



by

Sheikh Muslih-uddin Sa'di Shirazi (1258)

Translated by

Sir Edwin Arnold (1899)



World Famous Persian Poet of 13th Century



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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Chapter 6



On Weakness and Old Age

Story 1

I was holding a disputation with a company of learned men in the Jamiah (cathedral) mosque of Damascus when a youth stepped among us, asking whether anyone knew Persian, whereon most of them pointed to me.

I asked him what the matter was and he said that an old man, aged one hundred and fifty years, was in the agony of death but saying something in Persian which nobody could understand and that if I were kindly to go and see him I might obtain the information whether he was perhaps desirous of making his last will. When I approached his pillow, he said:

دمی چند گفتم بر آرم به کام

دریغا که بگرفت راه نفس

دریغا که بر خوان الوان عمر

دمی خورده بودیم و گفتند: بس

'A while ago I said I shall take some rest
But alas, the way of my breath is choked.
Alas, that from the variegated banquet of life
We were eating a while and told it is enough.'

I interpreted these words in the Arabic language to the Damascenes and they were astonished that despite of his long life he regretted the termination of it so much.

I asked him how he felt and he replied: 'What shall I say?'

ندیده ای که چه سختی همی رسد به کسی
که از دهانش به در می کنند دندانان؟

Hast thou not seen what misery he feels,
The teeth of whose mouth are being extracted?

قیاس کن که چه حالت بود در آن ساعت
که از وجود عزیزش بدر رود جانی

Consider what his state will be at the hour
When life, so precious to him, abandons his body.

I told him not to worry his imagination with the idea of death and not to allow a hallucination to obtain dominion over his nature because Greek Philosophers have said that:

although the constitution may be good no reliance is to be placed on its
permanence and

although a malady may be perilous it does not imply a full indication of
death.

I asked: 'If thou art willing, I shall call a physician to treat thee?'

He lifted his eyes and said, smiling:

دست بر هم زند طبیب ظریف
چون حرف بیند اوقتاده حریف
خواجه در بند نقش ایوان است
خانه از پای بند ویران است

'The skilled doctor strikes his hands together
On beholding a rival prostrate like a potsherd.
A gentleman is engaged in adorning his hall with paintings
Whilst the very foundation of the house is ruined.

پیرمردی ز نزع می نالید
پیرزن صندلش همی مالید
چون مخطب شد اعتدال مزاج
نه عزیمت اثر کند نه علاج

An aged man was lamenting in his last agony
Whilst his old spouse was rubbing him with sandal.
When the equilibrium of the constitution is destroyed
Neither incantations nor medicines are of any avail.'



Story 2

It is related that an old man, having married a girl, was sitting with her privately in an apartment adorned with roses, fixing his eyes and heart upon her. He did not sleep during long nights but spent them in telling her jokes and witty stories, hoping to gain her affection and to conquer her shyness.

One night, however, he informed her that luck had been friendly to her and the eye of fortune awake because she had become the companion of an old man who is ripe, educated, experienced in the world, of a quiet disposition, who had felt cold and warm, had tried good and bad, who knows the duties of companionship, is ready to fulfill the conditions of love, is benevolent, kind, good-natured and sweet-tongued.

تا توانم دلت به دست آرم
ور بیازاریم نیازم
ور چو طوطی، شکر بود خورشید
جان شیرین فدای پرورشید

As far as I am able I shall hold thy heart
And if injured I shall not injure in return.
Though sugar may be thy food as of a parrot
I shall sacrifice sweet life to thy support.

Thou hast not fallen into the hands of a giddy youth, fun of whims, headstrong, fickle minded, running about every moment in search of another pleasure and entertaining another opinion, sleeping every night in another place and taking every day another friend.

Young men are joyous and of handsome countenance
But inconstant in fidelity to anyone.

وفاداری مدار از بلبلان ، چشم
که هر دم بر گلی دیگر سرایند

Expect not faithfulness from nightingales
Who sing every moment to another rose.

Contrary to aged men who spend their lives according to wisdom and propriety; not according to the impulses of folly and youth.

ز خود بهتری جوی و فرصت شمار
که با چون خودی گم کنی روزگار

Find one better than thyself and consider it fortunate
Because with one like thyself thou wilt be disappointed.

The old man said: 'I continued in this strain, thinking that I had captivated her heart and that it had become my prey.'

