In praise and invocation

Ruba’i

If anyone sees the way our downfall passes all bounds, the way that Islam, once fallen, does not rise again, He will never believe that the tide flows after every ebb, once he sees the way our sea has gone out.

Musaddas*

Prologue

1 Someone went to Hippocrates and asked him, ‘In your opinion, which diseases are fatal?’ He said, ‘There is no ailment in the world for which God has not created the medicine,’ ‘Except for that disease which people think trifling, and about which whatever the physician says is nonsense.

2 ‘If you try to explain the cause or the symptom, they find a hundred defects in the diagnosis. They set their face against medication and dieting, and heedlessly they little by little aggravate the disease. ‘On no account will they fall in with the physicians’ suggestions, until the point is reached when they despair of life.’

3 Precisely this is the condition in the world of that community, whose ship has entered the whirlpool and is surrounded by it. The shore is far away, and a storm is raging. At every moment there is the apprehension that it is just about to sink. But the people in the boat do not even turn over, as they lie asleep and unconscious.

4 The rain-cloud of adversity is spreading over their heads. Calamity is showing itself. Inauspiciousness is hovering behind and in front. From left and right is coming the cry. ‘Who were you yesterday, and what have you become today! Just now you were awake, and now you have gone to sleep!’

* Hall’s revisions to asterisked stanzas are listed in the appendix on pp. 208-16 below.

1 Hippocrates died in Rome, the former capital of Syria, about 100 years before Alexander. His medical books were the first to be translated into Arabic.

2 The medical term ‘cause’ (dhab) means that which starts the illness, while ‘symptom’ (‘ulamut) is that from which it is recognized.
The geographical term "peninsula" (fāsil) means an area of dry land surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

In Arabic, the word "fanā" (fāsil) is often used to translate "peninsula" (fāsil). Hence the

Arabian Peninsula is often translated as "fanā" (fāsil). It is a peninsula surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

6. Their condition is similar to that of wild beasts, for they are content to be
in whatever state they find themselves. They are neither fearful of ill, nor eager for
honor. They are neither given to flattery nor to pride. They have no trade, no
profession, and no knowledge of the world.

7. Their religion which made them deserters, which made savages and brutes
which made them shepherds of their souls, and which made them conquerors,
which made them kings of the earth, and which made them slaves of the
world. Their religion which made them ignorant of the world, and which made
them blind to the light of the mind.

8. What did Arabia, whose fame is all this amount to? It was a peninsula.

9. Its climate was not so favorable to the spirit that the qualities might
be spontaneously cultivated. Nor were there obtained there the requisites necessary for
the development of the heart. There was no grass. Life was dependent
solely upon water.

10. The land was sandy and the air dry. There were but traces of trees
and vegetation. TheArabians were hunters and shepherds. They were
dependent on the desert.

The age of the Arabians

The condition of the Arabians is still the same. Their religion has not changed. They have been reduced to dust, but their arrogance is still the same. Their condition is similar to that of wild beasts, for they are content to be in whatever state they find themselves. They are neither fearful of ill, nor eager for honor. They are neither given to flattery nor to pride. They have no trade, no profession, and no knowledge of the world. Their religion which made them deserters, which made savages and brutes which made them conquerors, which made them kings of the earth, and which made them slaves of the world. Their religion which made them ignorant of the world, and which made them blind to the light of the mind.

The age of the Arabians

1. The condition of the Arabians is still the same. Their religion has not changed. They have been reduced to dust, but their arrogance is still the same. Their condition is similar to that of wild beasts, for they are content to be in whatever state they find themselves. They are neither fearful of ill, nor eager for honor. They are neither given to flattery nor to pride. They have no trade, no profession, and no knowledge of the world. Their religion which made them deserters, which made savages and brutes which made them conquerors, which made them kings of the earth, and which made them slaves of the world. Their religion which made them ignorant of the world, and which made them blind to the light of the mind.

2. The geographical term "peninsula" (fāsil) means an area of dry land surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

In Arabic, the word "fanā" (fāsil) is often used to translate "peninsula" (fāsil). Hence the Arabian Peninsula is often translated as "fanā" (fāsil). It is a peninsula surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

3. Their condition is similar to that of wild beasts, for they are content to be in whatever state they find themselves. They are neither fearful of ill, nor eager for honor. They are neither given to flattery nor to pride. They have no trade, no profession, and no knowledge of the world. Their religion which made them deserters, which made savages and brutes which made them conquerors, which made them kings of the earth, and which made them slaves of the world. Their religion which made them ignorant of the world, and which made them blind to the light of the mind.

4. The geographical term "peninsula" (fāsil) means an area of dry land surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

In Arabic, the word "fanā" (fāsil) is often used to translate "peninsula" (fāsil). Hence the Arabian Peninsula is often translated as "fanā" (fāsil). It is a peninsula surrounded on three sides by water and on one side by dry land.

5. Their condition is similar to that of wild beasts, for they are content to be in whatever state they find themselves. They are neither fearful of ill, nor eager for honor. They are neither given to flattery nor to pride. They have no trade, no profession, and no knowledge of the world. Their religion which made them deserters, which made savages and brutes which made them conquerors, which made them kings of the earth, and which made them slaves of the world. Their religion which made them ignorant of the world, and which made them blind to the light of the mind.
11 The light of Egypt did not shine there, nor was there any knowledge of the learning and art of Greece. Men's minds were simply in their natural state. God's land was utterly unploughed. Everyone's camp was on mountain and in desert, everyone's lodging lay beneath the sky.

12 In one place fire was worshipped there without restraint, in another star-worship was prevalent. Many were passionately devoted to the Trinity in their hearts, while everywhere the business of idols was carried on on all sides. Some were prey to the wonder-working of the monk, others were captivated by the shaman's enchantments.

