

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

LOSSES

FAKHRUDDIN 'IRAQI

We often think of life as a movement forward, gaining ground step by step through effort and organization, using our will power to accomplish goals and secure rewards. We make plans for our future and act to get there. This is our normal agenda as we proceed through life. But there is a counterintuitive course that the soul also takes on the spiritual path. It moves in the opposite direction.

The Sufi poet Iraqi calls this love's path, and describes it as a series of ever more deeply disturbing losses that the soul must ultimately experience and endure. In the end there will be a gain, but in the meantime all we know are the losses we have experienced.

The first loss starts with the guiding instrument that plans all of life's trajectories—the mind or the head. To lose one's mind is a terrible thing for us. Most certainly Iraqi is not counseling insanity in any psychological sense, but he is indicating that the instrument of the mind that typically makes all the plans must be de-centered in some fundamental way in favor of something far more accurate and reliable.

Next he speaks about the master-controller behind all the mind's plans and projections. This is the small self of the ego which has its own agenda and wants to call all the shots to own advantage. Having been "at the helm of our ship of state" for so long, it sets out for those longed-for ports of entry into a world of success. In the end, however, the ego's evaluations are seen to be petty—far too small. We are easily caught off guard by its trivial pursuits and unprepared for what life actually presents to us: an illness, a change in economic

status or material fortunes, the many vicissitudes of chance, changes in the weather, and perhaps now climate-change wrecking havoc across the planet.

What we thought was "life" may, in the end, turn out to be ephemeral—magical thinking or a pipe dream projected on to life by our human fantasies. All of this must be dropped, which can be profoundly devastating for us. Iraqi counsels us that these experiences must be borne and integrated as a part of the life we never anticipated.

Few are exempt from life's misfortunes which typically present themselves "outside the box" of our plans and expectations. Iraqi says we must take them in and learn how to bear them. Losses allow us to gain wisdom and strength if borne properly. In the teachings of Yeshua, and other masters of spiritual life, the loss of one's life (or self) is actually a gain which has great spiritual advantage, much to our surprise perhaps.

The poet says those are all part of the unfolding. When we let them go, we move forward to the real purpose of life's path. What replaces the head and the ego as ultimate master is the heart—a superior organ of cognition and perception. Iraqi knows that this does not complete the work of spirit. There is another loss to be experienced—any occlusion on the mirror of the heart that blocks the Light. This must be polished away. Is it again, life's circumstances that provides the substance for this inner polishing? Despite all of the losses some residual may remain that provides opportunity for the finer practices of spiritual awakening.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *No one in this world has been exempted from the experience of loss. How have you personally experienced it?*
2. *What careful plans have you made that have been dashed by circumstances and calamity?*
3. *Iraqi sees these experiences of loss as bearing spiritual fruit. How have you experienced this to be true?*
4. *When have you lost your “head?” What does this experience mean for you?*
5. *How have you experienced ego-loss? Defining the ego is difficult? How do you define it? When it loses something what is its typical reaction?*
6. *Have you lost what you thought was your “life?” How? What has been the eventual outcome?*
7. *How do you understand the metaphor of the mirror of the heart? What is a mirror meant to do? What do you see in that mirror? How does it become occluded?*
8. *Which of the images and illuminations speak most deeply to your experience or your personal feelings about them?*

A Place for Notes and for Journaling your Answers:

*Fakhruddin ‘Iraqi was born in Persia near the city of Hamadan in 2113, during a time of Islamic spiritual revival. At an early age he joined the Qalandari, a band of Sufi wanderers. Later in life he met and became a friend of Jalaluddin Rumi in Turkey, but considered another Sufi, Qunawi, his spiritual master. He wrote poetry and commentary on Islamic spirituality the most well known is the text the **Laman’at**, Divine Flashes.*

This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for contemplative prayer and spiritual vision.

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The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

*T*he first step in love
is losing your head.
After that,
the petty ego.
Then you give up your life
and bear its calamities.
With this behind you, go, go, go...
Polish the residual left
upon the mirror of your heart.

—Fakruddin ‘Iraqi
Divine Flashes, 1982

Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATIONS







