

The Troubled Watermill - Dertli Dolap

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الذين آمنوا أشد حبا لله، أَلست بربكم، إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ، يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا
كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا، أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ، كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ وَيَبْقَى وَجْهَ رَبِّكَ ذُو
الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds. Peace and Blessings be upon our prophet, messenger, and beloved, Muhammad ﷺ; and upon his family and companions. I ask Allah to bless this short article, and to make it into a cause of benefit and knowledge.

My intention in writing this piece is to elucidate crucial concepts needed to understand the worldview of the Sufis, which I will be tackling through this poem written by Yunus Emre. A mysterious figure himself, almost all that we know of him comes from the local traditions of Anatolia. He is an exemplar of the 'folk people's poet'. We have no vast library written by him, his divan instead being a collection of inherited poems by Anatolians.

The poem we are looking at today, like every other poem of Yunus Emre's, has several renditions and arrangements found in different locales. The specific arrangement of couplets I have chosen here best serve the flow of meaning, both in Turkish and my translation. The full text of the poem in both languages can be found at the end of the work.

The Troubled Watermill is by far my favorite of Yunus Emre's poems. The concepts it expresses are fundamental to not only Tasawwuf and 'Ishq, but understanding all of reality and man's place within it. Still, it does so in a very concise and beautiful way. In elucidating the concepts of The Troubled Watermill and my own understanding of his ideas, my greatest teacher has without a doubt been Mawlana Jalaluddin Al-Rumi.

Yunus Emre and Mawlana Rumi, in addition to being contemporaries, were similar in many ways. While they were both very learned in the theological and mystical scene of their time, I believe that they

both looked at the universe with an eye wholly unique to them. They can not be strictly categorized as part of either Ahmad Al-Ghazali's tradition of mystical love or the philosophizations of Ibn 'Arabi. Instead, it seems to me that their worldview and method of expression is uniquely Qur'anic. Over the course of this commentary, I will frequently mention lines from the beginning of the Masnavi, taken from Jawid Mojaddedi's translation. I hope for this to be a source of inspiration and learning as well as showing the similarities in experience between the two individuals.

Before we get into the text, as a means of getting familiar with both persons, I would like to recount their first and ever interaction. May Allah be pleased with both of their 'Ishq.

The meeting of 'Ashiq Yunus and Mawlana Rumi

A narration well-known in Anatolia

One day, as Mawlana is ending his daily halaqah with his students, one of his dervishes abruptly enters the room. The dervish informs Mawlana that a traveler from very far away insists on seeing him. Hearing this, Mawlana grants his permission.

In enters a young man, beardless and without dervish attire. Immediately, Mawlana Rumi leaps from his seat like an arrow, and goes to hug the man. The students, baffled and confused, would only later learn his name: Yunus Emre, famously called 'Ashiq Yunus.

For the rest of the day, Yunus and Mawlana sit together like old friends, despite meeting each other for the first time. The entire time, they talk mostly with poems, only conversing in rhyme and meter. Mawlana's puzzled students do nothing but watch the intimacy of these two great lovers of Allah.

From the long conversations they had, we know that Mawlana asked Yunus:

-You have dressed very plainly and beautifully. There is not even a coat on your shoulders, do you not get cold?

Yunus Emre responds with a poem:

-What they say of being a Dervish; is not a coat nor a crown

Whoever made his heart a Dervish; not in need of coat or crown

Mawlana makes a gesture of agreement, and then asks once more:

-You say the truth indeed. How are you? What are you busy with? What do you do?

Yunus once again responds in rhyme:

-Impotent is our name,

Our enemy the indignant

No resentment exists from us to any

To us the whole world is one

I did not arrive for quarrel,

My duty is only for love

Hearts are The Friend's dwelling,

I arrived only to build hearts

Henceforth Mawlana continues:

-When we teach Tawhid to our dervishes, we say "One apple, two mirrors." What would you say?

