THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

The Story of Hai bin Yaqzan

As told by
ABU BAKR MUHAMMAD BIN TUFAIL

A New Translation by
RIAD KOCACHE, Ph.D.

THE OCTAGON PRESS
LONDON
From then on, none of the animals came near him with the exception of the doe that had reared him. The two remained inseparable till the doe began to weaken and grow old. When this happened he took on the task of caring for her, leading her to lush pastures and picking sweet fruit for her. With time, however her frailty increased and finally death caught up with her.

All her movements and actions ceased and the boy became frightened when he saw her in this state and was overcome with sorrow. He called to her again and again, using the sound to which she usually responded but he could discern neither movement nor response. He examined her eyes and ears but could see no defect in them. He then went on to examine all her organs but still failed to find any visible defect in any of them. His hope was that he could find some cause of her condition, and, by removing it, restore her to her usual state.

He was led to this line of thought by something he had already noticed; that if he shut his eyes or held something in front of them he could not see till he opened them or removed the object; if he blocked his ears with his hands he could hear nothing till he removed the blockage; if he held his nose he could no longer smell till he released it. He had been led therefore to believe that all his perceptions could be nullified by obstacles that would stop perceptions till the obstruction was removed.

Having examined all the external organs of the deer without discovering any obvious defect and observing that the inactivity extended to all the deer's organs without exception, it occurred to him that the malady affecting the deer might be sited in an internal organ, one whose function could not be taken over by any other; perhaps one on whose function all the others depended. Thus if some malady affected such an organ the damage would be comprehensive and total. He hoped that if he could find such an organ and remove what had obstructed it, it would be restored and all other functions would then act normally.

He had noticed in the past when examining dead animals that the only parts which had cavities were the skull, the chest and the abdomen. All the rest was solid. He felt that the organ he sought was probably located in one of these three places and he had an intuition that it was probably the central one. He felt certain now that all the other organs depended on this one and that it would occupy a central position. He had felt the presence of just such an organ in himself, inside his breast. At times he had speculated that even when he obstructed the function of hands, legs, ears, nose and eyes he could somehow still manage. He thought this might even apply to his head but when he turned to the organ in his breast he felt that this was something he could not do without—even for an instant. It was for this reason that he always tried, instinctively, to protect his breast from the horns of animals when he fought with them.

In this way he reached the conclusion that the organ in the deer which was obstructed was the organ in her breast. He decided to search for it and try to remove the obstruction.

Nevertheless he was afraid that if he took this action he might cause more damage than the original malady, whatever it was. He also reflected that he had never seen any animal, once it reached this state, returning to normal. This thought made him despair for the doe, if he left it as it was. There was therefore some little hope that if he found the affected organ and removed its obstruction she might return to normal. So he
resolved to slit open the deer's breast and make a search.

He had long ago made for himself makeshift knives from stone fragments and splinters. With these he slit open the deer's flesh between the ribs until he reached a strong membrane beneath. He felt certain now that the organ he sought would have just such a protection. He tried to cut into it but found this difficult owing to the inadequacy of his tools, so he replaced the cane and sharpened his stone knife and then found that he could open up the membrane. He had reached the deer's lungs and, to begin with, thought this was the object of his search. He examined them very carefully, first one then the other, before it occurred to him that what he was looking for was one central organ. He then searched further along the middle of the deer's chest and so found the heart which was indeed protected by a strong membrane and secured with ligaments.

One lung covered half the heart—on the side of his incision—and he said to himself: 'If this organ has on its other side, what it has on this side, then it is truly in the centre and must be the organ I'm looking for. This seems most likely in view of its position, its beautiful form, its compactness and the fact that it is protected by a membrane, the like of which I haven't seen in any other organ.'

So he searched the other side of the chest and found a duplicate of the first lung with its membrane under the ribs. He now felt quite certain that the organ in the centre was the one he sought. He attempted to slit open its covering membrane and finally succeeded after great effort.

He uncovered the heart and found that it was sealed on all sides. He examined it for any visible defect and could find none. He took hold of it and when he did so, realized that it must be hollow inside. He thought: 'Maybe my ultimate goal is inside this organ and I haven't yet reached it.' So he slit it open and found two cavities in the heart one to the right and one to the left. The right hand cavity being full of clotted blood, the left hand cavity being totally empty.

He said to himself: 'What I'm looking for must definitely be in one or other of these cavities.' He had already observed that blood clots and solidifies when it flows out of the body, so he now reasoned: 'It is definite that this blood did not clot until the body reached its present state and this is just ordinary blood. Blood like this is found in all organs, and isn't specific to any one organ. What I'm looking for is something specific to this place, something I am unable to do without, even for an instant. Animals have often injured me and I have lost blood in considerable quantities. Yet this did not do me any harm and it certainly didn't cause me to lose any of my functions. This section therefore doesn't contain what I'm seeking. This left hand cavity is completely empty and there must be a reason for this. Every other organ carries out some specific function, so how could this one, having obviously an honourable state, be without any function? I have to conclude therefore, that what I am seeking was once in this cavity and has now vacated it and departed. It was when this happened that the body suffered such great damage that it could no longer sense or move.'

