

DEATH IN MOWLAWEE'S VIEW

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Death is one of the main obsessions of man and ranks among his most sophisticated mental and spiritual enigmas. It is hard to accept that there will come a day when we will have to abandon all our mundane attachments to set out a journey to an unknown world. In a glance at works of literature, art and philosophy created by the talented and men of thought in all cultures and languages we will find death as one of the fundamental issues dealt with since the shock and fear caused by the thought of it is a common and natural feeling among men. Naturally, everyone has an approach of their own according to their viewpoint . The difference between a believer in resurrection and a denier of it starts from the very point that the former regards death as the beginning of a new stage of life and the latter as the end to everything .

Islamic mystics and sophis even went farther .They regarded death not only as a beginning of a new life but also as a means to reunite with the Eternal Beloved from whom they had been detached by their mundane life .Therefore they consider death as an auspicious event which they always welcome cheerfully and the arrival of which they long for.

Jalaaladdin Mohammad Balkhee, known as Mowlawee, is one of the greatest mystics and thinkers whose attitude toward death we are referring to in this article :

1. In his primary view of death, Mowlawee finds common man's viewpoint of death erroneous and he strongly holds that it must be reviewed and corrected. Death, contrary to the common belief, is by no means frightening. To fear death is to fear oneself. Every man's death is the depiction of his very self. Every man gets his reward according to the way he lived his life and one's death suits the manner of his worldly life .The type of death is a reflection of what is inside one's mind and heart. Metaphorically, death is a mirror to show the true nature of each man rather than his affected appearance which deceives others and hides his real self. If our nature is as beautiful, to quote Mowlana, "as a Turkish girl, its beauty is reflected from the mirror but if it be ugly, ugly will be the image ."1

Mowlawee divides wisdom to partial or imperfect wisdom and whole wisdom which enjoys the glory of faith and revelation. He believes that it is those not possessing but imperfect wisdom that fear death , but those ,to quote the Holy Koran, who are endowed with the whole wisdom (197/2) will never fear death .2

True men have no fear of death .Death is considered to be a stage and a continuation of this worldly life and an evolution from a low world to a higher and exalted one. Death, from this viewpoint, is an exaltation. Mystics deride the fear of death. When death happens, this is the shell of this mundane flesh, and not the pearl of soul, which destroys.3

Mowlawee inspired by the Holy Koran and quoting part of the chapter Ya Sin: Verse 53, "...and they are all arraigned before Us" opines that there is the life after death. Were death equal to total and complete annihilation, the Lord would not have used the word 'arraign , here in this verse .4

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1. Mathnawee (349-344/3)

2. Mathnawee (4226/5)

1. Mathnawee (3453-3496/1)

2. Mathnawee (444-445/5)

2. Mowlawee considers death, in an allegory, as a touchstone for testing the claimants of faith and says death can be defaming. The world without death is similar to a market where it is impossible to distinguish true gold coins from the forged ones. The coins are exchanged and it is the money changers and experts who know real gold coins from the feigned ones so as to reveal the swindlers.¹ In another attractive and precise allegory, Mowlana likens death to the cracking of the shell of a walnut .He says, “*What fear of being defamed has a walnut from cracking when it enjoys a fully grown kernel ?!*” or somewhere else in his poems he sees a similarity between death and skinning of a pomegranate or an apple, which reveals the inner contents.² Quite naturally , what is sweet and healthy is welcome, while the rotten or fermented contents are thrown away .

3. In another poem by Mowlawee death is likened to being born and the souls of the deceased are waiting for the person’s being born to see to what group of them (the bad or the good) he/she belongs. Each group thinks that person

will join them upon his/her death . (S)he dies, in other words, is reborn in a new world and by putting step in that world puts an end to the difference arisen between the two bad and good groups .³

4. From another point of view this mundane world is like a jail in which the believers are imprisoned. Therefore death amounts their freedom from such a prison. Obviously, the most exciting moment in the life of a prisoner is the one at which he gets his freedom. The prophets had a true understanding of the world. They regarded this earthly world as a prison from which their souls longed for getting freedom and flying in infinite horizons of the heavens. Their sorrows are the result of being imprisoned in this narrow and poky prison.⁴

Mowlawee retells the story of Bilaal the Abyssinian, the devoted follower and companion of the prophet of Islam, when the time of his death neared, his wife began to wail. “This is the very time for merry- making rather than crying since my soul is joining those of Mohammad (p.b.u.h) and his confederates.” has said.⁵

