

Crescent and Heart

A poem

by

Murshid Samuel L. Lewis

(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

Introduction

While it is said that the realization of the mystic defies verbal expression, the poems comprising “Crescent and Heart,” written by the American Sufi master Murshid Samuel L. Lewis, transcend that general rule. In this short cycle of poems, the author reveals insights into God-realization and its resultant states of ecstasy, and further, indicates methods and points of view through which others may experience these states of consciousness within themselves.

Murshid Samuel L. Lewis composed the poems of “Crescent and Heart” in the 1950’s during a pilgrimage to Ajmer, India, the site of the dargah (tomb) of Khwaja Hazrat Moin-ed-din Chishti. This renowned Sufi saint brought Sufism to India in 1191 AD. Of his teaching, Murshid Samuel L. Lewis said, “Arriving in India, (Moin-ed-din Chishti) established friendship with Yogis and then proceeded to show that the spiritual side of Islam offered the same goals and was open to all people alike regardless of ancestry. It must have shocked the bigots of his time to find a saint giving esoteric training to high and low, men and women of all faiths—and succeeding, to boot.” To this day, Sufism is still widespread throughout India.

Hazrat Moin-ed-din Chishti taught through music the experience of “Saute Sarmad,” the hearing of the “Divine Symphony” or “Music of the Spheres,” in which the essential unity of all being is revealed.

The author, while in Ajmer, entered into the state referred to in Sufism as **fana-fi-Sheikh** (effacement in a master) in the being of Khwaja Hazrat Moin-ed-din Chishti. This is why each of the poems begins, “Says the Khwaja...” Murshid said of “Crescent and Heart” that he had no sense of having authored it, rather that he felt simply a vehicle through which the spirit of the saint

expressed itself.

“Crescent and Heart” demonstrates how the various aspects of music (rhythm, harmony and melody) are a metaphor for the Divine Reality and, more importantly, how the practice of music may lead to heart realization. He says in Section X:

*Before there was time, Allah burst into song,
And time was the measure of His song,
And space was the tambura of His heart,
.....
And when the song was finished, the world was made.
And before I sing my song I hear Allah.*

It is taught in Sufism that in the beginning there was **Zat**, the Divine Essence, and in its midst a single note was struck. As that note grew it created **Sifat**, the myriad expressions of Allah in form. The experience of these words reveals their reality as more than any metaphor could describe.

It is through attunement and effacement in the Divine Being that mystical heights are reached. As is said in Section V:

*And before I sing my song I hear Allah
.....
Now there is a song, and once the singer had a name,
But to give any name but Allah is separation.
I let you call me Khwaja,
But since Allah is Holiness, how can anyone be Khwaja?*

Over and over this surrender to the Oneness of being is stressed: “In Allah are not two songs, but the Divine Symphony of praise (Section III).” Throughout the whole of “Crescent and Heart” are directions toward practice:

*“Sing your note, learn to sing your note, perfect your note,”
.....
I began: “La, la, la, la, la....”
And it echoed: “Al, al, al, al, al....” (Section IV)*

When I attune my vina I look at the stars,

*I take a raga from the tone-book of the spheres;
It is not the stars to which I am attuning,
But the movement of the spheres is the tempo of Allah. (Section V)*

As a musician and disciple of Murshid Samuel L. Lewis, I have kept these poems as a constant companion since first being introduced to them almost ten years ago. Even after hundreds of readings, each new one sheds new light. I hope that these poems will inspire all who read them to seek the experience so beautifully expressed in Section X:

*In the Qur'an and in the Masnavi are the echo of echoes,
But floating through my heart is the Song of songs.*

—Sheikh Vasheest
San Francisco
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I.
In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
"Sing to us of Love" they said:
I threw my vina away,
And went into the forest solitude.
But they heard not the voice of Love,
They were deaf in the midst of music.
How can the vina sing without the Player?
How can the voice resound without the Heart?
The Player of the vina they do not know,
And the Heart that is singing, they do not perceive.
They asked me were Love in sex:
Where is It not which brings atoms together?
They search in the farthest for the nearest;
Easier for the telescope to espy the worm,
Than for the outside to describe the inside.
What are words but praises of echo!
But music is the gift of the Beneficent;
From Him it came and to Him it shall return.
Therefore song is my prayer and prayer is my song.
When I hear the Muezzin I do not hear the Muezzin;
The Mosque is the temple for the absented,
But he who has never departed is bathed in the Presence,

And seeks no other satisfaction.

II.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:

They came unto me and said:

“If Allah would only send an Avatar, a Rassoul, then should we be saved.”

