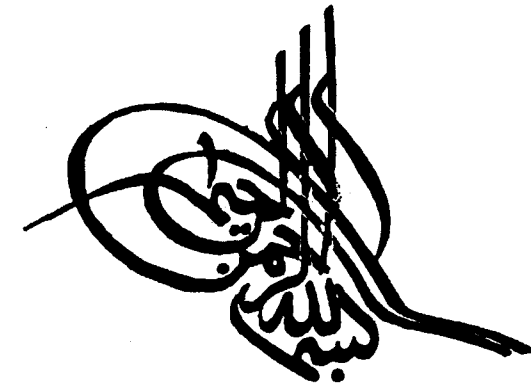


deny the essence of existence. We like to speak of Islam and liberation, but we close women behind curtains and walls and call it modesty. What modesty is there in men who cannot control their desires and who project upon women their subjugation fantasies? Every time we tell a woman not to speak or act or appear or breathe, we only affirm our own immodesty. What modesty is there in resisting temptation, not by sanitizing our hearts, but by purging women and turning our sisters and wives into a subjugated colony?

The more I ponder the affairs of our nation, the more I realize the distortion that has crept into our psychology. Our gallant men were colonized by other men and were demeaned and humiliated for centuries. In our chauvinism—oppressed, demoralized, and emasculated—we associated defeat with femininity. In the same fashion that the abused becomes an abuser, the colonized became the colonizer, and we displaced our loss of masculinity, pride, and dignity upon our women, and made women a subjugated colony. The real shame is that we denounced the blessings of God and justified our ugliness through religious sophistry.

June 2000

## *In the Footsteps of the Beloved*



Can we trace the footsteps of the beloved when the beloved has walked away? Can we find the scent, the fragrance, the redolence of his trace? Can we seek the fragments of memory, the smiles, the laughs, and the kind gestures? Can we locate the beauty over fourteen hundred years too late? I agonize over these questions, struggle with the promises, and I refuse to despair.

I agonize over the questions, and so I run to the Conference—I run to the books. I run to the papers and the ink. I run to the transmissions and reports—to so and so reported from so and so. I pursue the evidence in the books, in the testimonials and quotes, and in the layers of words. I pursue it with the relish of reverence, with the fervor of zeal, and the rapture of love. What I want is not to find him, for the Prophet is dead, but to find the perfume of his soul, the radiance of his beautiful face, and the magnanimous bliss of his hands. Yes, I search the *hadith*, the *sunan*, and the *masanid*, I even search the imagination and dreams. Those who love him will understand, and the others will only be interested in the archeology of

his footprints in the sand. But the perfume of the beloved travels in the soul—not in the burdened winds or the antiquities of the land.

I search, and what I find are sightings and descriptions of time and place—the reports that say what the beloved said or did, the beloved once occupied this certain space. But I do not want to stare at the scatter of remains, or simply retrace his footsteps, or collect the relics on the trail. What I want is to inhale the perfume, sprinkle it on my soul, wash my heart, and reshape every single cell in my brain. You see, I do not want to commemorate or memorialize, and I do not want to reminisce or build a shrine. I am not searching for graphs or illustrations, I am not searching for plats or delineations. The *Sunna* of the beloved, my friends, is not a map; it lives in our soul not our hand.

I do not want to retrace his steps and then walk along his trail. I want to walk my own trail and route, for in life, no two paths are exactly the same. But I want to walk the road of life with his heart, not mine.

To mimic the Prophet is nothing but an impersonation, for his sublimity cannot be simulated. The instant his majesty is animated, it is reduced and degraded. The replication of his *Sunna* becomes a grotesque parody of images and sounds—a demeaning forgery and an insolent falsification. The authenticity of the Prophet does not mean imitation, but personification.

Beauty is not to counterfeit what cannot be copied, but beauty is to bring to life the truth of the Prophet. And, the truth cannot be placed within the idiosyncrasies of limits. We cannot follow the *Sunna* of the beloved, we must live it—as if inhaling the fragrance only to emit it.

So, I stand in the road of my life confronting my own fate, but I confront it with his fragrance, his truth, and his beauty. I stand in dignity, steady, somber, and staid, for I sit in judgment over myself before God seals my case. When presented with a problem or an argument, I exercise diligent self-restraint. For I ask myself the fundamental question that transcends time, place, or any limitations, “What would the Prophet have done in this situation?”

In whatever life gives or takes, in whatever the liabilities or stakes, in whatever the pains or aches, in whatever pleasures or gratifications, I inhale the fragrance of the Prophet and ask, “What would the Prophet have done in this situation?”

Who would the Prophet have married? How would the Prophet have made love or acted with his neighbors? How would the Prophet have acted in his home, shared the happiness, or reacted to any consternation? How would the Prophet have dealt with an extended hand or acted toward this poverty or privation? How would the Prophet have driven a car, managed a job, or even responded to any small sensation?

The response to the question is mine and yours, not the Prophet's, for the truth, that is the Prophet, is not susceptible to relative individualization. But to ask the question will unlock the heart to the Prophet's beautiful authenticity, and the heart's own moral self-realization.

“What would the Prophet have done in this situation?” A society built on this solemn inquiry is a society permeated with his blessed fragrance, and his miraculous beauty becomes its salvation. His *Sunna* would not be pursued in malformed and contorted imitations, but a fundamental state of transformation.

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Ibn 'Abdullah, Abu al-Qasim, my Prophet, my beloved, you are among God's most wondrous manifestations. My heart is wedded to beauty, and, my Prophet, you are the beautiful marvel of all creation. But the truth is, I have no use for my heart, I want to live through yours.

My Prophet, what words can I find to describe my utter and unrelenting infatuation? “I love you,” just won't do, and there are no words, no expressions—language is just a system of bounded significations. When the words leave my heart, they are formalized, interpreted, and corrupted by my own mind. So I absorb the silence, stand in place, and look all around. When I glimpse your footprints or hear the echo of your footsteps, I run to where I know your perfume will be found. I inhale the fragrance, sprinkle it on my soul, wash my heart, and reshape every single cell in my mind. Then I walk on my own road carrying my own burdens and chores. But I confront the blessings, trials, and tribulations not by acting out a parody or attempting an impersonation, but by the authenticity of a personification. And, in every point, and at every sensation, I pause and ask myself, “What would the Prophet have done in this situation?”

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