

Sand and Glass

When Allah created the heavens and the earth,
There was a vastness of the formless and the void;
Then the Light of Divine Beauty brought order to the world.
The Blessing of Divine Mercy brought mercy to the world.
The Grace of Divine Being left an accommodation for everything,
So even the formless and the void found presence in His Presence.
By disintegration of interminable rock-masses,
By the swift play of wind and storm and angry atmosphere,
A vast appropriation of sand covered an extended peninsula
Where the dust of the earth seems to disappear before His Beneficence;
The absence of **Baraka** was so evident
That there were neither trees nor flowers nor pools of living waters,
Where nothing would live save the spider and the scorpion
And noxious serpents.
Sand was the outcome of erosion,
Sand was the product of wind pounding rock,
Sand was the further result of sand avenging itself
Upon the pristine formations which once had held it in place,
So that neither the primordial formations,
Nor the varied stratified foundations,
Nor solid hills and mountains were in sight—
Only mounds and depressions and gullies and depths—of sand.
Men shunned that particular portion of the world
Save for an occasional roving caravan
Or marauding pirates seeking temporary refuge.
So the Phoenicians came to Nabatean Arabia:
Pirates, tradesmen, adventurers and robbers,
Fly-by-high promoters, scheming profiteers, clever tricksters,
Middlemen between the known and unknown parts of earth,
Carriers of gadgets and luxuries from one country to another.
A starlit firmament gazed curiously at their pots of iron
While glowing fires persisted through the night
Though there was no danger from craven beasts or men—
The wearied to sleep, to dream of further of adventures,
The animals to sleep, forgetting the turbulence of the day,
Even the iron pots to sleep, lured by the lustful sand,
And the morrow presented the fruit of their union under the stirring fire:

Glass!

The chaotic had given birth to form,
The untamed had submitted to a miraculous discipline,
The worthless had achieved an unsuspected value
There was beauty and price in that formless void,
The dust had come to put on an enchanting garb,
Whence windows and goblets and various utensils,
All from the barren, the worthless, the neglected,
All from the places where the Divine Grace seemed absent:
The Perfect Had Arisen Where Men Had Thought It To Be Impossible.

When Allah created Adam, He made him from the dust of the earth;
When Allah created Adam, He made him in His likeness—
Allah created Adam, it is said, out of His own fulsome Light,
Then created the common out of the light of Adam;
Whether the environment reflected the people within it
Or the people within it determined the environment,
The land that was ignorant of trees and flowers and song-birds
Became the land of people who lacked the qualities of trees and flowers and song-birds.
The peninsula of desolate sand housed the people of desolate hearts.
We shall not sing of the people of the time of ignorance,
We shall sing of how the people were rescued from ignorance.
There was a world of sand liaisoned by fire and metal into glass,
There was a world of desolation elevated to beauty and utility;
There were hearts of sand, purposeless and leaderless,
There was the Heart of Allah which sought to rescue them.
By the fire of Mercy and the metal of Eternal Patience
The Perfect Would Arise Where Men Had Thought It To Be Impossible.

A man was born in these wastes,
A spiritual son of solitude and emptiness
Who lost his father even before he appeared,
Who lost his mother while yet a little child,
Who never lost the endless Grace of Allah,
The Grace which embraced his vivid emberant heart;
For whosoever walks a single step toward Allah
Will find Allah taking a dozen steps toward himself.
There was a meeting place of the heart-of-man and the Heart-of-God,
There was the removal of a single drop of blood of the young Ahmed
And Qur'an was revealed, revealed upon a solitary peak,

Revealed where the eye sees only far stretching wastes,
Revealed among the ignorant of the ignorant
Who, despite their state, dwelt within the confines of Divine Mercy,
Who, despite their state, became transmitters of the Message of Allah.
So Mohammed, the orphaned Hashimite, became the Messenger of Allah;
So Mohammed, the exiled Meccan, became the spokesman for Allah;
So Mohammed, whose purity of heart excited even his enemies
Became an exemplar for the human race;
The people of sandiness were by Love transformed into glass,
The people of opaqueness were by Grace transmuted into Light,
The people of ignorance were by Mercy translated into knowledge,
The bookless people were granted a guidance forevermore.
From that unsuspected beginning came a multitude of leaders—
Thus Alhambra and Al-Azhar and an endless string of mosques;
Thus Masnavi and Mantik-ut-Tair and many stirring poems,
Thus the transmission of wisdom from ancient times to now,
Thus the establishment of brotherhood within humanity.
The Perfect Had Arisen Where Men Had Thought It To Be Impossible.

What wonders has Allah performed!
How marvelous the Alchemy of His Spirit!
How mysterious the blessings of His Grace!
How impenetrable the glories of Islam!