

ON THE 35TH VERSE OF THE MESNEVÎ: "NAKD-İ HÂL" AS A DECLARATION OF THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS

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Abstract

The Mesnevî is a work that has been extensively contemplated, interpreted, and approached through various layers of meaning since the day it was written. While the effort to understand what Mevlânâ intended to express has continued for centuries, numerous new works have also been written, drawing on the rich metaphors and allegories created by the Mesnevî. Mevlânâ's dense use of similes and symbolic narrative, on the one hand, shaped the fundamental structure of these works and inspired them, while on the other hand, it allowed readers to integrate their own experiences and worlds with the text. In this regard, one of the most distinctive qualities of classical works is their enduring capacity to resonate with readers across different eras and intellectual traditions. However, the world of similes used by Mevlânâ in the Mesnevî also forms the primary basis for criticism that the work is disjointed and incomprehensible. Consequently, the texts written about what Mevlânâ actually meant have formed a substantial body of serious commentary literature on the Mesnevî. However, evaluating Mevlânâ solely as a sufi mystic obscures the human, philosophical, and existential dimensions of his works. Consequently, all efforts to understand the Mesnevî appear incomplete and futile. For Mevlânâ, as a human being, expresses the weaknesses, quests, and states found in every person. In this article, the verse that serves as an introduction to the first story of the Mesnevî is evaluated through the commentaries of the exegetes, and the verse in question is interpreted for today's humanity within the framework of the intended meaning.

Keywords: Mevlânâ, Mesnevî, 35th Verse, Human, Consciousness

MESNEVÎ'NİN 35. BEYTİNE DÂİR: GERÇEK HÂLİN BEYÂNİ OLARAK "NAKD-İ HÂL"

Özet

Mesnevî, yazıldığı günden bu yana üzerinde çokça düşünülmüş, yorumlanmış ve farklı anlam katmanlarıyla ele alınmış bir eserdir. Mevlânâ'nın neyi ifade etmek istediğini anlama çabası yüzyıllardır sürerken, aynı zamanda Mesnevî'nin oluşturduğu mecaz ve istiare zenginliğinden beslenen pek çok yeni eser kaleme alınmıştır. Mevlânâ'nın yoğun teşbih ve sembolik anlatımı, bir taraftan bu eserlerin temel kurgusunu şekillendirip ilham verirken öte taraftan okuyucunun kendi tecrübe ve dünyasını metinle bütünleştirmesine de imkân tanımıştır. Bu doğrultuda, klâsik eserlerin her döneme ve her okuyucuya hitap edebilme niteliği onların en belirgin özelliğidir. Bununla birlikte Mevlânâ'nın Mesnevî'de kullandığı teşbih dünyası, eserin birbiriyle alakasız ve anlaşılmasız olduğuna dair tenkitlerin birincil hareket noktasını da oluşturmaktadır. Dolayısıyla Mevlânâ'nın aslında ne demek istediğine dair yazılan metinler, Mesnevî'ye dair ciddi bir şerh edebiyatı külliyatı oluşturmuştur. Mevlânâ'yı yalnızca bir mutasavvıf olarak değerlendirmek ise onun eserlerindeki insanî, felsefî ve varoluşsal boyutları görünmez kılmaktadır. Böylece Mesnevî'yi anlamaya yönelik tüm çabalar da eksik ve beyhude görünmektedir. Zira Mevlânâ, bir insan olarak her insanda bulunan zaafı, arayışları ve hâlleri dile getirmektedir. Bu makalede,

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Mesnevî'nin ilk hikâyesine giriş mahiyetindeki beyit, şârihlerin yorumları üzerinden değerlendirilerek bahse konu beyit, kastedilen mânâ çerçevesinde bugünün insanlığı için yorumlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mevlânâ, Mesnevî, 35. Beyit, İnsan, Bilinç

Introduction

The first 18 verses of the Mesnevî have been accepted as the essence of this work by Mevlevi commentators and admirers of the Mesnevî. Mevlânâ's disciples asked him to write a work similar to those of Sanai (d. 1131?) and Attar (d. 1221); Mevlânâ took a piece of paper from his turban and handed it to Hüsametdin Çelebi (d. 1284), on which 18 verses were written by Mevlânâ himself. In the 18th verse, Mevlânâ states, 'It is necessary to cut the word short, for those who are raw cannot understand the state of the cooked,' seeming to indicate that a person who has not yet matured cannot comprehend the state of someone who has attained spiritual maturity. Indeed, attempting to explain what Mevlânâ wrote, drawn from the distillations of knowledge, wisdom, virtue, philosophy, and art, is not much different from presenting our own ideas under the pretext of the Mesnevî and Mevlânâ, rather than our own delusions and fantasies (Konuk, 2011:88).