Once more Yunus responds:

-Seems Tawhid is the whole world,

The knower of Tawhid be Adam

Whoever denies this Tawhid,

Seems he be an enemy to himself

Mawlana Rumi wanted Yunus to stay in their lodge for a time:

-If you accept our proposal, we would be very pleased. And we would also show you our entire 6 volume Masnavi.

At this, 'Ashiq Yunus stands up and starts moving to the door, and speaks plainly for the first time:

-You've written it so long! You've exerted a lot of effort. Had it been left to us, we would have only said:

Wrapped in meat and bone,

I appeared as Yunus

And so Yunus leaves the lodge, never to be seen there again.

~~~~~

### The Commentary on The Troubled Watermill

*Why do you groan, O Watermill?; For I've troubles, I groan*

*I fell in love with the Lord; For It do I groan*

We start our journey alongside Yunus, traveling through the hills, villages and sights of Anatolia. Rather than Mawlana's command of "Listen!" that the Masnavi starts with, Yunus most often opts for a more experiential style, inquiring and learning whatever destiny decrees will appear to you.

In one such incident, Yunus happens upon a huge watermill, its purpose to transport water for the inhabitants' consumption. Yunus, when he sees the watermill, is put off by the non-stop, agonizing squeaking and groaning of the huge wheel. And so he asks the seemingly sad creature: *Why do you groan, O Watermill?*

The watermill aptly responds, declaring that his troubles are the source of the groaning. This declaration of troubled nature and the need to cry out, we will see, is repeated throughout the entire poem. It is quite fitting as well, as the watermill here is speaking as the lover, representing both every single being and Yunus himself, the inquirer. 'Ashiq Yunus would not be able to stay silent when he is

troubled in such a way, just as the gigantic wooden watermill or the reed-flute can not, as told by Mawlana in:

*My Song's expressed each human's agony.*

Then, the watermill goes on to point to its love for the Lord as his reason for groaning. The original Turkish has a subtle ambiguity that adds many more layers to the meaning. The personal pronouns in Turkish are gender neutral, and so the *Onun(It)* used here could refer to both 'falling in love with the Lord', or purely 'for the Lord'. Both are true.

The watermill declares that because he loves, he groans, and as far as the former will continue, the latter will as well. The watermill is in actuality a poet, wailing and moaning about the calamity that love has caused him. It does not let him rest, have peace or tranquility. The watermill groans, and he does it 'for the Lord', as that is what his duty is. The watermill, in his groaning day-and-night, is fully aware that he is responding to Allah's command: "O believers! Always remember Allah often, and glorify Him morning and evening."(33:41-42).

*They found me on a mountain; My arms and wings they plucked  
Saw me fit for a watermill; For I've troubles, I groan*

The watermill continues to express his woes, and here we get a clearer picture as to why he is troubled. It seems peculiar that a lover of Allah in constant remembrance of Him should not be fully impacted by "Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort"(13:28).

Yet, the watermill is still troubled, and his reasoning is *They found me on a mountain; My arms and wings they plucked*. The watermill was not always a watermill. Long ago, he was a majestic tree upon the mountain, his arms and wings stretching up towards the sky. He was grand and strong, as much a peg stabilizing the earth as the mountain itself.

Yet the wood-cutters came. They saw him fit for a watermill and plucked the tree, cut him down and dissected him. Now the tree is no longer a tree, his home no longer the mountain. He is instead a groaning watermill, groaning because he is a watermill.

This story is not unique to the watermill, it is the story of all mankind and creation. We were once One with our Lord, and then we were rent asunder. We used to exist purely and without multiplicity in Him. Without disease or defect, evil or hate, we were like Adam enjoying the fruits of paradise in bliss.

And then, The Lord decided “I desire to be known”, and so he created. We heard the command of “Be!” and buckled under its strength, wounded into existence. That creation, the separation from our Lord, is the cutting down of the tree from its roots in the mountain.

Then, while we were still astonished and impaired from the flash of creation, the divine speech came once more, this time inquiring: “Am I not your Lord?”(7:172). In being exposed to His absolute Beauty and Majesty, we fell onto our knees, hearts hopelessly in love release an impossibility. So we cried out, and continue to do so in our groans, “Yes indeed, we bear witness!”(7:172). It was then that our arms and wings were plucked, no longer free to our devices, but a slave to love forevermore.

