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HOJA AHMED YASSAWI AND THE FACULTIES OF LIFE

In addressing the question the impact Hoja Ahmed Yassawi has had on humanity I would like to start in sharing on a very personal level.

How my wife and I ended up translating the first-ever English translation of Diwani Hikmet is a journey relevant to many ignorant of Yassawi's work yet undoubtedly who will become privy to it at some point, as well as those well versed.

Our relationship with Yassawi was initiated when Anuarbek Bokebay, a Turkestan civic leader and lifelong Yassawi devotee, having translated Diwani Hikmet into Kazakh and Russian asked us to make an English translation. Although he passed shortly after his request, his brother Samatbek instigated and supported what lay ahead.

With no idea what did lie ahead we, as accomplished translators, said yes. What followed was an immersion into a life changing 13 months of study, deep meditative process and getting to know and fall in love with a saint.
Hikmet 132:

*This path has many obstacles
Impossible to serve without a living teacher.....
Without a teacher the cup of Truth cannot be supped [1]*

For us the help that migrated and settled around us I truly believe was supplied by Yassawi himself. As much as we had a translated version of the original in both Kazakh and Russian we also were gifted a great scholar and life long student of both Chagatai and Yassawi – Mirahmet Mirhaldarov – his excellent presence through present technology was constantly there to assist our understanding at times of blockage.

Another great help came from Sayin Nazarbekuly's informative and personal commentary we included in the volume. I carried a record of a Chagatai version I was able to take back with me in photographic, page-by-page, form made possible through the kindness of Saidalim Yuldashev, which helped an inspiring

connection. Also the kindness of Shaharbek Usmanov inducting us into so many of the sacred places making up Yassawi's life on our visit to Turkestan helped connect me to the true spirit of the saint.

Our own Sufi roots are in the Naqshbandi order through Maulana Sheik Nazim al-Haqqani. With his blessing we started the venture and at first the translation looked so superficial and made little sense. I wondered if I was up to it. We struggled, realising our six-week window was ludicrous. Over and over we studied. We dived deeper, sense began to formulate, yet as much as clarity formed I felt something missing. After several months one day I sat and called to Yassawi himself to enlighten me on what he wished to impart. Immediately I heard a response. I felt his presence on my shoulder, his voice in my ear.

I moved deeper, he cajoled, agreed, altered, held back and encouraged translation as needed. I had arrived at a place within, a place of surrender, silence and listening – to receive.

When completed this journey of connectivity was shared with others. Around us we found the impact Yassawi had made on us radiated out to new ears and hearts through his verse. It was received, picked up and interest sparked. The depth we experienced is being fed back to us by those drawn deeper. We notice their journeys are drawing individuals to dive deep into the ocean in search of Yassawi. Hikmet 1:

“Scattering pearls and diamonds before the pilgrim...”[2]

Both my wife and I had got to know, connect and have the deepest respect and admiration for a man, whose gifts are now being known, felt and appreciated far, far more widely than he could have imagined.

Yet I believe he **did** imagine this. It was no happenstance my wife and I were called to this work. Thus I wish to share thoughts, insights and something of what we have been gifted during our time working with Yassawi. To look at how this beacon of light, love and peace is reaching the whole world, not just the Muslim world – in the same way as his latter day, self confessed student, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi manages to.

However we interpret this great saint, mystic and poet - Hoja Ahmed Yassawi was in essence a human being. As it turns out an extraordinary human being of huge import not only in his time but down the centuries to us today.

His thinking, intuition, perception, imagination, memory and will developed to such a degree that those studying him, reading his work and immersing into getting to know this giant, consider him to be one of the most influential forces in our development and appreciation of what it is to be human.

The extraordinary truth is that outside circles we all are privileged to move within, the devotional spiritual communities impacted by this great man, Yassawi and his work is a relatively an unknown commodity.

Past centuries can be excused such reach by the fact the printed word and word of mouth were afforded far smaller and more exclusive availability. Unlike today where within a millisecond millions can be reached and word spread in the blink of an eye.

So to ask how has this great man impacted humanity and more specifically our world today, is a question best answered seeing how his work is spread today and the state of our spiritual development in both implementation and desire.

How relevant are his teachings, his works in relation to past and present history, advancement of knowledge, literature, sociological and political scenarios we are immersed in today? – the simple answer is, hugely relevant.

