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*all is not lost*

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As soulful wail radiates with heavenly splendour from the enchanting minaret, signalling the time to prepare for Hakim Nejad Bahzir in his faithful calling. Such is the time of the month that the entire community hasten to hear his prayerful wise words, like a fledgling flock descending en-mass to feast on a plentiful supply of freshly precipitated manna. The exquisitely decorated mosque is packed to bursting, but Hakim's heart tells him to yet wait. The meandering minutes pass without undue influence; he will indeed wait for an eternity, if that is what is required of him.

Sebah Akhir has fallen and badly twisted her ankle in her haste. She limps along the street, fighting back the still welling, inevitable tears of excruciating pain, as she tortures herself for being late. A mountain of discarded footwear confirms her fears and she must somehow now make her entrance unseen; not due to acute embarrassment, but because it would be wholly inappropriate to distract attention. She slips stealthily into a suitably secluded side and nestles in the wing unnoticed by all.

All, that is, except Hakim, who smiles kindly as he contemplates.

Hakim begins with an undiluted outburst of unadulterated adoration, directed at the divine centre of his current consideration. It is regrettably not feasible to satisfactorily explicate these euphoric extolations, reaching far beyond the rationale of rhyme, or the restrictive rhythm of rudimentary reason. A swift swell of empathic murmuring affirms the attendees' unified adherence as they are swept onwards and ever upwards. Presently a reverent hush softly befalls the finely focussed forum. Hakim's customary exhortations to the congregational intercessions are delivered in a language not easily understood by the conventional western mind and it would thus be possible only to provide the very crudest of deeply flawed interpretations:

He recounts a recent visit, when a young boy (*perhaps young man rather than boy, but it is somewhat ambiguous*) sought his counsel regarding a matter of grave concern. It seems that the youth had been worried by bad (*'troubling', rather than 'evil'?*) thoughts in his bed at night, while preparing for sleep (*could be*

*already asleep and dreaming; again, it is rather unclear*). As a result he had been caused to question the (*'very nature of'?*) sacred daily prayers.

In the young boy (*/man*)'s thoughts (*or maybe imagination/dreams*), he has found himself alone and lost in a (*the?*) vast (*infinite?*) desert; dizzy with heat exhaustion, desperately dehydrated and nearing death's door. With no sense of time, his daily duties press upon him and his anxiety grows many, many-fold. Tentatively trusting that 'The Divine Source Of All Life' (*there are certainly no words or names, in any language on Earth, that could contain an adequate understanding*) would mercifully overlook (*'hold not to blame'*) the indiscretion, should he be outside the appointed time, he dutifully (*or 'by being moved'?*) turns to his prayer. Quickly turning full circle however, the Qibla (*relative location of the Kaaba; the most holy place towards which the sacred daily prayers must always be directed*) entirely eludes him. Without bearings or compass, he knows not where to face and is thus unable to utter a single word.

He falls heavily to his knees (*not prostrate*), tares his shirt (*'upper cover/garment'*) and beats the scolding sands until his bare (*from 'open', although meaning 'uncovered'*) hands bleed. A nearby 'armoured and clawed creature of the desert' (*a scorpion?*), hearing the grievous commotion, curiously comes to investigate. Seeing the adolescent human's 'most earnest suffering' (*very difficult to translate*), the creature is moved to intercede on his behalf. He implores his 'Most Excellent Creator' (*yet another wholly inadequate name*) to graciously excuse the bold (*implies 'an acknowledged unworthiness' rather than confident*) approach and then duly expresses his extreme gratitude for the wonderful life that he has been blessed with. He has never known pain (*'anguish of the body or of thought'*); but, should it be the will of his 'Most Wise Master', then may he graciously be permitted to take this stranger's wretched cup of suffering swiftly from him, and may that other know instead the bountiful beatifications so very gratefully enjoyed by the humble creature throughout his life. With this, he spontaneously combusts; fierce red (*orange?*) flames lustfully lick the scorched desert sky.

Spinning around and rubbing his eyes in disbelief, the lost soul at once cries out (*sings?*) and, turning his back on the solitude of his despair, declares how grateful he is that his 'Most Graceful Guardian' has spared him such a frightful fate. He had thought he was suffering, but can now see how fortunate (*'with unearned blessings'*) he is. He continues to pour forth praise (*far more than appreciative prayer*), negligent of his needs and tirelessly (*without pause?*), until darkness overcomes him and sleep finally takes charge.

When he eventually awakes (*it is not clear whether this is the following morning, or perhaps some unspecified later date*), the boy (*/man*) finds himself in a cool, bright, bedouin tent. A tall dark figure stands silently over him, an outstretched golden platter in hand (*or plural; 'hands'*), bearing the incinerated remains (*ashes?*) of an 'armoured and clawed creature of the desert'. Breathing a long sigh of relief,

the youthful adventurer explains how the cruel beast had been closing in to kill him, when the searing sun had obediently cranked up the heat; not to punish, as he had at first feared, but to save him. The nomadic tribesman (*'visionary'?*) suggests that things are not always as they at first appear and perhaps the compassionate creature had at once heard his harrow, seen his sorrow, smelled his fear, tasted his suffering and been tenderly touched. With all of his senses simultaneously, he might have then sacrificially sought the youth's urgent salvation and gratefully found it in the divine eternal flame. The young man laughs delightfully at this spirited rendition until, noticing no hint of a smile on the authoritative other, is (*'profoundly over-taken with mystery' - no interpretation*).