And after that most sacred covenant, we were sent down to earth. As Yunus said in his last words to Mawlana, we were wrapped in meat and bone, and took on our names. How strange it is, that souls existing in pre-eternity with Him are now here, temporal and blotched. How strange it is that the blessed and pure Adam walked upon the earth and built houses with mud, how strange that a grand tree on a mountain was seen fit to be a groaning watermill.

*From the mountain they cut my wood; My disparate order they ruined*

*But an unwearied poet I am; For I've troubles, I groan*

I think that for whoever is familiar with the opening lines of the Masnavi, the relationship between it and this poem is clearly evident. The watermill is for Yunus what the reed-flute was for Mawlana

Rumi. The reed-flute cries out in agony, the haunting notes it plays giving an account of what it is, where it comes from, and who it wants to unite with:

*Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me,  
My song's expressed each human's agony,  
A breast which separation's split in two,  
Is what I seek, to share this pain with you  
When kept from their true origin, all yearn,  
For union on the day they can return.*

Just as the reed-flute complains of separation from his source, so does the watermill. Is it not inane, that a grand and majestic tree of the mountains has found itself a creaky, spinning watermill? The tree once was whole with his beloved, his roots burrowed deep into the ground, inseparable from the soil.

But both him and the reed-flute were split in two, not by meticulously dissecting the roots of the tree or reed-bed, or by burning it so the whole dies as one, but rather with an axe that swiftly cuts through the middle. Without ease nor prolongation, the axe of "Be!" came from pre-eternity, and cut us off from our source. And as Mawlana explains, all things yearn for union with their true source.

What the watermill refers to in *My disparate order they ruined* are the wondrous blisses of union. The beginning of every path, when the traveler is without maturity or realization, is always remembered to be the sweetest, even if one recognizes its deficiencies. Men think of their childhood and wish for such nostalgic innocence and ease, students think of their first ever years in school and wish for such comfort, and Adam thinks of the fruits of paradise, and wishes to find them once more.

However, even though the watermill complains and groans of his troubles, even though the reed-flute sings of its separation, and they both wish to return to their previous states, their *disparate order*, the true gnostic is one who recognizes the necessity of such events.

The creation of all was according to a design, and so the fall of Adam from paradise was as well. The entire universe is but a theater for the Divine Names, and it would not befit the playmaker to not hire actors. The proper actors, in turn, must not abandon the play, where they are paid for their service, as well as act out divine scenes far above their station.

So the Watermill declares himself to be: *But an unwearied poet I am*. That is all he is, his groans and moans acting the part of poetry. He does not tire or stop his poetry, because firstly even though he has found himself to be a watermill whilst before he was a mature tree, his duty of remembrance and worship is not abrogated by his current state.

And secondly, the true lover is one that never stops crying for his Beloved. The fire sparked from separation is one that burns hotter and hotter as separation continues on, and how can a lover on fire ever stop complaining about burning? Mawlana Rumi himself expresses this beautifully in:

*While ordinary men on drops can thrive*

*A fish needs oceans daily to survive*

The poetry of the watermill is his worship, caused by the trouble of separation that has befallen him. The groans and squeaks you hear are in fact everything that the watermill says; he has no other words. For the true lover, nothing falls from his tongue except his troubles. 'Ishq enraptures his entire being, leaving no room for wits, comfort, or folly. When you blow into the reed-flute, all you hear are its cries. When you listen to a watermill, all you hear are its groans. And so if you look for the true lovers of Allah, all you must hear are His Glorifications.

*I am The Troubled Watermill; My water flows, roaring and rumbling*

*Thus has God commanded; For I've troubles, I groan*



Halfway through the poem, the watermill has finished his answer to Yunus' question. Even though he has explained the source of his troubles, he continues with a declaration of the present, instead of a recounting of the past: he is The Troubled Watermill, and his water flows, roaring and rumbling.