Through the lens of the faculties we all hold common and that Yassawi utilised and exemplified exquisitely, I would like, alongside referencing his Hikmet to advance a personal thesis.

As we already know Yassawi's life was as varied as any human's could be. Some of his experiences included mystic, dervish, businessman, householder and family man, teacher, political figure, outcast and impoverished mendicant. His life and his journey moulded him into a saint.

That he accumulated so many experiences in life skills was not, I am sure, because job opportunities were in short supply.

This was a very conscious act garnering as much actual experience in the widest range of life skills to place him in the best possible position where his teachings resonated the greatest to the many.

Yassawi had a hugely developed critical mind. His thinking and reasoning processes, from a very early age directed him on a very specific course – that of spiritual educator. His university was his own journey of life. His tutors, among the

likes of Arystan Bab, helped guide him. Different life experiences enabled him reflect the knowledge, truth and connection he wished to draw on.

He chose the role of spiritual educator, through leading Zikr, bringing teachings to women and connecting himself to Higher Source, Allah.

Hikmet 45:

*Come Zakir, let us perform Zikr for Allah,
Performing Zikr for Allah, the mind grows, my friends,
When the bird spreads its wings, spirit flies,
Soars heaven-wards to sit upon the throne, my friends. [3]*

Among his other tools were his written and spoken words, his gatherings and circle of students, leading by example and becoming dervish.

Hikmet 51:

*Dervishes are easy going sharing tales on the road,
Travelling light, they journey forever.*

*Their possessions being staff in hand, sash around the waist,
The name of Allah always on the dervish lips. [4]*

We know Yassawi took himself underground age 63:

*“At sixty-three the message came “Go underground, beloved,
I am your beloved soul, so give it.” [5]*

Today science shows us that recitation in darkened space, such as is afforded underground, makes such practice very powerful and effective. We know scientists, inventors and those seeking solutions find dark space the perfect environment for ‘seeing’, that is inner sight, insight, intuitive reception unclouded by the normal busy ‘monkey mind’. We witness Yassawi’s extraordinary grasp and utilisation of intuition.

When praying we instigate a connection to Allah, the Divine. When the Divine speaks to us that is intuition. This clear channel instantaneous, precise and with utter clarity is what we can utilize, comprehend and be shown the way. Hikmet 136:

*All of a sudden arising, I felt intuitively,
The light of God Almighty shone through my eyes,*

*Forty years of rusted heart,
Opened up through the grace of God. [6]*

Yassawi makes it absolutely clear around this connection. It demands discipline at its root where the clarity of intuitive connectivity can operate not soiled by mental interference, ego override and distraction. That is why for many today intuitive faculties have been so sidelined, ignored and become rusty through lack of attention and mass distraction.

His urge to recitation such as *Hu* and repetition of *La ilaha ilallah* to draw focus, dissolve scattered thought patterns and bring the mind to stillness and receptivity on a far higher level is wisdom indeed.

Hikmet 142:

*Start with 'Hu' and end with 'Hu', recite it ecstatically,
I pray the Lord will show His glory.
Repeating outwardly and inwardly 'Hu' step onto the path,
I pray the Lord will show His glory.*

*Repeating 'La ilaha ilallah', be penitent,
Whosoever performs Zikr, befriend him,
Serve Pir Mugan, with all your being,
I pray the Lord will show His glory. [7]*

Let me stress we are not referring to the sort of discipline found in military or socially engineered programming. These are external practices imposed by others. Often meant to harness, through rigid power constructs, control over others. It is spiritual discipline that aims to instil inner peace calm and single point focus in order to receive our divine intuition.

Within the scant amount of his complete works we have in our possession today, it is obvious his intuitive reach features throughout his work. The breadth of insight and vision is one of the most remarkable and endearing qualities of Yassawi's work.

His perceptive awareness and breadth is obvious in his work. Perception for an individual is more often than not operating within a narrow corridor, ruled by opinion and proclivity - a perception ruled by what we see and hear and indeed that is a perception of sorts.

Yassawi's perception held a far wider lateral view of the world and one that

importantly cut through the veils across centuries and as an accomplished seer he saw through and beyond present time and space.