She drew, however, a deep sigh from her grief-filled heart and said:

'All the words thou hast uttered, weighed in the scales of my understanding, are not equivalent to the maxim I once heard enounced in my tribe:

زن جوان را اگر تیری در پهلو نشیند ، به که پیری

An arrow in the side of a young woman is better than an old man.'

زن کز بر مرد، بی رضا برخیزد
بس فتنه و جنگ از آن سرا برخیزد

When she perceived in the hands of her husband
Something pendant like the nether lip of a fasting man,

She said:

'This fellow has a corpse with him
But incantations are for sleepers not for corpses.'

A woman who arises without satisfaction from a man
Will raise many a quarrel and contention.
An old man who is unable to rise from his place,
Except by the aid of a stick, how can his own stick rise?

In short, there being no possibility of harmony, a separation at last took place. When the time of the lady's Idah (probationary period) had terminated, she was given in marriage to a young man who was violent, ill-humored and empty-handed.

She suffered much from his bad temper and tyrannical behavior, and experienced the miseries of penury. She nevertheless said:

'Praise be to Allah for having been delivered from that wretched torment, and attained this permanent blessing.'

با این همه جور و تندخویی
بارت بکشم که خوبرویی
با تو مرا سوختن اندر عذاب
به که شدن با دگری در بهشت

Despite of all this violence and hasty nature
I shall try to please thee because thou art beautiful.
To be with thee in hell burning is for me
Better than to be with the other in paradise.

بوی پیاز از دهن خوبروی
نغز برآید که گل از دست زشت

The smell of an onion from the mouth of a pretty face
Is indeed better than a rose from an ugly hand.

A nice face and a gown of gold brocade,
Essence of roses, fragrant aloes, paint, perfume and lust:
All these are ornaments of women.
Take a man; and his testicles are a sufficient ornament.



Story 3

I was in Diarbekr, the guest of an old man, who possessed abundant wealth and a beautiful son.

One night he narrated to me that he had all his life no other son but this boy, telling me that in the locality people resorted to a certain tree in a valley to offer petitions and that he had during many nights prayed at the foot of the said tree, till the Almighty granted him this son.

I overheard the boy whispering to his companion: 'How good it would be if I knew where that tree is that I might pray for my father to die.'

Moral: The gentleman is delighted that his son is intelligent and the boy complains that his father is a dotard.

سالها بر تو بگذرد که گذار
نکنی سوی تربیت پدرت
تو به جای پدر چه کردی ، خیر؟
تا همان چشم داری از پسرت

Years elapse without thy visiting
The tomb of thy father.
What good hast thou done to him
To expect the same from thy son?



Story 4

One day, in the pride of youth, I had traveled hard and arrived perfectly exhausted in the evening at the foot of an acclivity. A weak old man, who had likewise been following the caravan, came and asked me why I was sleeping, this not being the place for it.

I replied: 'How am I to travel, having lost the use of my feet?'

He said: 'Hast thou not heard that it is better to walk gently and to halt now and then than to run and to become exhausted?'

اي كه مشتاق منزلي ، مشتاق
پند من كار بند و صبر آموز
اسب تازی دوتگ رود به شتاب
اشتر آهسته می رود شب و روز

O thou who desirest to reach the station
Take my advice and learn patience.
An Arab horse gallops twice in a race.
A camel ambles gently night and day.



Story 5

The active, graceful, smiling, sweet-tongued youth happened once to be in the circle of our assembly. His heart had been entered by no kind of grief and his lips were scarcely ever closed from laughter.

After some time had elapsed, I accidentally met him again and I learned that he had married a wife and begotten children but I saw that the root of merriment had been cut and the roses of his countenance were withered. I asked him how he felt and what his circumstances were.

He replied: 'When I had obtained children I left off childishness.'

Where is youth when age has changed my ringlets?

And the change of time is a sufficient monitor.

چون پیر شدی ز کودکی دست بدار

بازی و ظرافت به جوانان بگذار

When thou art old abstain from puerility.

Leave play and jokes to youths.

طرب نوجوان ز پیر مجوی

که دگر ناید آب رفته به جوی

زرع را چون رسید وقت درو

نخرامید چنانکه سبزه نو

Seek not a youth's hilarity in an old man

For the water gone from the brook returns no more.

When the harvest-time of a field arrives

It will no longer wave in the breeze like a young crop.

دور جوانی بشد از دست من

آه و دریغ آن ز من دلفروز

قوت سر چشمه شیری گذشت

ری به یوزراضیم اکنون چو پنی

The period of youth has departed.

Alas, for those heart-enchancing times.

The force of the lion's claws is gone.

Now we are satisfied with cheese Eke a leopard.

پیرزنی موی شیری سیه کرده بود

گفتم : ای مامک دیرینه روز

موی به تلبیس سیه کرده ، گیر

راست نخواهد شد این پشت کوز

An old hag had dyed her hair black.

I said to her: 'O little mother of ancient days,

Thou hast cunningly dyed thy hair but consider

That thy bent back will never be straight.'



Story 6

In the folly of youth I one day shouted at my mother who then sat down with a grieved heart in a corner and said, weeping:

'Hast thou forgotten thy infancy that thou art harsh towards me?'

زالی به فرزند خویش : چه خوش گفت

چو دیدش پلنگ افکن و پیل تن

گر از خردیت یاد آمدی
که بیچاره بودی در آغوش من
نکردی در این روز بر من جفا
که تو شیر مردی و من پیرزن

How sweetly said the old woman to her son
When she saw him overthrow a tiger, and elephant-bodied:
'If thou hadst remembered the time of thy infancy
How helpless thou wast in my arms
Thou would'st this day not have been harsh
For thou art a lion-like man, and I an old woman.'



Story 7

The son of a wealthy but avaricious old man, having fallen sick, his well-wishers advised him that it would be proper to get the whole Quran recited or else to offer a sacrifice.

He meditated a while and then said: 'It is preferable to read the Quran because the flock is at a distance.'

A holy man, who had heard this, afterwards remarked:

'He selected the reading of the Quran because it is at the tip of the tongue but the money at the bottom of the heart.'

دریغا گردن طاعت نهادن
همره نبودی دست دادن گرش
به دیناری چو خر در گل بمانند
ورالحمدی بخوانی ، صد بخوانند

It is useful to bend the neck in prayers
If they are to be accompanied by almsgiving.
For one dinar he would remain sticking in mud like an ass,
But if thou askest for Alhamdu he will recite it a hundred times.



Story 8

An old man, having been asked why he did not marry, replied that he could not be happy with an aged woman, and on being told that as he was a man of property, he might take a young one, he said:

'I being an old man and unwilling to associate with an old woman, how could a young one conceive friendship for me who am aged?'

پرهفتائله جوني مي کند
غشغ مقري ثخي و بوني چش روشنت
زور بايد نه زر که بانورا
گزری دوست تر که ده من گوشت

Let not a man of seventy years make love.
Thou art confessedly blind, kiss her and sleep.
The lady wants strength, not gold.
One passage is preferable to her than ten mann (weight) of flesh.



Story 9

شنیده ام که درین روزها کهن پیری
خیال بست به پیرانه سر گیرد جفت
بخواست دخترکی خبروی ، گوهر نام
مردمان بنهفت چو درج گوهرش از چشم

I have heard that in these days a decrepit aged man
Took the fancy in his old head to get a spouse.
He married a beautiful little girl, Jewel by name,
When he had concealed his casket of jewels from the eyes of men

اشا بودچنانکه رسم عروسی بود تم
ولی به حمله اول عصای شیخ بخت
کمان کشید و نزد بر هدف که نتوان دوخت
مگر به خامه فولاد ، جامه هنگفت

A spectacle took place as is customary in weddings.
But in the first onslaught the organ of the sheikh fell asleep.
He spanned the bow but hit not the target; it being impossible to sew
A tight coarse robe except with a needle of steel.

به دوستان گله آغاز کرد و حجت ساخت
که خان و مان من ، این شوخ دیده پاک برفت
میان شوهر و زن جنگ و فتنه خاست چنان
: که سر به شحنه و قاضی کشید و سعدی گفت

He complained to his friends and showed proofs
That his furniture had been utterly destroyed by her impudence.
Such fighting and contention arose between man and wife
That the affair came before the Qazi; and Sa'di said:

پس از خلافت و شنعت گناه دختر نیست

بلرزد، گهر چه دانی سفت تو را که دست

'After all this reproach and villainy the fault is not the girl's.
Thou whose hand trembles, how canst thou bore a Jewel?'



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