Mowlana in his book *Feehee Maa Feehee* refers to the same topic using another allegory: “*Upon observing the infiniteness of the other world and having got freed from this narrow world , allegorically thou wilt be like a person to have his limbs been fetted all his life and even having been happy about it seeing that he hath not experienced the joy of freedom , but upon being unchained to his great surprise he will behold what a torture his situation has had been . He can be likened to a baby with his/ her legs and arms tied tightly in the cradle but when he or she has grown to a grown-up it shall be a bitter persecution to be tied up like that*”.⁶

5. In Mowlana’s eye this earthly world causes disunion and death takes us to a world which amounts unity and absolute unity with the Lord. ”*These are but dividing walls confining thou and which cause duality betwixt thee and the Lord and the other world setth thine soul free in infinity and reuniteh it with Him.*”⁷

6. Mowlana holds that death has given value and prestige to the life in this world .But for death man would remain a captive in the vicious circle of doing nothing but to eat and sleep . He would keep his earthly form and would enjoy no exaltation. He tells in his poem the story of a man who said ,”*but for death the world would be a happy place.*” “*But for death the world would value nothing.*” responded another one.⁸ A’ttaar Neishabouree in his book *Tazkaratol Anhyaa* (biographies of men of God) narrating the biography of Yahyaa Mi-a’az Raazee tells an episode : “*Once ha was told that with the Angel of Death the world is worth nothing . “Wrong you are . But for the Angel of Death nothing would the world cost.*” “*What for ?*” demanded they .” *Since death is a bridge to connect you with your Greatest Friend “(i.e. the Lord) .*⁹

3. Mathnawee (1674-1681/4)

4. Mathnawee (706-710/1)

5. Mathnawee (3514-3518/1)

6. Mathnawee (3553-3544/3)

7. Mathnawee (3517-3532/3)

1. (*Feehee Maa Feehee*,p194)

2. (*Feehee Maa Feehee* , p194).

3. Mathnawee (1760-1763/5)

4. (*Tazkaratol Awlyaa*, p315).

7. Mawlana says in another poem that there is no such a death as to mean not to exist any more .Life is the same as death .We are all swimming in the ocean of existence. Death is nothing but a change of state. Death means to join the Lord or eternity. So it is the very reunification with our Beloved and we must welcome it and delight in its arrival. Accordingly, the true life lies in the heart of death. Death is the time of emancipation. We dwell in this earthly abode but a few days and then return to our origin. We ought to care about nothing but the destination of this exhilarating spiritual journey. The whole Mathnawee is the biography of a ‘flute’, the symbol of a man who has been away from his origin and is endeavoring to reunite with it.

8. Sensuring those who have forgotten death, Mowlana says: *”Death is continuously and at each instant shouting ‘to you I am coming,’ and is beating its drum so forcefully that its skin is nearly torn but the deaf ear of men will not bear those alarms and warning sounds or pretendth not to have heard them.*¹

9. Mowlawee believes that those who see death as total annihilation haven’t got but partial or false wisdom which causes them to see facts in an inverted way.²

10. In another poem Mowlana says that death is water of life put in darkness and the man yearning passionately for it is likened to a thirsty man .A thirsty man wishes earnestly to search for and find water. The water in a pot upon its arrival in the river vanishes into it. Its eternity means that same vanishing and it is its best and most exciting moment in life.³

11. Mowlana has likened, in another allegor, the world to a warm Turkish bath. Baths in old times had various parts and equipments and they were not so easy to use as today’s baths. To take a bath in an old bath would sometimes take hours. The warm floor and walls of Turkish baths and the dense steam rising from the hot water caused the people inside it to perspire a lot and gave them a feeling of sadness and heavyheartedness. The poet reminds his readers allegorically in an imagery that unless they get out of that bath, they will not have a heart full of delight and happiness and unless they have a joyful heart they will not take any pleasure in their wealth. Suppose we were taking a walk in a vast meadow. How could we enjoy our hiking when our shoes were too tight for us? It is the case with the bounty and riches people have, even though it does not seem to be so.⁴