“From what would ye be saved?” asked I.

Can the light of another’s eyes relieve the blind?

Or the drink of another’s mouth quench the thirsting?

The food for another’s lips answer the hungry?

The embrace to another lover answer one’s passion?

If Wisdom is the light of his eye, what could you read?

Or if Wisdom be the touch of his hand, where is your benefit?

Or if Wisdom be the sound of his voice, where is your ear?

And if Wisdom be his sainted presence,

Will that avail your sanctity?

The Qur’an teaches Allah is One, there is no second,

I sought Allah in the stones and the stones were my Avatars;

I sought Allah in the flowers and each blossom was my Rassoul;

I sought Allah in the animals, and from their mouths came Wisdom;

I sought Allah in mankind, and from that light was the light of the world.

The blunderer stood on the wishing gate and could not find his wish,

And he who held Aladdin’s lamp was not Allah-Din,

For Allah-Din is the light of that lamp;

The wisher turns gold into dross,

But the taste of the blessed sacrament dissolves the Universe,

And the gold of gold is the gold of God,

Besides Whom none existeth.

III.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:

Out of the Light of Chaldea came Abraham to the blessed land,

And out of the Light of Wisdom came I to Bharata;

To spread the gospel of Islam came he to the West,

To sing the gospel of Islam came I unto Sind,

Who could not sing to teach the singers to chant,

Who could not praise to instruct the Bhaktis to worship,

Who could not meditate, to tell of the wonders of Silence.

From my pupils I learned,
From the unbelievers I drew my lessons,
And found Allah in every atom of Creation;
From teaching was I taught,
And from instruction I instructed my vain selfness.
O loved ones of God, cease to teach and learn to sing,
Cease to worry, and cease to bring,
Without God is not anything,
First is your duty to Him.
First do your duty, then behold beauty,
And love the Lover of lovers.
And let me sing to all the world,
From Chaldea and Bharata, from the old world to the new,
And let music unite the East and the West.
In Allah are not two songs, but the Divine Symphony of praise;
Once I dwelt among the angels,
And they did not answer my questions,
So I returned unto myself but my self was lost.
Then I wept and Allah comforted me,
And I sought no more the angels, but only Allah;
I sought no more my self, but only Allah,
And now no one answers my questions,
For the end of the quest is the end of the question,
And in the light of Supreme Light there is no darkness or doubt.
Now come and sing with me,
And let the words of your lips be as the Masnavi,
And let the words of your heart be as the Qur'an,
And the song of your soul your votive sacrifice.

IV.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:

They want to know about metaphysics,
They want to know about metaphysics who know not physics,
To peer through the telescope who have not opened their eyes.
How can you know metaphysics who know not physics?
And know physics without knowledge of sound?
And how can you tell of sound who cannot sing a single note?
Attune your voices to a note, any note;
Perfect that note, and sing well,

Then learn the scales.
But how can you know the scales without the dominant note?
I sang a note, a single note:
Once I was taken to Djabrut,
And I asked the Angels, "Tell me of metaphysics."
"Praise be to God, praise be to God" was all they could say.
Then I saw a Holy Being and he answered:
"Sing your note, learn to sing your note, perfect your note."
I tuned my vina and sang,
It was only a single note but I sang.
I began: "La, la, la, la, la...."
And it echoed: "Al, al, al, al, al...."
Then my being sang: "Allah, Allah, Allah."
Then as the angels did unto man,
My song brought me back to earth,
And I knew metaphysics,
I knew physics also—
That metaphysics was the a science of God, the Unseen,
That physics was the science of God, the seen,
And there was no science but of God,
And there was no knowledge but of God,
And users was no being but of God.
So I took my vina and sang each day my note,
And the whole world burst into song.

V.
In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
God created the world by a song, the Universe is His song.
When I attune my vina I look at the stars,
I take a raga from the tone-book of the spheres;
It is not the stars to which I am attuning,
But the movement of the spheres is the tempo of Allah.
God created the world by a song,
So the Hindus call Him Brahma,
But I call Him by every name, by every form,
And when I look at the stars I see Allah,
And before I sing my song I hear Allah.
Hazrat Ali proclaimed: "Say Allah and Allah you will become."
I know there is no "I" but Allah,

And this song is Allah singing through my body.
Allah sang and the world became,
The angels sang in imitation of Allah,
And Adam entered the house of flesh.
Now there is a song, and once the singer had a name,
But to give any name but Allah is separation.
I let you call me Khwaja,
But since Allah is Holiness, how can anyone be Khwaja?
I leave the question, Allah is the answer to all questions.
Some say: Seek a teacher and he will teach,
But my song says: Seek the Teacher and you will be the lesson.
Once I was taught, and now I sing,
And through my song I hope to be as the angels,
But they brought man into his house of clay,
Only I would return him to his dwelling-place.
Man is greater than the angels, sayeth the Book;
Let my song be greater than the song of the angels,
Let this song raise him from the denseness of the earth.
O sons of Chisti, be ye sons of Allah,
And may you also be sons of glory,
That the Light of Allah may shine upon the world.