We may feel we see with our eyes yet in truth we see through our minds and hear with our minds. This is the true meaning of seer, the mystic. Merely using our senses certainly gives us a view or ability to hear, however it lacks the breadth for the mystic within us. Yassawi implores us that is what we need to develop to be truly able to connect to Haq, to our truth self, to Allah.

A personal favourite for me illustrating Yassawi's perception is in Hikmet 35. It shows us how his seeing is for both his time as much as for us today in the 21st century.

*The prediction of saints will soon come to pass,
Judgment Day draws closer, my friends,
They say smart people will lose their minds,
As mercy and kindness desert people, my friends.*

*From the old and the young politeness flees,
From tender girls and young women shame departs,
Where has moral sense in faith disappeared, asked Rasul?
Unusually, society lost its shame, my friends.*

*Muslims killing Muslims,
Misrepresenting and violating the meaning of the Lord,
Murid became impolite, neglecting their teacher,
Remarkably, violent times descended, my friends. [8]*

Yassawi's spiritual journey brought him at a very early age to experience the full breadth of imagination. The breadth of a child's imagination is vast, complex and often without context to the rational mind we fall back into as adults. As he began to experience such a close spiritual relationship his imagination triggered his connection to light.

It was that inner light that awoke in him his deep connection as he tells us in Hikmet 2:

*At one-years old the spirits of the dead gifted me,
At two the prophets came visiting,
At three the Chiltan showed interest in me.*

So it was at sixty-three I went underground.

*At four years old, in Truth, Mustafa gave me persimmon,
Showed me the way, that hidden path many had found,
Everywhere I travelled the holy Khidr accompanied me. [9]*

Our imagination is directly related to our creative thinking, creativity is birthed through imagination and the proper energy it exudes. It is no surprise so much early magnificent art in all its glorious colours, can be seen in the places of spiritual celebration, where efforts to express the divine in human expression and form thrives. The very beauty and craft exemplified in the Mausoleum of Yassawi here in Turkestan is example of that as are other such beauties of Persian Turkic mastery in such as the Nasir-al-Mulk Mosque in Iran, the blue Mosque in Istanbul and the beauty that is Samarkand and Bukhara, to name a few.

What these places and so many more are saturated in is sunlight. We know sunlight develops the brain and mind to operate faster. With Persian, Arabic and Turkic intelligence becoming the hub of scientific, cultural and artistic advancement in the ancient world, the spread of that devotion, creativity and spiritual drive was bound to burst forth be shared and discovered.

It was not until these influences broke into the Western consciousness that we see the Renaissance flower, the Dark Ages roll back and the flow towards what we have today as a global creative awakening.

Yassawi urges us to allow our imagination, our creative tendencies to expand. He certainly points out how the darkness pursued when we turn away from the light will bring nothing but suffering, ignorance and great pain.- as we hear in Hikmet 49:

*The careless do not know true blessings,
Looking from the outside see nothing,
The outer eye of ignorance will notice nothing,
When opened the inner eye sees all, my friends.*

*When the inner eye opens all veils dissolve,
As they dissolve the secrets behind the veils are revealed,
Awestruck, the soul's vision marvels in wonder,
The light of faith illumines all, my friends. [10]*

When, as Yassawi says, we allow our ignorance - that is darkness - to shadow our full being then our imagination - our light - is withheld from grasp. The wonders of our true being are unable to be realised in that condition.

What is so true with developing our imagination is, like children who see birds in folded paper and fruit in balls of mud through their imagination, so can we transform our own being from dense material into spiritual lightness in flight to the Lord. Here in Hikmet 75:

*Become a nightingale in the blooming garden,
.....
Taking a giant staff of righteousness,
Covering the body in the garb of happiness,
With feathers of love elating me,
I yearn to fly onto the branches of Ma'rifat. [11]*

In indigenous cultures and through the Kam or shaman, as many know these mystics as, remembering the generational tree back to ten, twenty or even more generations is no gift, merely a natural, handed down practice of memory.

In these cultures how else was the wisdom of the ancients able to be transmitted? Today we may feel our technological aids superimpose the need for such memory, yet we are foolish to believe that and, if truth be told, that thinking is our very death warrant of extinction.

How often do we hear today the reply – “I can't remember”?