12. Mowlana says that when a man dies and experiences death, he will not be sorry about it. Death will not be a shocking and unfamiliar event to him. On the contrary, he will find it a fact and he will observe the fact of the world. What causes regret in him is that why he did not do good during his mundane life so as to be well-equipped in his journey to the new world.⁵ Mowlana says in *Feebee Maa Feebee* (p 174) : *“ The believer is the one who knowth who there is beyond this mundane wall , who is aware of every single deed of ours and beholdth everything , though we do not see Him. The believer is certain about Him , but he who is not a believer sayth :’No, this is naught but a tale told’ and he does not believe .There shall come a day when he faces his chastisement and shall say : “Alas! Evil was what I said and I erred since everything was Him”*

13. Mowlana has a deeper view of death to the effect that life is an arena of changes from one form to another and we have so far experienced death many times and passed different stages so that our souls should evolve to higher levels.⁶

Man, however, upon stepping into each stage, will forget the previous one.⁷

The separation of soul occurs not only in the case of death. Each instant which elapses and each breath man takes, shall drive him a step nearer to death. So man is incessantly walking toward death and to put it more precisely we are all always in a state of dying or the separation of soul from the flesh.⁸

5. Mathnawee (773-776/6)

6. Mathnawee (4136-4139/9)

7. Mathnawee (3907-3914/3)

1. Mathnawee (3545-3552/3)

2. Mathnawee (604-609, 1766-1768/5)

3. Mathnawee (3901-3906/3)

4. Mathnawee (3646-3647/4)

5. Mathnawee (123-126/3)

Then he advises us to live our dear life and spend our precious time in a way not to be losers in the end.¹

14. Mowlana's most important and deepest idea about death is that he emphasizes on choosing voluntary death before the arrival of compulsory death. He is not the first to put forth such a suggestion. There have been other men of thought, both before and after him, to have introduced this view to the field of thinking. The difference is that, however, Mowlana has used elegant and impressive images in his beautiful poetry to convey this idea.

Voluntary death has been called transformative death and mystic annihilation or the second birth, as well, which means to part with one's self and to submit to the divine will, in other words to free the self and join the Lord or the dying of self and

reviving in divine life and it is not feasible, Mowlana holds, unless the soul joins completely all the divine manifestations. This process can be likened to the annihilation of wood in fire and that of shade in light, which calls for man's spiritual evolution and the transformation of his temperaments.² This interpretation of voluntary death or the death before the final death has been used by the mystics inspired by the verse 54 of the Cow chapter of the Holy Koran: *Turn in repentance to your Creator and slay your selves*. It means that through killing the satanic desires of your selves or giving up them amounts 'breathing' a fresh and new soul into your earthly bodies. Mowlana says, in his *Feehee Maa Feehee* (p73), *"Men of God are as dead before their very death as walls and doors . There is not a wee bit of this mundane life in them. They are like a shield in the Lord's ban . The movement of the shield doeth not come from itself and that is how 'The very Lord I am' maketh sense. The shield sayth I am but a means and the movement comes from His Divine hand. "*, which can be an allusion to the quoted advice from the prophet of Islam : " Die before your death comes .", a piece of advice so much emphasized by the mystics.³

To obtain such a death, i.e. the voluntary death, is to achieve victory in the major war against the satanic self. The war against the diabolic self - and every man is enjoined to wage such a war from the beginning of his adulthood - is more important than the minor war, that is the war against the unbelievers. To neglect the Lord and to be tempted by devilish desires of self, according to Mowlana, is the ugliest form of death.⁴ So there are two types of death: voluntary death and compulsory death .In the voluntary death man can overcome conceit, selfishness and the satanic desires of self and accordingly, he will be able to fetter self with the chain of faith and intuition. Consequently, he shall achieve purification spiritually and morally. Mystics have called this death of lusts and diabolic passions 'the Minor Resurrection', as well as the 'Middle Resurrection'. Because man dies considering the dark life of lustful self.

Not all men are so courageous as to die a voluntary death . Not every man is able to achieve this level of exaltation. Men and cattle are the same considering their compulsory deaths. Both men and animals experience it in the same way.

Mowlana and his circle of friends considered themselves the ' children of joy' since they regarded death by no means a sorrowful event .Mowlana made a will to Sheik Salaahaddin Zarkoob to the effect that his funeral should be a joyful dancing party rather than a mourning ceremony with wailing and weeping since going to the Beloved and leaving this transient abode is an exhilarating happening not a sad one.⁵ Mowlana would have merry-making and dancing ceremonies held on occasion of his mystic fellows deaths .

