

*Sufi Texts:
Awakening*



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Sleep is necessary to the human organism for certain purposes. Permanent, or even semi-permanent, sleep is a negation of the total purposes of the organism.

Mankind is in a state of fitful sleep, generally more resembling a nightmare. He asks himself what his purpose is, whether he has a purpose, how he can understand the purpose. He does not ask himself whether he is in a position to carry out this investigation.

He is trying to do something which he is incapable of doing. Not having a knowledge of the methods by which the questions can be asked, let alone the answers elicited, he "normally" has no possibility of arriving at the answers.

The basis of his confusion is the assumption that he may be able to arrive at "truth" by empirical methods. This absurdity is his makeshift for a genuine cognition of what truth is. He has derived it from primitive generalization of things which "work" in the short run or small scale.

Since he has chosen the assumption that he can himself, unaided, attain truth, he has to invest himself with a certain capacity. This capacity, itself a tentative hypothesis, quickly converted into a belief, is the transcendent importance of the individual man. The operation of this assumption negates its truth. It develops into self-love, egoism and so on—inflexibility. Originally of importance, still of significance in certain fields, the concept has been hallowed and named "The Dignity of Man"; the "Sovereignty of the Intellect" and so on. Having thus been named, it is ranged alongside other "sacred" concepts, which may or may not work, but which must not be questioned. They may not be questioned, even if their clumsy use is itself a danger and a conditioning

mechanism. The conditioning mechanism is one of the major instruments of auto-narcosis, putting oneself to sleep.

From immemorial times, there have been men who have been outside this vicious system, at least to a sufficient extent to realize that man has a destiny, and to appreciate what this destiny is, and how it may be furthered. A long succession of teachers, in many climes and with varying necessary emphasis, have maintained this tradition, practised its methodology and transmitted it. Because of the hostility inherent in the sleep situation, this has been done with circumspection for the most part. Where necessity has overcome circumspection crisis and worse have occurred.

One of our great teachers, during the twelfth century, the Master Sanai, speaks of this sleep, of man's inflicting it upon himself, of the need to burst from the vicious circle, of the lack of contact between sophists, prattlers and those who understand the situation, of the lack of appreciation of what is actually futile, of the upsidownness of sleep thinking, of the danger of automatism and mere habit.

In his magnificent book, the Walled Garden of Truth, he says:

"Mankind is asleep—men of this world have gone to sleep concerned with what is useless, living in a disordered sphere. And religion itself does not rise above this, it is mere habit and usage, not devotion. Such 'faith' is in fact inept. Do not prattle to the People of the Way. Rather consume yourself with shame, like rue, which is burned to avert evil. You are yourself upside down to Reality, and thus have only an inverted 'wisdom' and 'faith'."

"Man should not weave a net round himself. A lion bursts his cage of self asunder."

Habit and automatism, so useful in a certain stage of life, so essential within a certain context, make up the net. This prevents the cognition of the "Truth", the real vision of what it is all about. Man, asleep, tied down with his own ropes, tries to behave, or thinks that he is behaving, as if he

were awake, and as if there were no ropes, administering more narcotics to himself.

But man has a destiny, an evolutionary one. Transmitted through the working schools (Tarikas) of our tradition is the concept by means of which it is possible to approach this question. The great teacher Rumi, a disciple of Sanai, invites man to look upon himself as part of an evolutionary system. We invoke this analogy, standard in the thinking of our tradition, though not intended to be viewed as a totality. That is to say, the analogy is used only as a sidelight upon the situation, not purporting to be a full enunciation of it.

Man, for Rumi and the other teachers, has an evolutionary destiny. He developed in successive waves of effort. At each stage he changed; mineral to vegetable, vegetable to animal. At each stage he developed to a different realm of being and nutrition, environment. Because of the needs of the adaptation, he lost the memory of the effort needed in the earlier stages. At each stage a fresh formulation, after a recognition of evolutionary necessity, was requisite.

The stirring of the necessity is an urge to move ahead, forwards, upwards—"away from where one is". Those who do not correctly develop this recognition remain "mineral, vegetable, animal."