This is the result of having a flaccid muscle called memory. For indeed memory is a muscle. Unless muscles get exercised they wilt and eventually become useless. Yassawi knew that and thus encouraged us to remember our recitations, to do Zikr, to strengthen our prayer practice, keeping our self education bright and invigorated not simply through our youth but through each and every day of our life.

The more we remember, cultivate our memory, the sooner we shall become aware of where we come from. Spiritual practice strengthens this process, as in Hikmet 89:

*Let us, friends, all together remember,
His name will draw all into the light, verily,
Beginners, start by loving His Name,*

Gifts grow day by day, verily. [12]

A good memory harbours intelligence. That intelligence is only as good as we then use it and when used well and guided by our intuitive faculty along with critical thinking we develop our overall muscle of being to the point of recognising we are not the human being our ego may have thought us to be. We are spirit in a human form experiencing all we process towards this realisation.

Yassawi recognises the path of the teacher is only attained when all that has been learned is let go as in Hikmet 132:

*Until life and the intellect are released, the path cannot appear,
A hand will not be offered until worship is sincere,
Until seekers drop their pride, malice melts not,
Impossible to leave until you yourself serve as teacher. [13]*

Then there comes the time when even memory, wisdom, words and language leave. The point when silence takes over from prayer and observances. Hikmet 82:

*At that moment, was heard "This day no one leaves,"
Now is the time when your fasting and prayer counts,
Wisdom and memory are dissolved,
As also is language and speech. [14]*

Does this all mean that everything we have developed has been for nothing? Does letting go leaves not a trace of our existence?

To answer that we need to study precisely what it is that Yassawi asks of the Murid. As he constantly implores us to let go, leave ego behind, to allow this chain of Shaitan relinquish its bind.

How we develop this release is by the operation of the will. It is **will power** that is the glue holding all our other faculties in place. As we develop each and every faculty to become stronger, this releases the ratchet holding our will and its utility becomes more and more operative. The stronger the will forged in the right action and thinking of our other faculties, the greater the impression we make on those around us.

As that impression is all that we leave as our legacy, it becomes us to develop a force and power encouraging, inspiring and helping those we leave behind to develop in turn.

Yassawi's legacy is huge. His impact even after the small span of many centuries resonates and reverberates like the Bell of Heaven. It becomes an Azan calling us all to seek that highest goal within each of us. To release everything that arrests the attainment of our goal.

He himself in his Munajat lays out in love his wish for all who read his words:

*May the words of destitute Ahmed live on,
And not lie glowing like embers on the ground.*

*Nor lose their usefulness, nor be dishonoured,
May those servants who read them never fall ill.*

*Those reading these words I will assist,
And on the Day of Judgment plead on their behalf.*

*If you are My Lord, gift me a place in heaven,
For those servants reading these words, I will intercede.*

*Whatever you may ask, may the Lord give it you,
May the fire of love be placed within your heart.*

*May Parvardigar show His full Splendour,
Let Him guide the seeker to the path of Bir wa Bar.*

*May the Lord gift joy on Mahshar,
And on that day perfume all with Your purest essence. [15]*

Both his impact and his influence not only are necessary today like no other, they are the very solutions guiding us out of the darkness that seems to surround this world at these end of times.

(v 17 and 46)

*May my Hikmet be an universal Sultan,
May they turn the desert instantly into verdant pastures*

*May my Hikmet serve as an enlightened teacher,
For whatever servant you are, stay faithful to the Lord. [16]*

I have no doubt that all of us here and all those who will become exposed to this mystic saint will agree he certainly was and is an enlightened teacher, a paradigm of Love and an example we can follow with gratitude and humility.

END

References:

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- [15] Munajat (v 3-9) *Divine Wisdom Diwani Hikmet of Hoja Ahmed Yassawi English Translation by Jonathan and Virve Trapman ©2013 –Living Zen Books*
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Abstract/ Summary:

Hoja Ahmed Yassawi and the Faculties of Life

The paper takes the relationship and impact the six major human faculties have influencing Hoja Ahmed Yassawi's work Diwani Hikmet, both from the perspective of his teaching and the student's learning. Through the experiences gathered by translating into English his work and developing a unique relationship with the saint, Yassawi teaches us all how these faculties are part and parcel of an essential tool kit in personal and spiritual growth for comprehension of his words and teaching.

With reference to his individual Hikmet.

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