This view rests on the recognition that one can never definitively reconstruct the intellectual and experiential context from which a work emerges, nor fully capture what it signifies within the author's inner world. However, it is possible to say that Mevlânâ's technique of interweaving narrative elements throughout the work, which at times appear unrelated, plays a significant role in maintaining the vitality of efforts to understand what the Mesnevî and Mevlânâ intended to convey.

Mevlânâ, using the technique of intertwined stories, begins to offer advice from the 19th verse onwards, describing the qualities of the perfect human being while also revealing the condition of the imperfect human being. The verses leading up to the thirty-fifth demonstrate a predominantly metaphorical structure, characterized by a highly abstract and symbolic mode of expression. As is the case throughout the Mesnevî, it would not be misleading to think that the subjects and objects in the verses in question gain meaning entirely according to the reader's understanding, imagination, and even conjecture. To be free from the bonds of gold and silver, the sea poured into a cup, the cup in the eyes of the lovers, the garment torn by love, beneficial love, the cure for pride and honour, the body of earth ascending from love to the heavens, the soul of Tur, the one united with the lips of the beloved who is the maker of melodies, one who cannot find a friend who speaks the same language, the absence of roses and rose gardens, living beloved ones and dead lovers, the wingless bird, the absence of beginning and end, the treacherous mirror, the rusty state of the mirror of the soul - these motifs collectively prepare the reader for a deeper unveiling of the existential condition of the imperfect human being

1. On the State of Awareness

It is observed with concern that the lifestyle recently imposed on individuals as a mandatory condition by society is characterised by the notion that you will only live once, so you should travel, eat, drink, and live each day as if it were your last. It is therefore unsurprising that a distorted conception of religion, coupled with an education and way of life deprived of philosophical grounding, has contributed to the present existential disorientation. The motto/principle of 'living each day as if it were one's last,' oriented solely toward pleasure, appears profoundly inadequate - if not detrimental - for a humanity already distanced from its essential self.

However, time is the means by which the futility of all the desires of the will, of everything it pursues, is revealed and explained to the individual. Time is the form in which the futility of everything becomes clearly apparent. Time is the sole measure by which all pleasures and delights prove futile. That is to say, life resembles a payment made with copper coins, for which a receipt must be given in return. The copper coins are the days, and the receipt is death (Schopenhauer, 2018:11).

Today, existentialism, which is criticised for driving people into pessimism and attempting to discredit it with a philosophy of hopelessness, raises the question of how it evaluates Schopenhauer's (d. 1860) assessment above, which stands before us like poisonous honey, in the context of hedonism, which advocates "living each day as if it were your last".

It would not be unfounded to argue that unconsciousness, in all its forms, stands in fundamental tension with the very basis of human existence. For we know that what distinguishes humans from other creatures is thought and consciousness. Therefore, the law of 'live each day as if it were your last,' pursued by those chasing happiness and desires, serves no different function than burying the individual in deeper suffering.

The things a person constantly pursues deceive them, and each deception will lead them into new errors. Ultimately, the human being, who should be conscious and sober, stumbles and falls. Pleasures and the subsequent state of detachment bring misery and suffering (Schopenhauer, 2018).

The pursuit of things that human beings can never fully possess throughout their lives is akin to a person travelling in a very fast vehicle being unable to possess or even comprehend the things they see around them.

In philosophy, consciousness is generally defined as a faculty considered to be the centre of awareness, emotion, perception and knowledge in humans. Often seen as something that cannot be defined or can only be defined by referring to an unmediated introspection of human conscious experiences, consciousness has been analysed in two ways. In addition, it can be said that consciousness consists of three basic types of activity or functions: knowledge, emotion, and volitional action. It can be divided into two types: spontaneous consciousness, which is the immediate feeling of what is experienced and sensed, and reflexive consciousness,

which turns to the immediate impression and attempts to analyse its causes, nature, and meaning (Cevizci, 2002:179).