VI.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
Let me sing of the Qur'an,
Let me glorify the Heavenly Book,
Not written by the hand of man,
But read in its place by the all-seeing eye of the illumined.
There are books and books and the unlettered men could not read them,
But there is one Book which the lettered men do not read.
I sing of the Book which is not read,
Which never was written by the hand of man.
There is no Qur'an,
But the Prophet sang and his words have been recorded.
Of what did the favored one sing?
Come into the land of the Prophet and read,
Witness the Daybreak and the passing of the starry night;
Behold the glory of the Dawn and the coming of the Day,
Where the Noon Brightness is ever shining,

And there is no division in Unity.
I sing of the Qur'an which cannot be read,
I tell of the Qur'an which was never recited,
I pray from the Qur'an which is where it is,
And learn the Knowledge which is Knowledge.
Let me sing until I am nothing but a voice,
Let me pray until I am nothing but a prayer.
No Islam do I see but only Allah,
For what is Islam but the sight of Allah?
And is not all else Kafr?
How can I measure exceeding goodness,
Or tell the depths of the glory of the Magnificent?
My song goes on and were it not for my song would I die,
For abstinence from the song of glory
Is presence in the fires of Naar,
And in the song of glory what matter be it Nur or Naar?
What is Sufism but the promise of a song,
That the song be sung on earth as it is in Heaven,
And that man who is greater than the angels
Prove his greatness by his better deeds.

VII.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
Some want to see phenomena,
They look at the rehearsal and ignore the drama,
They watch whereon the parts are not learned
And never know the beauty of Perfection.
In Allah's realm everything is in loveliness,
And only experienced players are on the stage.
Come with me, my children, and enter the theatre of Love,
Where Beauty's eyes are feasted with the Eye of Beauty,
And the echo and song mingle in marvelous delight.
You will never want any other phenomena
But the end of seeming and the beginning of surety.
A Jinn is beautiful in the eyes of man,
And an Angel is beautiful in the sight of the Jinn,
But wherein is the angel comelier than the Jinn?
Wherein is the Jinn fairer than man?
It is the Glory of Allah which has brought Beauty,
And it is the Glory of Allah which I seek.
Glorify Allah and you will become the Glory of Allah;

As a mother delights in her children,
So does Allah delight in His returned ones,
Who have left off the seeming and the imperfect rehearsal
And joined in the celestial chorus of the satisfied.
Blessed is he who has returned to the feast,
And is finished with fasting.

VIII.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:

Is there no end to music?
Is there no completion of glorification?
Tel them the end of music is the end of the world,
And the cessation from glorification is the victory of night;
So long as is music is the world,
So long as is glorification is existence.
Some seek the end of doing and undoing,
But who is the Doer and what is done?
With a song came the World and by music is it sustained,
And the soul of man is a note of revelation.
Nought are ye but songs, and as ye sing, ye are;
From the heart comes the voice of courage,
From the heart the sound of mercy,
From the heart the assurance of Truth.
Wherefore the beat of the heart save to continue the tempo?
What is the theme of the heart except everlasting love?
The body may go but the heart beat continues,
The mind may cease but the heart beat rolls on,
The breath may dissolve but the heart keeps its rhythm,
And the dreamer awakes as a heart-beat in the Cosmos,
Arising from the Heart, returning to the Heart,
Witnessing the scheme of things on his journey,
From the unknown known to the Known unknown
In the Infinite ocean of Love.