Thus he concluded that whatever had once occupied this cavity had now departed. Also, that it had departed while the organ was still intact, before he had cut it open. Now that the organ had been cut and torn by him, he felt certain that whatever it was that had once occupied it, would never return. Without this 'thing' the whole body seemed worthless and he now believed that this vital 'thing' inhabits a body for a certain time and then departs.

All his thoughts were now focused on this 'thing'. What was it? What links it to the body? Where has it now gone? Through which outlet of the body had it taken its departure? If it left unwillingly, what forced it to leave? And if it didn't leave unwillingly, what made it dislike the body so much that it decided to leave?

He now realized that the mother who had suckled him and comforted him was this 'thing'. It was from it that all her actions had emanated, not her body. With this realization, all interest in the dead body of the doe vanished and he discarded it from his thoughts, understanding that the body in its totality was an instrument, a tool, much like the sticks he employed when he had to fight the animals. All his interest now was focused on this 'thing' which owned a body and was its prime mover. This, and this only, he desired to know about.

Presently, the body of the deer began to rot and decay and give off a foul smell. This increased his repulsion for the body and he wished that he did not have to look at it. By chance he saw two ravens fight till one killed the other. The survivor then scratched the ground till he had made a hole and into this he pushed his dead adversary. The boy then thought: 'Though
victorious raven was wrong to kill the other raven in the first place, he did a good action by burying the carcass. I should follow this example and do the same for my mother.' So he scraped a hole, pushed his mother's body into it and covered it up with earth.

He continued to think about this 'thing' which controlled the body but came to no conclusion as to what it could be. He noticed however that the form and shape of all the deer he saw was similar to his mother's. This led him to believe that each of them was controlled and activated by a 'thing' which was similar to that which had animated his mother. This feeling of kinship made him friendlier and more kindly to all the deer.

This remained his state for some time. He examined all the varieties of animal he could find all over the island, hoping always to find a being that resembled himself. He noticed that for each type of animal or plant there were always many representatives. But he seemed to be the only one of his kind. Having seen that the island was entirely surrounded by water he concluded that there was no other land in existence.

One day a fire started in a thicket of cane and the sight terrified him. He stood looking at it in wonder for a while, then started to approach it, little by little. He noticed the penetrating light that came from it and he observed also how overwhelming was the action of the fire, consuming and transforming everything it touched. His amazement, coupled with the strength and courage which Allah Most High had given him, impelled him to stretch out his hand and try to take hold of it. The moment his hand made contact, the fire burned it and he learned that it was not something that could be grasped. He noticed a length of stick which was burning at one end only and he ventured to take hold of it at the unburnt end. He discovered that this was possible and he returned to the cave which he had for some time used as his home, with a burning brand.

The fire amazed him and delighted him and he kept it alight by giving it attention day and night, stoking it with dry grass and sticks. What pleased him most was that the fire at night-time provided a substitute for the light and heat of the day-time sun. His delight in fire was unbounded and he regarded fire as his best possession. He noted that fire always moved up, as though its nature was to ascend and this made him think that fire must be in some way related to the circles of light he saw in the sky.

It occurred to him to test the strength of fire on a number of different things by dropping them into it and he noticed that it overwhelmed some things more rapidly than others. It so happened that one day among the things he dropped into his fire were some marine creatures which had been washed up by the sea. As these started to cook, the aroma made him want to taste them and when he did, he found he liked the taste very much. In this way he learned to eat meat. This made him apply his cunning and ingenuity to hunting and fishing and presently he excelled in both.

His love for fire grew because, through it, he was able to extend his diet and utilize things for food which had not been possible before. The range of possibilities inherent in fire made him more than ever fascinated by it and he suddenly occurred to him that the 'thing' which had departed from the deer's heart—his mother's heart—must be of the same or a similar nature to the essence of fire. This idea was reinforced by the observation that animals are warm as long as they are alive and become cold when they die; also by the observation that there was heat in his own chest in the area where he had cut open the deer.

He then had an idea. Supposing he cut open the heart in a live animal and examined the section which, in his mother's heart, he had found empty. Surely in the case of a live animal he would find the cavity filled with this thing and so establish whether it had the essence of fire and whether it gave out light or heat.

So he caught an animal and tied it up and slit open its flesh on the same side as he had cut into the doe, till he reached its heart. He now opened up the left hand section and found it was filled with a steam-like gas similar to white fog. When he pushed his finger into the chamber he found it nearly hot enough to burn. At this point the animal died. From all this, he concluded that this hot vapour was the driving force that moved an animal; that there is some of it in every animal; and that when this is separated from the animal, it dies immediately.

He then felt impelled to investigate all the other organs of the animal, observing their arrangement, position, quantity and size. He discovered how they are all interconnected and how they all draw upon this hot steam for the maintenance of their lives. But how, he wondered, does the steam last only for a given time? Where does it come from in the first place? And why does its heat not become less?