The recognition is based upon conditions and factors which may be represented, albeit crudely, as a certain fragile, subtle capacity for recognition, as well as the presence of the urge to go forward.

This urge to go forward, when not correctly expressed in terms of truly coherent progress, causes dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction of man is thus due to his not having found the road to fulfilment of his function to move forward in a certain way. Since the basic urge may be strong, he will invent substitutes which give him temporary, narcotic or stimulating "fulfilment". Seeking semi-consciously to explain his situation, he concludes that this unnatural state of affairs must be his fate. He now rearranges his thinking

to enable himself to believe that he needs irresolution, insecurity, uncertainty, incompleteness, in order to force him to continue the struggle. He is right in this, if he looks upon the crude use of the raw drive or urge as the whole of real or possible being and experience. He assumes, on the basis of the existence of an emptiness, and the use to which he puts it, that its function is just what he can see it to be. A source of light may also give off heat, but the blind man will assume that it is solely a source of heat. Light is, after all, unfamiliar to him. He may feel threatened and uneasy because of his incapacity, but he has no real idea as to what constitutes "sight", so he thinks in terms of "heat" alone.

It should be evident that thinking in terms of "drive" being suitable merely for survival is an "exterior" diagnosis, inherent only in the assumption that there is nothing else that man can do. It is not an objective fact.

It has to be understood that this conclusion is not something which is inherent even in the phenomenon of restlessness, only inherent in the assumptions derived from man's usual employment of restlessness.

Pursuing the analogy of blindness, taken from the great teacher Shabistari and others, we can see from our point of view the illogicality of the situation, even in the incomplete phraseology available to logic. Let us borrow his analogy.

Let us suppose that there is a blind man, and a man who can see tried to explain to him what colour is. The blind man says that he cannot grasp it, and asks for a demonstration. He also asks for a description or parallel. The man who can see may put it in one of many ways. Supposing that he says: "With sight you will be able to achieve a balance of the senses. You will not need your present over-acute hearing which will become weaker." At this point the blind man interrupts: "Impair my hearing! The greatest gift I have! And let my enemies creep up on me unheard. My whole world would be changed, and I cannot be convinced that it would be an improvement. Rather to the contrary."

Note here that even if we could convince the blind man that sight was good for him, if we were faced with the problem of making him experience sight before it would operate effectively, we would be in a dilemma.

You may take up the "blind man" analogy, and with intellectual sophistry attempt to concoct a method whereby we could overcome or by-pass the blind man's problems. But you will not be able to transpose the results, the method, into terms acceptable to our real objective, because our analogy is merely illustrative and bears no proportionate relationship with the problem of development with which we are faced.

Man has, often for excellent reasons during a "marking-time" period, taught himself to rely upon emotion and intellect. As a consequence of this habit-pattern, he demands that everything be placed within these terms before he will examine it. "Tell me", he says, "how will this 'sight' help my hearing?" This is a part of what is called upside-down or inverted wisdom. Because it has become so deeply ingrained, and because it is "justified" by sophistry, the hypertrophy of intellect, intellectualism as such, has become a real barrier to human development. To use a phrase formerly much employed in English, it does not "know its place". The intellectual struggle is a useless end-product.

Such a person is groping. Ideas enter his mind and are instantly connected with other ideas, follow certain patterns of greater or lesser importance or seeming significance. It is a closed circuit, often not perceived as such because there are so many possible re-arrangements.

How does the faculty of "sight" become activated? It has its own method, largely imperceptible to the blind man. Yet this "blind" man may be one of those in whom the emergent faculty of sight is stirring. Organs come into existence under the right developmental conditions, in response to a need for the operating of those organs.

But organs, faculties, need "drawing out". They do not develop mechanically. This "drawing out" is a part of the phenomenon "having its own method". For practical purposes this means that the sight-function can be elicited only by those who already have sight, and who know how to make it function. This in turn means that the "guide" must have these two qualifications. A "guide" must have a minimum of co-operation.

In our tradition the word "Guide" is advisedly used. A Guide is someone who has been somewhere himself, who knows the way, and who is exercising the vocation of taking other people to that place. Hence the teacher is termed Guide, and also Director. A Director is one who knows and presides over. The people being guided through a wood must, however, walk on their own feet. This is their co-operation.