This unprecedented behavior incited the anger of fanatics. " *What is such a blasphemous innovation for ?*" objected they . " *The group of men reciting the verses of the holy Koran walking ahead of the coffin is to show that the dead person was a believer and the group of singers is an evidence of his/ her being both a believer and a lover of God .*" rejoined he.⁶

6. Mathnawee (123-131/3)

1. Mathnawee (2272/4)

2. Mathnawee (3837-3740/6)

3. Mathnawee (796/6)

4. (Waladnameh,p112)

5. (Monaaghebol AArefeen , mystics' virtues, p 233/1)

In Mowlana's funeral various musical instruments, such as trumpets, flutes, tambourines and viols were being played and a great number of people were singing and merrymaking. Everyone in the procession, Mowlana holds, ought to mourn themselves rather than the dead person.¹

Through voluntary death man shall enjoy rebirth and open his eyes to the world of meaning and fact.² As Jesus, the Christ, said, "No one shall reside in heavens unless he is reborn." Mowlana believes that the holy prophet of Islam is the most prominent example of such a rebirth. As a result of such a rebirth which is caused by the voluntary death the spiritual temperaments of man transform. Men upon commencing his eternal life will exalt spiritually and temperamentally in a way that they no longer need earthly foods which their diabolic selves used to desire. They will wash their ill deeds and thoughts in the purifying water of being good-natured and sincere.³ A man who dies against his tempting self and obtains a voluntary death will achieve the eternal life. No word is on his tongue other than God. Such a death is the origin of life.⁴

The way to reach the true life is to free oneself from the mundane barriers and confinement so as to obtain spiritual life. Should we be bound to the earth as the plants are, we will be vulnerable in case of being exposed to various winds.⁵

Voluntary death is the very true life in the appearance of death, and unless we obtain it, despite the fact that we are apparently alive and breathing, we are actually dead.⁶ In Mowlana's eye, voluntary death is much more difficult than the compulsory death. He argues that one who succumbs compulsorily to natural death experiences death merely once and in the verse 185 in the chapter of 'The House of Imeran of the holy Koran we read: "*Every soul shall taste of death.*" The mystics and those who are obliged to give up mundane attachments, however, experience such a death many times and to quote Mowlana, mystics die in a hundred ways.⁷ Life, in Mowlana's point of view, is not just breathing. Life is the same as rebirth and to obtain one's abode in the divine heaven, in other words to die with the dark mundane life of self and to be reborn in the life of moral and spiritual virtues. Considering this point of view of Mowlana, most living men rank among the dead.⁸ Voluntary death is different from the one that as a result of which the dead person is buried. The former means to go into the world of light and not into a grave. Voluntary death amounts the transformation of person's previous characteristics and temperaments and the undergoing a great change from the dark mundane life of self to a purified life and, to quote Mowlana, from being a negro to a white Roman.⁹

Mowlana has used numerous allegories of voluntary death. One of them is the tale of the merchant and the parrot in book one.¹⁰ The throwing away of the parrot is a symbol of despising the mundane body and the flight of the bird is a symbol of ascending of soul to utmost spiritual levels and its joining the Lord. Voluntary death is the major condition for man's evolution and his transcendence to perfection¹¹. The mere way to get to the eternal life and emancipation from the life full of suffering is to slay self. Mowlana has excellent words in this regard in his Feehee Maa Feehee¹²: "*With the Lord there cannot be two T's. Thou sayst: 'I' and he sayth: 'I'. Either thou shouldst die beside Him or he should die beside you so that there should be no duality. But as to His death, it is not possible objectively or subjectively. And the Ever Living One He is and dieth not. He decreeth that it shall be more advisable to thee if thou diest so as there shall be no duality. Now that He shall never die, thou shalt die so that he will manifest Himself to thee and there should be no more duality.*" Mowlana

6. Mathnawee (796-799/6)

1. Mathnawee (3576/3)

2. Mathnawee (43-45/3)

3. Mathnawee (3364-3365/3)

4. Mathnawee (1280-1283/3)

5. Mathnawee (4135/5)

6. Mathnawee (1538-1539/3)

7. Mathnawee (3837-3839/3)

8. Mathnawee (739-741/6)

9. Mathnawee (1751-1758)

10. Mathnawee (723-724/6) & (2824-2826/5)

11. (p24&25)

says, in his Feehee Maa Feehee¹, : *“Ali , may God be pleased with him , sayth : ‘ Should mundane forms be removed and come Resurrection , my certainty shall not increase.”*

Sources :

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