IX.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
Concentrate on the heart of a tree; what do you see?
Does the tree in boisterous clamor boast of its omniscience?
Or glorify its knowledge in the world of trees?
One ring over another and annually it tells a simple tale.
What is the tale of the tree?
Or the song of the bee?
Or the whispering of the wind?
In many sounds is Sound, and in many aspects Light;
Color and flame and shadow and brightness all reveal the Light,
And crescendo and diminuendo and silence tell of Sound.
I sat under the tree and bethought of life,
And the leaves told me of the trunk,
And the trunk referred me to the root,
And the root said: "Look into the ground and into the air."
And the earth said: "I do not know."
And the air said: "How can a moving being gather and keep?"
And the waters ran away and the fire looked upward.
And the tree said: "Why look into me?"
So I looked at my fingernail, and it referred me to the finger.
And the finger to the hand, and the hand to the body;
But the body did not know,
And the mind did not know.
Am I not greater than finger and body and mind?
The leaves of the tree knew what they were not,
Nor did I know their knowledge.
Then in my heart I heard a voice,
Where cool breezes blew a phantom wind,
And the wind fled and I fled; the wind fled me and I fled me,
And the harder the fleeing, the harder fled I,
Until I lost my breath and my nufs was gone
And my Zikr was the only reality about me.

X.
In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:
Before there was time, Allah burst into song,
And time was the measure of His song,
And space was the tambura of His heart,
And in His singing fell He into ecstasy;

Like unto the ecstasy of a fair young maiden—
For in those days Allah was as a virgin—
But in His ecstasy He fell in Love,
With Himself He fell in love in the state of bliss,
And through Himself and by Himself He conceived,
And when the song was finished the world was made.
What was the purpose of the world, O my kindred?
God made no Universe, but only instruments
That could continue his song as He stayed in bliss,
For lovely is the song, but lovelier the state of bliss.
Come with me, dear children, and listen to the song of the elements
Which becalm the Heart of Allah in Infinite Peace;
This was the secret of the Masnavi,
And the doctrine breathed unto Hazrat Ali by the Enlightened,
Who was graced to bathe in the empyrean ocean of song.
And copy of its melodies into the Qur'an.
In the Qur'an and in the Masnavi are the echo of echoes,
But floating through my heart is the Song of songs.

XI.

In the Name of Allah, Who Is Mercy and Compassion.

Says the Khwaja:

I am singing to you, I am singing to you of Love,
I am singing to you the only song which is in my heart,
But that song contains all songs;
It is the Praise of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
Who am I but a voice in the empyrean?
Without my voice, I am not,
And with voice I am only a call to the Call.
You ask me where I am, on what transcendental plane?
Are there distinctions in Allah?
Where the high meets the low,
And where your nufs are swallowed up by Zat?
I am the zero where two lines cross,
The line of nothingness where two planes meet,
The sound of the grating of the outside on the inside,
And the reflection of the radiance from the inside to the outside.
O beloved child of the seekers, what do you seek?
In the darkness a few objects are felt,
And in the light are all objects seen,

But how far from the light to the darkness?
From ignorance unto Knowledge?
Some seek the Knowledge—what is the Knowledge?
Truth is two or else Truth is one;
If Love and Knowledge are different, which is Truth?
If Truth is different from Love and Knowledge
What can be said to exist?
How can I tell of Knowledge who am a song?
How can I discourse on metaphysics who have lost words?
In a word, everything can be expressed in Unity,
And Unity can be described in a Word,
I lost my tongue in the land of silence,
And my silence ended when I entered the heart;
I beheld the Holy of Holies and fell in a swoon,
And since then has Khwaja been lost.
Now can I say where I am?
Go, stare five minutes at the noon-day sun,
And walk straight to your destination.
What is your destination, blind in darkness and blind in light?
I thought I was the seeker and found I was the sought,
I thought I was the fowler and in love's snare was caught,
I thought I was an entity and found that I was naught,
And in Love's ecstasy I ceased from thinking thought.
From my-ness and from I-ness was I snatched and made a slave,
And in my slavery I found escape from karmic grave,
What happiness in slavery when freedom does deprave,
And a song of glory is the essence of the soul!

Glossary

Aladdin—From “Ala-ud-din,” Height of Religion.
Allah-din—God-Faith.
Avatar—Incarnation of God.
Bhaktis—Devotees.
Bharata—India.
Chaldea—Region, Eupharates River.
Chisti—Khwaja Moin-ed-din Chisti, in whose voice Crescent and Heart is spoken.
Djabrut—Astral plane.
Hazrat Ali—Son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.
Jinn—Being— between man and angel.
Kafr—Unbelief.

Khwaja—Holy (title), see **Chisti**.

Masnavi—Songs of Jalaluddin Rumi.

Muezzin—One who calls to prayer.

Naar—Hell.

Nufs—Ego, breath.

Nur—Light.

Raga—Melody.

Rassoul—Prophet.

Sind—India.

Tambura—Stringed instrument which plays the background drone.

Vina—Lute-like instrument, symbol of heart-desire.

Zat—Divine essence.

Zikr—Remembrance of God.