What is this co-operation based upon? There are two factors, both of which must come into play before progress is made. The first is that the preconceptions inherent in the "ordinary" sleep-thinking must be exposed and recognized. Nobody is deprived of them, because they have a function in their own sphere. But their limitations must be understood; and not merely hypothetically accepted as an intellectual exercise.

To the extent to which false or inapplicable assumptions are carried over into "evolution work", there will be: illusion of progress, but no real progress; frustration, probably following initial excitement, interest or euphoria, a sense of wellbeing.

A protective mechanism asserts itself in pattern-thinkers, to prevent them from feeling that they have been fools, or that they have wasted their time. It is necessary to establish deeply that a dreamer is not a fool, he is a man who is asleep.

The second factor in this co-operation starts at the point at which repetitious sophistry, intellectual exercise, leaves off.

Once an individual realizes, deeply and thoroughly, that he is and has been thinking in patterns inapplicable to a more refined field, he may come into fruitful contact with someone "who can see". At this stage an interchange takes place between the blind and the seeing man. This interchange is manifested by a conscious dawning of perception—the first fluttering of the eyelids, if you like. Once the undergrowth of intellectual imprisonment, therefore, has been put away, there is a possibility for the subtle mode of perception to take effect.

This doctrine has often been taught incorrectly. People have been allowed, by imitators and theorists, to pay mere lip-service to the theory that they cannot use their intellect in this field. As a result, instead of being permeated by the consciousness that sophistry is outrun at a certain point, they merely absorb the theory as an intellectual postulate. Though this may seem the apogee of absurdity, it is the usual method in the circles of which I speak. These people are the theoretical, intellectual, would-be seers. A further impossible development, truly a dereliction of our Way, is this: The hypertrophied intellect, instead of being used to face and profit by the fact of its own limitations and true use, is engaged in repetitious acts or thoughts, or else numbed by incomprehensible theories or activities. The intellect has here been put out of gear, disengaged, instead of being "transmuted" and employed correctly.

This dilemma, of course, has occurred because people have intellectually grasped the first part of this thesis (that preconceptions must be exposed) and believe that the second part, or any useful consequence, follows automatically. They therefore teach the first part, although they are not qualified to do so, not having themselves correctly been altered by it, nor permeated with its dynamic significance. They may believe or hope that this very discovery (or the first part) will pave the way to the second part.

Unfortunately for everyone, there is an element missing in this approach; the element of personal guidance. The only person who can make possible the experience of "sight" is someone who already has it, and knows how it works, not the experimenter, however pious he may be. If he has this sight it is impossible for him to be an experimenter. Two things interfere with his effective operation:

1) "Intellectual hangover" in "unsighted" people. They accept the theory, but still automatically look for intellectual, or even emotional, demonstration of "sight". They have not been permeated with the "touch" which characterizes the craftsman, which cannot be learnt except by work.

2) "Carry-over of assumptions". People are reluctant to allow others to guide them because, in cruder fields, they have been taught (quite correctly) that man "had to do things for himself". "Slogonization" has interpreted this as an affirmation of the dignity of man, and so on.

Much human behaviour is based on the concept of struggle, and upon the "fight or flight automatism".

Many people think that they must seek a problem or encounter one, assess it, then overcome it. But the problem is a "threat" which must be fought or flown from only if it is a real threat. For many people anything outside of the (admittedly unsatisfactory) prison of conditioning is a "threat". Human possibilities far exceed this. A drowning man will fight, perhaps very dangerously, against his would-be rescuers. So may a person in a state of hysteria. In both cases the essential remedy may be to knock the individual unconscious. The principle that it is wrong to knock anyone out goes by the board, superseded by an abnormal situation. The intellectual method of trying to project this teaching suffers from similar disabilities to those of the abnormal man. The drowning man wants to be saved, but he will also struggle against his rescuer. He or the hysteric may even rave at the same time. The situation,

especially where action is essential, is insoluble in terms of argument.

