

PaRDeS: On the Symbolism of the Fountain & the Garden

By Nigel Jackson

All stands in two worlds, and the ground
Of Paradise is everywhere.

Katleen Raine

The Rose spoke; it was like the clear chant of the angels...
Because I alone am a native of the Old Garden...
Because in my blossom is hidden the Great Mystery,
Because I waft abroad the sweet odours of Paradise,
Ancient relics of the lost Kingdom.

Arthur Machen

The word *Eden* signifies 'Delight', the blissful beatitude which characterizes the sacred Centre, the 'Primordial' estate of Adam before the Fall, when he dwelt in the heart of God. Since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Edenic state, the spiritual history of man is a chronicle of exile and travail. Throughout the ages humankind has been veritably haunted by the pervasive sense of loss and 'nostalgia for Paradise', and so the Chinese poet Li T'ai-Po (d. 762), upon hearing the floating call of a jade flute at evening in the mountains, asked: '*To whom does it not bring back the love of his old, early garden?*' The traditional arts and crafts have always given expression to this innate longing. William Blake described painting, poetry and music as 'man's three ways of conversing with Paradise', ways of witnessing the profound yearning of the soul for its return to the ancient Garden of its pre-existence.

The sacred arts of the Islamic, Judaic and Christian civilizations provide an immense *richesse* of symbolic traditions and metaphysical lore regarding the Garden of Paradise, for example through the schools

of Christian hermetists, Sufi initiates and Kabbalistic sages in medieval Spain. The classical Moorish and Persian gardens of the *Chahr-Bagh* pattern evoke the archetypal *Paradaeza*, the walled garden of Indo-Iranian tradition, echoing the *Var* or central enclosure of the god Yima of the Mazdeans. In the Zend Avesta, it is written that Yima 'made waters flow in a bed a hâthra long; there he settled birds, by the evergreen banks that bear never-failing food...that *Var* he sealed up with the golden ring, and he made a door, and a window self-shining within.'¹ Situated in the central 'clime' (*keshvar*), at the centre of the world, this terrestrial paradise and garden-enclosure is the locus of the luminous Eran Vej, the 'Earth of Visions', *Terra Lucida* from whence is secreted the radiance of the 'Light of Glory' (*Xvarenah*).

According to such authorities as St. Basil and St. Ambrose, the Garden of Paradise is located upon the summit of a lofty mountain which ascends to the sphere of the Moon—its elevation thus ensuring its preservation from the floods, mutations and dissolutions of the sublunary sphere below, and the Garden is untouched by time, death or decay. This is why according to Abd al-Karim Al-Jili (d. 1424), the prophet Adam is identified as the 'Pole' of the Heaven of the Moon.

The Abrahamic religions know both the Lower Eden or Terrestrial Paradise and the Supernal Eden or Celestial Paradise. The first set of terms corresponds to the Lesser Mysteries, effective realization of the fullness and totality of the divine human state at the Centre, Salvation and Immortality; while the second symbolizes the goal of the Greater Mysteries, supra-formal and supra-individual realization of the Supreme Identity, Deliverance and spiritual Liberation. The Garden of Paradise is the immemorial image of the sacred Centre, the *Paradesha* (Sanskrit *Para* 'Beyond, Remote' + *Desha* 'Land, Place, Locus'—signifying 'The Land Beyond') of Indian sacred geography. As the 'heart of the world' or the Axis Mundi, the mystical sanctum is identical with the *Mishkan* and the *Shekinah*. At the motionless centre-point of the universe it is the still axis of the circle. Eternally existent beyond revolutions of time, change and mortality, the Garden of Paradise is the imperishable 'Abode of Peace', the transcendent locus of origin and return.

The peerless images of Paradise, *Chahr-Bagh* and Gulistan—encountered in Persian miniature-painting, ceramics, carpets, tapestries and

¹ Zend Avesta, Fargard of Yima II v. 34-38

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