The line *My water flows, roaring and rumbling* contains many layers. Firstly, it expresses the exhaustion and flabbergasted state of the watermill: all he does is move water from one place to another. He has just recounted his past order and beauty as a tree, and now he points to the present in wonder. How has life turned into such monotone, repetitive, nonsensical actions? Day in, day out, the watermill takes water from the stream below, and it deposits it above. Without any end in sight, It continues to lift the water from the river and bequeath it above. Again and again, every minute he repeats his job, for hundreds of years.

And yet, just as the watermill is unwearied in his recitation of poetry, resolute against his separation, he must be unwearied in the minute day-to-day he finds himself in. The watermill has, by resigning himself and saying *Thus has Allah commanded*, reached one of the highest ranks on the Path. Reliance and resignation upon the Divine Command, to recognize the circumstances we are in and their absolute tedium and low nature, whilst simultaneously understanding that Allah is absolutely Wise and Knowledgeable in all he does — that is the full realization of “You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help.”(1:5).

As for the second layer of meaning, the water that flows from the watermill can be seen as the tears it sheds. For the true 'Ashiq, the fire of love does not stop at his tongue. Every limb, every cell and atom cry out and groan of his trouble. The eyes, being one of the most crucial parts of the body, display this by becoming unending springs of water. There are countless narrations of Rasulallah ﷺ shedding tears, be it during worship or outside of it. The eyes are the windows through which the soul sees the world, and the tears are the overflowing love that the vessel of the soul can not contain. The soul in love is like a flooded house, to such a degree that when you open the windows, everything inside rushes out.

What I rendered into the English as *roaring and rumbling* is one of the hardest sections to translate. The original Turkish uses the phrase *yalap yalap*, which can refer to the roaring and

splashing sound made as water falls. In this sense, it intensifies the crying of the watermill. Not only is he shedding tears, but those tears are so heavy that they splash and rumble as they hit the ground, showing the extent to which the watermill is in love.

However, there is also an alternate reading, perhaps more metaphorical. *Yalap yalap* can also refer to the glistening of a surface as light bounces off it. In this sense, the tears flowing from the watermill become a great and shining source of light. Whoever looks at them would see their beautiful shimmer and sparkle.

This touches on another aspect of the lover of the Divine: Beauty. When the ‘Ashiq is fully realized, he takes on the Beauty of the Divine, and whoever looks at him can not see anything but the reflections and gleams of light as it bounces upon his mirror.

This beauty is not one that you can measure. It is not found in the ratios of symmetry and geometry, but rather one that comes from the world of the unseen, witnessed by the heart. The most perfect example of how this may be is Yusuf (AS) and Rasulullah ﷺ. Even though the former was given half of all beauty, and women cut their fingers without realizing upon seeing him, Rasulullah ﷺ was in fact even more beautiful, his soul shining with the reflections of Divine Beauty to an even greater degree. Such that ‘Aisha (RA) proclaimed: “Had those women seen Rasulullah ﷺ, they would have cut their hearts instead.”[Al-Shamail Al-Muhammadiyya]

Keeping in mind this connotation of *yalap yalap*, if the flowing water is instead taken to refer to the particular acts of monotony and effort that the watermill undertakes, then this line becomes even more meaningful. Instead of only referring to the sparkling beauty of the tears, instead it refers to the beauty that radiates from every single act the lover carries out.

Certainly, whatever is touched by the beautiful is also beautiful. Whatever is associated with beauty also takes upon it beauty. Just as Majnun kissed the walls and stones that witnessed Layla’s beauty, the most pure lovers and worshippers of Allah scatter beauty wherever they go, in whatever they do, and however they do it.

*I am but a mountain's tree; Neither am I bitter, nor sweet*

*I am but a pleader to the Lord; For I've troubles, I groan*

These next lines are a most concise explanation of the greatest ranks that the 'Ashiq can reach. Among the wondrous different experiences that the lover is beholden to, one that is particularly sought after is Fana'. This state is marked by the annihilation of whatever is from the lover in the beloved. The literature and discussions around Fana' is vast and we can not hope to deal with it to full extent.

However, what Yunus says here is, sufficient enough to grasp the basics of Fana', which in many ways is the highest aspiration of the lover: to be united with his source. The first thought that underpins Fana' has actually been conveyed throughout the whole poem. It is the trouble of the Watermill, his separation from the mountain.

The second step onto reaching Fana' is in the extension of this realization to its fullest degree. The 'Ashiq that has fully been enveloped and filled with love holds nothing inside his soul except his trouble. He only sees, feels and thinks of how he is separated from the mountain, and that he is from it. The true lover removes from himself everything except being a lover, and his love removes from him everything except the desire of unity. The watermill, at this stage, affirms nothing of himself except that he is *a mountain's tree*.

The next phase of consideration is one that flows naturally from the last. If the lover only sees, thinks, feels, and senses the beloved, then what is left over of the lover? When every one of our senses is blinded by the light shining on it from the beloved, then one can sense nothing but the beloved. Furthermore, one can make no affirmation of any sensation or experience except of the beloved.

A perfect example to better elucidate this is of Majnun and all that he went through in the search for Layla. He was ridiculed by his people, yet felt no chagrin; walked day and night through the desert, yet felt no discomfort; lived in the forest, naked and without food or drink, yet felt not a sliver of cold, illness, hunger or thirst.

There was nothing in the existence of Majnun except the existence of Layla. As a fully enraptured lover, he had no identity except in being a lover. This state is what the watermill expresses as he declares: *Neither am I bitter, or sweet.*

At last, what we end up at is the annihilation of the lover within the beloved. Everything that the 'Ashiq is or was, remembered or imagined, saw or heard, is annihilated and lost. He becomes the most perfect example of "Every being on earth is bound to perish, and only your Lord Himself, full of Majesty and Honor, will remain"(55:25-26). The bitterness and sweetness both are replaced by the beloved, and the lover has found what he lost so long ago: unity with his origin.

However, the station of Fana' is not the end of the story of love. There exists another step, much harder to reach and unfathomably harder to maintain than that of annihilation. It is called Baqa', or subsistence, within the beloved. After the height of rapture that the lover experiences in annihilation, those who are truly spiritually mature descend back onto the earth from the heavens, and once more take their place within it.

As opposed to the state of separation– Farq that existed before annihilation, when in the state of Baqa', the lover experiences his beloved through all that separates them. He sees with his eyes, and yet still witnesses his Lord; he listens to the voices of creation, yet still hears the Speech of Allah. In the beginning, the lover groaned of his troubles, constantly in pain over his separation from the beloved. Then, in experiencing annihilation, his troubles as well as his own self disappeared, in ecstatic joy and delight of being unified with the beloved.

The final and most lofty station is the one in which the lover combines both his separation and union. He knows of his separation and is forever troubled by it, all whilst experiencing his Lord at every moment and being delighted by their union. This is why the watermill affirms that he is *a pleader to the Lord*, even after admitting to his non-existence in the previous phrase.

When the lessons that the Troubled Watermill has been imparting on Yunus are taken into consideration, Baqa' is quite evidently shown to be the most perfect rank that the lover can achieve. The servant can not truly fulfill his duty to Allah without first being separate from him. The lover fully

annihilated can not willingly moan and sing poetry of his troubles or act as the Lord's vicegerent. This is this state that Rasulullah ﷺ and his companions walked the earth with, never once faltering in acknowledging all of Allah's creation, and simultaneously witnessing Him in everything.

*Yunus, whoever comes here will find no joy; Will not reach his desire*

*Nobody stays in this Transient; For I've troubles, I groan*

Over the course of the watermill's answer to Yunus' inquiry, one thing has become evident. The answer of the watermill, in the form of this poem, is much more elaborate than needed. In fact, much more than giving a simple answer, the watermill has taught Yunus about the origin of creation and the tale of love; about the troubles of separation and the states of annihilation. The listeners to the watermill, Yunus and us, have been given an essential lesson on the tenets of Tasawwuf and 'Ishq. Much like Mawlana Rumi does in the masnavi, the tale was a front for the guidance to higher truths.

Finally, the watermill decides that it has said enough, and refers to us directly, imparting his most valuable piece of advice, learnt from centuries of troubled moaning: *whoever comes here will find no joy; Will not reach his desire.*

Whatever we achieve in life, wherever we go or attempt to achieve, it is, at the end of the day, left meaningless. This world that we have found ourselves in was never meant to fit us, or quench our thirst. Our Lord has fashioned us for much more lofty spaces. Why do we strive to own this perishing world when even its Creator does not see it worth as much as a mosquito wing [Sunan ibn Majah]?

Whatever we own perishes, whoever we cling to dies, and whatever satisfaction we reach disappears. Thus the watermill warns us, having lived for so long and seen so much, that we will find no joy if we search for it here. This is expressed concisely and accurately in the Masnavi with:

*'How can my mind stay calm this lonely night*

*When I can't find here my beloved's light?'*

Not only is seeking joy in this world the height of absurdity, any of our desires from creation is also destined to disappoint us as well. The truest desire of all creatures is their Lord, affirmed on the day of their creation, and confirmed by Him in “but the true believers love Allah even more.”(2:165). Mawlana Rumi once again effectively conveys the wonders of leaving aside all false desires and only loving Him:

*Through love the earthly form soars heavenward,*

*The mountain dances nimbly like a bird:*

*Love made Mount Sinai drunken visibly,*

*So Moses fell and swooned immediately!*

The watermill that Yunus meets is troubled because his true desire is his Lord and he exists upon this finite world. Yet paradoxically, it is also very clear that he relishes his troubles, composing poetry of his groans and singing it delightfully. How horrible would it be, if all we could look for was this decrypt universe, instead of the Owner of Majesty and Honor.

The opening chapter and most sublime summary of the Qu’ran, after teaching of the Source of Mercy in “the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful”(1:3), immediately moves on to teaching of the eternal abode: ”Master of the Day of Judgment”(1:4). The servant who fully realizes the weight of the transiency of this universe, will then directly seek the eternal. Just like Adam, we were all created for paradise, and so we must seek its eternity instead of the obliteration of this world.

And so the Troubled Watermill ends his advice, and lesson, with *Nobody stays in this Transient*. Content that he has imparted enough onto Yunus, he turns back to face his Creator and once more starts groaning.

May Allah enable us to be as troubled in love for Him as the watermill. May He grant us experience and unity of Him just as he did upon the Pride of Creation, on whom be countless blessings, as well as on his family and companions.

الباقى هو الباقى

Serdar Kılıç

## **The Troubled Watermill**

*By Yunus Emre*

Why do you groan, O Watermill; For I've troubles, I groan  
I fell in love with the Lord; For It do I groan

They found me on a mountain; My arms and wings they plucked  
Saw me fit for a watermill; For I've troubles, I groan

From the mountain they cut my wood; My disparate order they ruined  
But an unwearied poet I am; For I've troubles, I groan

I am The Troubled Watermill; My water flows, roaring and rumbling  
Thus has God commanded; For I've troubles, I groan

I am but a mountain's tree; Neither am I bitter, nor sweet  
I am but a pleader to the Lord; For I've troubles, I groan

Yunus, whoever comes here will find no joy; Will not reach his desire  
No one stays in this Transient; For I've troubles, I groan

*Turkish:*

Dolap niçin inilersin; Derdim vardır inilerim,  
Ben Mevla'ya aşık oldum; Onun için inilerim,

Beni bir dağda buldular; Kolum kanadım yoldular,  
Dolaba layık gördüler; Derdim vardır inilerim,

Dağdan kestiler hezenim; Bozuldu türlü düzenim,  
Ben usanmaz bir ozanım; Derdim vardır inilerim,

Benim adım dertli dolap; Suyum akar yalap yalap,  
Böyle emreylemiş Çalap; Derdim vardır inilerim,

Ben bir dağın ağacıyım; Ne tatlıyım ne acıyım,  
Ben Mevla'ya duacıyım; Derdim vardır inilerim,

Yunus bunda gelen gülmez; Kişi muradına ermez,  
Bu fanide kimse kalmaz; Derdim vardır inilerim