There is a factor in our situation which can be called the recognition that action is essential. Apart from intellectual exercise and repetitious acts being useless, they are a luxury which man, did he but know it, cannot afford. We can transpose the urgency into terms of time. There is a well known Persian proverb which expresses this idea:

"Before the antidote has arrived from Iraq (where serums were prepared) the victim will have died from the serpent's venom".

And we are, as nearly as we can enunciate it simply in terms of language and association, we are dealing with people who are suffering from the effects of a venom. In their agony they struggle. Their delirium makes them believe that their writhing is some sort of evidence of their importance, or their understanding. Out of respect for established convention we are in general precluded from using such strong words as "delirium" to describe certain aspects of thought and exposition which have attained a respectful audience, imbued with the conviction that here is something worthwhile.

What element may we invoke to pinpoint some hope in the situation? It is this: a thing is known by its qualities. A person who has an indefinable quality can transmit it to the slumbering essence of the "eye" of the blind man. In order to bring sight to this man, he has to do two things.

The first is to clarify the dilemma in real terms, not by means of intellectual exercise. The second is that he must personally communicate his essential difference and potentiality to the blind man. The first question we have already examined.

The second part of the activity is ratified, activated if you like, only through the inner recognition that there is something of overwhelming importance here. To the extent, however, that the blind man has learnt and absorbed

the first lesson, will he be able to perceive the second part of the impact.

Unfortunately the usual blind man does not know, does not want to know, that there are these two stages. He wants to jump two fences at once, thinking that they are one. Better still, he would like to skip the pages of the first stage of this book.

"Don't bother to teach me how to recognize the alphabet—I want to know how to read words" he will say.

The man who can see the whole objective will say: "But you must know the letters first". To this the other will agree, on his own terms: "Yes, of course. Let us take the letters for granted. I will accept, unreservedly if you like, that they are essential, important, basic. Now show me the words and what they mean."

The various analogies used here are, as we have said, incomplete and cannot be pursued far. Metaphors are mixed and parallels are switched for a deliberate purpose, and also because this is not a mechanical exposition designed to appear neat or convincing, like a tidy essay. Very much the reverse. Systematization of that sort is, from our position, intolerable, however pleasing it may be to the labelling mind. Again, its function is "other" than ours.

It is therefore the blind man's responsibility to:

- 1) Realize that the operation is divided into two parts.
- 2) Become permeated with the consciousness of what this means.
- 3) Allow himself to be helped to become conscious of this if it is found that he is not in fact so permeated, even if he thinks that he is.
- 4) Associate himself with the sighted man, and make his consciousness available for the recognition of the essence of "sight", of which he has only a dim understanding.

5) Accept that what he may think is "sight" may be surmise, and that his previous efforts to find sight may have developed him towards that aim or may not. They may have developed in him qualities tending towards sight other than those which he believes to be important.

6) Realize that he cannot generalize about the quest for sight in terms of his past experience, because he is probably merely projecting the assumptions of the past into a present or future which is otherwise than he realizes.

7) He must make specific efforts which will permit the recognition of the weight of the "enlightening" impact. He must remember that a thing of this nature can be perceived only by means of itself. He has to use its methods in order to perceive it.

8) He has to decide whether he is capable of co-operating in this effort or not. If he cannot invest the effort with sufficient co-operativeness, he will have to continue along some other line. He may consider such a line more promising. While this is of no significance to the line being described here, it may be more suitable for a person who is at a stage where he cannot enter into activity. As to whether it would be of any use at all is of no interest to this activity, which concerns only the attainment of what it considers to be the only essential objectives by means of the only possible methods.

It is the responsibility of the sighted man to:

1) Be there, and make available his knowledge in a way in which it can be used most effectively.

2) Establish the fact that it is the unfamiliarity of this approach which makes adjustment to his projection so difficult.

3) Ensure that the development and use of "sight" occurs and proceeds in accordance with the essential purpose of that function.

4) It is the failure to observe the necessary attitudes and functions stressed above, which has been responsible for the widespread littering throughout the human context of every variety of cult, experiment, activity.

It must be understood that unless and until there is a basic grasp of what is fundamental and meaningful in this quest, the undergrowth will not have been sufficiently cleared away to make possible the operation of "sight", or the "growing of a plant".