In Islamic thought, “idrâk” (awareness) has been used to refer to individual experience, perception, or understanding of individual or particular objects (Cevizci, 2002:536). In this context, there are two types of idrâk: simple and complex. In the former, one perceives the existence of God but is not conscious of this perception or of the perceived God. In the latter, one perceives the existence of God and is conscious of this perception and of the perceived God (Uludağ, 2012:131).

Thus, the comprehension of the matters discussed by Mevlânâ can be seen as a state of consciousness.

2. On the Declaration of the Present State

Bi’şnevîd ey dostân in dâstân

Der hakikat nakd-i hâl-i mâst ân (Tanyıldız, 2010:253)

(Listen, friends, to this tale

Truly, it is the declaration of the present state)

The first story in the Mesnevî is “A sultan falling in love with a slave girl, purchasing her, the slave girl falling ill, and the sultan's remedy”. Mevlânâ began the first couplet of the Mesnevî with the call “bişnev” (listen). The second “bişnev” in the Mesnevî is uttered at the beginning of the first story. This is because Mevlânâ refers to himself with the first “bişnev”. It can be concluded that this second “bişnev” refers to the understanding of the story to be told.

Şem’î (d. 1602-03), providing a translation of the verse, stated that the Mesnevî, from its first verse full of truth and secrets to this verse and beyond, is written in the same style, and that it reveals its secrets for the sake of truth through the ney (Dağlar, 2009:233).

Sabûhî Ahmed Dede (d. 1647) interpreted the meaning of the verse as follows: “O friends, listen to this story, for in truth this story is our own condition, that is, it describes the state of our souls and spirits”. Mevlânâ also repeated the phrase bişnev to draw a lesson from the story (Algül, 2007:69).

İsmail Rûsûhî-yi Ankaravî (d. 1631-32) translated the verse as, “Listen, O friends, to this epic, that is, O friends of truth, listen to these stories, for they are our true state”. According to Ankaravî, the meaning and purpose of this story is that the sultan represents the soul, and the slave girl represents the self (Tanyıldız, 2010:253).

According to Sarı Abdullah Efendi (d. 1661), the first story of the Mesnevî is, in truth, a reflection of our own condition. The situations described in this story are not literal; each tale is in fact a share, each point contains a nuance, and each sign

has a metaphor. In the verse, the sultan represents the spirit, and the slave girl represents the ego (Sarı Abdullah, 156).

Dervish Muhammed Şifâyî Efendi (d. 1673) also believes that, because most people are inclined towards stories, Mevlânâ expressed divine secrets in the form of stories and concealed them in the form of tales to hide the secret of the beloved from others. According to him, O friends, listen to this story, for it is our true state, that is, the intention is to express our state in the form of a story (Özdemir, 2016:93).

According to İsmail Hakki Bursevî (d. 1725), each verse of the Mesnevî is a realm of meaning and a climate of divine inspiration. The meaning of the verse is this: O friends, listen to this epic and this story. This story is our nakd-i hâlim. Listen to this tale, take your share from what is told here (Bursevî, 2006:171).

According to Konuk (d. 1938) (2011), nakd is to select and count solid money from the heart. The word nakd, which also means something that is present and ready, refers to the second meaning. So, O seekers and friends, listen to this story, for the hidden meanings within it are our present state in this worldly life we are now experiencing.

Most commentators agree that in this story, the sultan represents the soul, and the slave girl represents the limited intellect under the soul's control. The goldsmith represents the ego. The doctors represent deceitful and false guides. The Divine Physician represents the perfect human being. This story explains the path the seeker must follow to purify the mirror of the soul from the rust of egoistic attributes. Therefore, the following verses should also be read and applied by readers with this connection in mind (Konuk, 2011:96).

According to Kenan Rifai (d. 1950), Mevlânâ begins this first great story of the Mesnevî with the words, "Friends, listen to this epic, for it is truly the story of our condition". This story recounts the great and wisdom-filled adventure of the human soul after it departed from the realm of God and lived through time. The story recounts the soul's separation from God, its descent into the realm of multiplicity, and its return to the realm of unity through self-improvement in this realm. Before the body was created, there was a sultan called the soul. This sultan was the ruler of both religion and the world. One day, the sultan rode his horse of determination before the armies of knowledge and set out to transcend the levels of existence and seek knowledge (Büyükkasoy, 1973:16).