13 That first house of God in the world, of whose foundation Abraham was the architect, and which the Divine Will had marked out in pre-eternity as the house from which the spring of True Guidance would well forth, that house had become a pilgrimage-centre for idol-worshippers, where there was no seeker after the name of God.

14 Each tribe had a separate idol: one had Hubal, another Safa, this one was devoted to Uzza, that to Na'ilä. In this fashion there was a fresh god in each house. The brilliant sun was hidden in the cloud of darkness. Darkness lay over the peaks of Faran.

15 All their manners were savage. Each one was unsurpassed in robbing and murder. Their time was spent in dissensions. There was no deterrent of law. They were as adept at killing and plundering as the wild beasts fearlessly roaming in the jungle.

16 Those who were stubbornly determined on something did not give way. Once they fell to quarrelling, there was no resolving their disputes. When two people fell out with each other, hundreds of tribes became angry. If a single spark flew up there, the whole country burst into flame because of it.

11 It is acknowledged that Egypt was more advanced than anywhere else in the world except for India and Persia, and so even Greece was illuminated by the splendour of Egypt.

12 The sect of the Sabaeans used to worship the stars, also to revere the sun. The Christians believed in the Trinity. The Christian ascetics who used to live in mountains and forests, renouncing worldly pleasures, were called 'monks' (waḥb). Those who claimed to have knowledge of the unseen and who used to dictate people through their predictions of the future were called 'shamans' (kāhin). All these religious groups were present together in the Arabian peninsula.

13 By 'that house' is meant the House of the Ka'ba, constructed 993 years before the foundation of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem by Sulaiman, and 2000 years before the birth of Jesus.
17 In the poems of the Jahiliyya, this war is called the War of Bara‘. It was caused by someone’s camel wandering into a field. The woman who owned the field beat the camel, whose owner stabbed the woman in the chest. The war arising from this incident lasted continuously from 494 to 534. It was originally between the Bani Bakr and the Bani Taghlib, but gradually all the Arab tribes took part. From beginning to end, 70,000 men were killed in it.

18 Sometimes a dispute would arise over the grazing of cattle, sometimes over making a horse gallop home first, sometimes over coming and going to the edge of a stream, sometimes over drinking and watering. Quarrelling used to go on amongst them for no good reason, for no good reason the sword used to be wielded amongst them.

19 When a daughter was born to anyone, the mother was made pitless by her fear of others gloating. When she saw her husband’s scowling face, she would go somewhere and bury her child alive. She would empty her lap with such loathing, as if she had given birth had borne a snake.

20 Gambling was their favourite pastime, day and night. Wine, one might think, had first been used on them as a pacifier in infancy. There was pleasure-seeking, there was obliviousness, there was madness: in short, their condition was iniquitous in every respect. Many centuries had gone by for them like this, with their good qualities overshadowed by their vices.

The birth of the Prophet

21 Suddenly, God’s sense of justice was stirred. The cloud of His mercy advanced to Bu Qubais. The earth of Bathe discharged that trust to which they had always borne witness. From the side of Amina was made manifest the prayer of Abraham and the good tidings of Jesus.

The Prophet said, ‘I am the prayer of my grandfather Abraham and the good tidings of my brother Jesus’ (And do’ala abbi Ibrahim wa-‘a‘laihu ‘asbi Isra’il). For Abraham prayed for the Mecceans to be sent a prophet from amongst themselves: cf. Rabbanā wa ‘alayhim rasūlan minhum (Qur’an 2:129) ‘Our Lord! send amongst them an apostle of their own.’ And Jesus gave his people the good tidings, ‘After me will come a prophet whose name shall be the Paraclete, that is Ahmad’; cf. Innt rasūlu Baka‘in minhisabihum bi-rasūla ya‘u mim hu ‘u (Qur’an 61:6) ‘I am the apostle of Allah, giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad’; and cf. the Gospel of John ‘It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter (Paraclete) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you’ (John 16:7).
22 The signs of darkness were effaced from the world, for the moon arose in the house of its exaltation.
But for a long time the moon did not shine, for the moonlight of the Prophethood was clouded.
But in the fortieth year, by the grace of God, the moon arose from the cave of Hira.

**The sending of the Seal of the Prophets**

23 The one who has received the title of 'Mercy' among the prophets, the one who fulfills the desires of the wretched,
The one who comes to the help of others in trouble, the one who takes to his heart the sufferings of his own and other people,
The refuge of the poor, the asylum of the weak, the guardian of orphans and the protector of slaves,

24 The one who pardons the wrongdoer, who makes his abode in the heart of the ill-intentioned,
The one who destroys evils, and reconciles tribes with one other—
He came down from Hira and drew near his people, and brought with him an alchemical formula,

25 One which turned crude copper into gold, and clearly separated the counterfeit and the pure.
Arabia, which had been covered with ignorance for centuries, was transmuted in a single instant.
The boat had no fear left of the wave of disaster. The direction of the wind had quite changed about.

26 An ore had lain useless in the mine, and had no worth or value.
The real qualities which it naturally possessed had all been turned to dust through lying in the earth.
But in the knowledge of destiny and fate it had been irrevocably decided that it would become pure gold in the twinkling of an eye.

**The first preaching of the Apostleship**

27 That glory of Arabia, the adornment of niche and pulpit,
Taking with him all the people of Mecca, went out one day to the desert in accordance with God's command.
He climbed up to Mount Safa and spoke to them all, saying, 'Oh descendants of Ghalib, do you think I am truthful or a liar?'

The descendants of Ghalib include most of the tribes of the Quraish, especially the Hashimites (Bani Hashim) and the Umayyads (Bani Umayya).