

Halqa Meeting of August 9, 2015

Abdul Hayy Khilwati: Omar Khayyam's quatrains, his *rubaiyyat*, became immensely popular in Europe and the United States thanks to Edward FitzGerald's translation of them into English in the second half of the 19th century. Some of Khayyam's poems seemed irreverent towards God, and many people assumed that he might have been agnostic. Because of Khayyam's frequent reference to wine, others supposed that he drank a great deal of the alcoholic beverage. Actually, his irreverent poems were intended to challenge cases of inappropriate anthropomorphism on the part of worshippers, and his many poems about wine invoked the well-established Sufi symbolism of drunken ecstasy to indicate the selfless love of God. Khayyam was a self-deprecating type of mystic known in the Sufi Way as *malamati*.

Here are a few of Omar Khayyam's quatrains that I have recently translated:

Tell me who has not sinned in this world,
and how could someone live who didn't sin?
I sin and You retaliate against me.
Say, how then am I different from You?

Of spring's arrival and winter's departure
the pages of our existence go fleeting by;
Drink wine, not sadness, for the sage has said,
"Worldly sorrows are poison, wine the antidote."

One cannot wash in the wine-house except with wine;
One cannot restore to grace a name that's been disgraced.
Come serve us the wine, for our saintly covering
is now so torn apart that it cannot be repaired.

In the spiritual world one must remain alert
and be silent as the events of the world unfold.
So long as the eyes, the ears and the tongue abide,
be as though without your eyes, ears, and tongue.

Every heart that's had love's light mixed in it,
whether people of the mosque or of the synagogue:
If their name was scribed in the book of love,
They'll be free from hell and unaware of heaven.