Tahirü'l-Mevlevî (d. 1951) provides the translation of the verse, stating, "The sultan and the slave girl to be narrated represent the spirit and the self" (Tahirü'l-Mevlevî, Undated:89).

In line with this, according to the aforementioned commentaries on the Mesnevî, Mevlânâ warns readers not to view the story he begins by saying, "Listen", as a story of a slave girl and a sultan, but rather to evaluate their current situations through the moral of the story.

Conclusion

The introductory verse of the first story in the Mesnevî, concerning the sultan's love for a slave girl, has been translated and explained by commentators according to the world of metaphor. Although the verse, "O friends! Listen to this epic (story), which is the expression of the reality of the situation", outwardly prepares the reader for the story to come, inwardly it can also be considered a sign of the "humanity" found throughout the Mesnevî.

Commentators have accepted the phrase *nakd-i hâl* in the verse as the current state. The word *nakd* means "valid and existing thing". It would not be misleading to think of the expression *nakd-i hâl* as "the current state" and "criticism of the state".

When considering the composition, two meanings seem to emerge. When the composition is thought of as "true state", "the truth of our state" or "the truth of humanity" the verse can be interpreted as meaning, "O friends! Listen to this epic (story), which is the complete expression of our true state/our state!" The word "nakd" in the phrase "*nakd-i hâl*" has meanings such as wealth, riches, and distinguishing between counterfeit and real money. Therefore, the verse also draws attention to "hâl" (state) and being aware of one's state. The phrase *nakd-i hâl* also hints at the concepts of "ân" and "ân-ı dâim" in sufi thought. If we live our lives aware of our "state" in the "moment" and appreciating its value, it will be possible to make every "moment" in our entire life valuable, and our state will also gain value; thus, it will be possible to be worthy of the honour of being human, free from a worthless, false state. In this context, Mevlânâ's famous saying, "Either seems as you are, or be as you seem!" will also attain its true meaning. If a person lives consciously in every moment, every moment becomes an opportunity that makes the person's existence valuable; the state ceases to be "false" and acquires a quality connected to truth.

The stories in the Mesnevî describe and critique the human condition, using similes and metaphors to tell the story of humanity. In this sense, the sultan in the first story of the Mesnevî represents the spirit, while the slave girl represents the ego. The king of soul, having fallen in love with his slave, becomes a slave himself.

Faced with the treachery of the world's deceptive pleasures, the soul's sovereign is left helpless. The soul, entering the cage of the body, has fallen in love with the body it inhabits. This love, in the sense of the soul being excessively enslaved to the body's lines of life and form, its beauty of colour and skin, and ultimately its desires and needs, was the state of the soul being deceived by worldly pleasures and straying from its own safe and sound path by obeying the body's commands, in short, falling ill from the right path (Büyükkaksoy, 1973:17).

It is evident that all criticisms directed at Mevlânâ and the Mesnevî stem from the language of metaphor and simile used in the work and by its author. This is because everyone derives meaning from the stories in the Mesnevî according to

their own mental world. Mevlânâ also clearly states at the beginning of the first story in his work that the stories he will tell are actually a presentation of the existing state of affairs. Although time and place may change, the essence of human nature remains unchanged. Human desires are their weak point. Mevlânâ attempts to awaken the state of consciousness and perception, which is the greatest power given to humans against this weakness, through the expression of lessons from stories.

The cultivated state of consciousness and awareness is the sole faculty capable of restoring to human beings a sense of their inherent sovereignty. For although reason compels humans to make choices regarding matter and benefit, the state of awareness that emerges through the power of the spirit and with the help of reason can free humans from being prisoners of the endless suffering of material life.

So where should human awareness or consciousness take the individual? Should humans live each day as if it were their last and remain indifferent to the things in the universe, or should they act according to the essence of existence, saying that everything in the universe is valuable to humans? With so much injustice, suffering and indifference in the world, heeding Mevlânâ's call from centuries ago to "look at your state, return to your essence" can perhaps shed light on humanity's loneliness and helplessness in the world.

Ultimately, nakd-i hâl functions both as the articulation of one's genuine spiritual condition and as a criterion by which the authenticity of that condition is tested. Thus, the verse invites humanity to live in a state that aligns with its essence.

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