The youth's kittenish curiosity then causes him to cross-examine the tribal statesman (*the phrase used implies 'Shaman'*); enquiring as to how he was found in such a vast desert. He was found in a state of prayer, comes the unexpected reply. Apologetically clarifying the point of his interrogation (*'asking without invitation'*), the question is resubmitted in a more suitably subordinate manner. In response, the far older and far, far wiser sage shows a kindness in the depth (*'fullness'?*) of his black-as-night eyes, uttering a single word:

***"Qibla"***

Seeing that the adolescent remains vexed, the stranger elaborates:

***"If a young man were to find himself in an unknowable desert, removed from an awareness of either time or whereabouts; how could he know when and where to direct his sacred prayers?"***

Startled by this revelation of too familiar knowledge, the young man is caused to suspect (*like 'a great fear'*) that he might have indeed died (*'been overtaken by his end'*), and is now enduring a pre-judgement test. He is thankfully spared the torment of a drawn-out (*'never ending'?*) uncertainty however, because the apparently angelic (*'with a character of notable righteousness'*) agent, pauses only for brief breath.

***"Man is a blind, lost fool stumbling in the dark. The world of man is unreal; he nervously projects what he only guesses he senses; his reality but a metaphorical representation of his inner fears. He reaches ever outwards in his search for truth, but the light of truth lies only within. The Kaaba is the most holy gateway, where the false dark world of man ends and the true enlightened world of 'The Source Of All Life' begins. Every man must at one time take this journey if he is to know salvation from his folly.***

***There is no mystery to prayer: it is simply the act of focussing the attention; to channel. The five senses of man's world are a distraction, leading away, not towards. To find the location of Kaaba he must first recognise that he is lost. Then, quietening***

*the misdirection of his own worldly senses, he must invite Qibla to over-rule them; realigning his attention. All of the senses must be focussed simultaneously, as one common sense, for divine inspiration to freely flow.*

*Do not be concerned by the apparent passing of time. There is but one everlasting day in the kingdom of 'The Perfect Originator'. Time serves only this master, with a purpose beyond the perceptions of man's ignorant planning. The knowledge of real time can only be found in sacred prayer; always current.*

*Therefore; use common sense at all times, and be enlightened presently."*

There is little doubt that the actual words used differ somewhat in their native dialect and that their true meaning may thus, inevitably, have been lost in translation. The young man contemplates for quite some time. However, before he returns from that serene shelter to his troubled bed, he earnestly requests the elder to identify himself. The reply is simply that he was once an armoured and clawed creature of the desert.

Hakim pauses; not a single falling pin punctuates the sanctified silence.

The anguished lad had needed 'a peace of understanding' (*'satisfactory answers' but also means 'deliverance from torment'*) he was certain the respected Imam would deliver. While the underlying message appeared clear, it seemed to go against (*'not in strict adherence to'*) the letter of the law and cornerstone of his faith. The suggestion was that he should not concern himself with any specific time of day and that rather than outwardly offering five distinct prayers, he should instead internally turn the unique quintessential devotions simultaneously into an all-encompassing, moment by moment, emersion. In this context, Qibla could be considered interchangeable with 'Divine Love'; quietening the erratically wayward outbursts of the delinquent mind and focussing the discerning spirit on the soft whisper of 'The Voice Within', emanating from the sanctity of the pure devoted heart. The youth is determined to be faithful and, not knowing from where these thoughts came, conscious or otherwise, seeks the rebuke of his trusted community leader.

It mattered not whether he was asleep or awake, Hakim had considered; there being little difference between the two (*'it is ever like darkness in the domain of mankind'?*). Doubtless the (*easily?*) deceived mind does not see things as they, in reality (*'of outside and of inside and entirely throughout; infinite perfectly reconciled simultaneous perspectives'; also translates as 'with divine integrity'*), truly are. Real time is certainly the order of that place not this, as is Love a reliable (*'depend upon'*) guide. Common sense suggested that so long as man's illusory days remain, he should perform all of his duties joyfully; in order to remind himself regularly, regarding the reliable reality of the one everlasting day in the kingdom of 'The Perfect Originator'. Having thought things through thoroughly,

Hakim empties his mind entirely and seeks the approval of a peaceful heart before addressing the youth thus:

*“It is certain that the open gateway of The Kaaba is yet a closed door to the unsanctified soul: perhaps an attitude of gratitude is the key?”*

His conundrum clarified, the lad smiles broadly, as the done creases fray fretlessly from his furrowed brow. He thanks Hakim enthusiastically and assures him that he will sleep well tonight.

Inspired anecdote completed in timely fashion, Hakim once more bursts into exuberant worship, lifting a multitude of ascending voices ever higher, in unison with his own.

Each and every member of the community leaves the mosque in silent contemplation, collecting their respective footwear as they go their separate ways. It is a divine mystery how the same words can bring a completely unique understanding in differing contexts, and each and every member carries with them a different meaning from the meeting. Sebah Akhir is last out (except for Hakim, that is) and resolves to pay more respect to time in future.

Hakim is pleased to have served his purpose and duly prays his own respects.

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