

because they found fault with Grace,
now in justice they feel remorse.

Praise to You from all,
for You are entirely good to all.

15. May Your grace bring me too back,
who am held in captivity;
my forefathers were taken away captive
from the Garden of Eden
to this land of thorns
through Satan's ill counsel;
it was he who has beguiled me
into dearly loving
this land of curses,
this place of chastisement.

Blessed is He who has brought us back from captivity
and slain him who took us away captive.

HYMN XV

Paradise can be compared to the wind: although it cannot be seen, it is nonetheless experienced. The Tree of Knowledge—awareness of truth and of spiritual reality—is the gate to Paradise, through which the mind can enter. But the Tree of Knowledge has to be approached in the right spirit and in obedience to God; otherwise, it will lead to destruction and loss, as both Adam and Uzziah discovered. Furthermore, once led astray by eating the fruit of the Tree in disobedience, man goes on to blame the fruit, rather than his greed for the consequences of his grasping. So strong indeed was the serpent's poison that it enabled Satan to turn aside (the verb is *sta* in Syriac, providing a word play) the whole of humanity—when we should be listening instead to another representative of the animal world, the ass whose brief words to Balaam saved its master from destruction.

1. My brethren, consider the wind:
 though its blast is tumultuous,
it lacks any color by which it can be seen,
 for it is hidden in its manifestation;
having no outer array
 or substance at all,
it is both hidden and yet manifest
 when it is blowing.
So too the abode of Paradise
 is both hidden and manifest:
while it can be perceived to exist,
 what it really is cannot be perceived.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who came and invited
 both worlds to His Paradise.

2. The tree that is called
 the Tree of Knowledge
symbolizes the gate
 of Paradise:
it is through the gate of knowledge
 that one is able to enter in;
it is the likeness
 of its glorious Creator,
in whose hidden abode
 through the gate of knowledge
all who are perceptive
 may approach His hiddenness.
3. Consider this knowledge
 which is the gateway to all things:
by it the intellect
 can enter everywhere,
though where it meets error
 in front of it

it comes up against a wall
and is blocked.
Through this gate of knowledge
the intellect enters in,
explores every kind of treasure,
brings out every kind of riches.

4. Even when the army
surrounded Elisha
a voice proved the key
to the eyes of the shepherd.¹
When the disciple's eyes
were held closed,
bread too was the key
whereby their eyes were opened
to recognize the Omniscient:²
saddened eyes beheld
a vision of joy
and were instantly filled with happiness.
5. So likewise that Wood,
which is the Tree of Knowledge,
can, with its fruit, roll back
the cloud of ignorance,
so that eyes can recognize
the beauty
of that Tabernacle
hidden within;
but because Adam and Eve
ate it in sin,
the vision that should have caused joy of heart
resulted in grief of heart.

¹2 Kings 6:17.

²Luke 24:31.

6. Intelligence is
like a treasurer
who carries on his shoulder³
the keys to learning,*
fitting a key
to each locked door,
opening with ease
even the most difficult—
skilled in what is manifest,
well instructed in what is hidden,
training souls
and enriching creation.
7. The precious stones of the ephod
worn by the priest in accord with the
commandment
he called
“luminous” and “perfect,”*
as well as
“knowledge” and “truth.”⁴
Thus the priest was robed in knowledge
whereby he might hear
the voice that came to him
from inside the sanctuary,
for it spoke to him
from between the cherubim.
8. Accompanied by the knowledge
which was hidden in the ephod
the priest entered the sanctuary,
a type for Paradise,
and he tasted of the Tree
through the symbol of the revelation given him.

³cf Isaiah 22:22.

⁴Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8.

But if anyone entered
contrary to the commandment, they died,
as a type of Adam who died
for taking the fruit prematurely.
The priest put on sanctification,
but Adam was stripped of glory.*

9. The intellect cannot explore
the bosom of those trees
without that fruit,
nor can the priest investigate
that treasury of revelations
without the ephod.
Two people did the evil one beguile and captivate
with his blandishments—
promising to make Adam into a god
and Uzziah into a priest,⁵
whereas in reality he stripped the one of his glory
and clothed the other in leprosy.

10. The Exalted One gave to Adam
the luxury of Paradise
and to Uzziah
the luxury of kingship.
To the former he forbade the fruit,
to the latter the censer.
Both however grasped at
something they were not given:
with the censer
Uzziah's name turned putrid,
with the scented fruit
Adam's name became loathsome.

11. It is easy to understand
how mankind

⁵² Chron. 26:16-21.

has come to hate creation:
having become hateful themselves, they hold
creation to be hateful;
by sacrificing flesh they spoil it,
by defiling marriage they have set it aside,
while gold they make hateful
by means of their idols.
Since it was through the fair fruit
that Adam became odious
he has made that fruit an object of hate,
considering it to be harmful.

12. It is obvious that the censer
of the inner sanctuary is good,
but the Tree in Paradise
has come to be considered as poisonous.
If the censer is glorious,
then the fruit is even more so;
through the censer, pure and glorious,
the evil one
made royalty leprous,
and likewise in Paradise
the cunning one slew
the young couple with the excellent fruit.

13. Of the serpent
which spoke for a moment
God provided an illustration
in the speech of the ass⁶
which spoke for a moment
to rebuke the audacious Balaam.
So too the serpent spoke
in order to test

⁶Num. 22:28.

the ears of Adam and Eve:
their ears heard two voices,
and at the voice of the bitter one
they held the Sweet One's to be false.

14. The serpent served as a garment
for the evil one to put on:
on seeing the innocent ones
he became full of guile,
he prepared a cunning trap
for the hearing of the young couple.
In their simplicity
they listened to his words eagerly,
for he made a show of his care,
but hid well his guile.
On another occasion the Iscariot
can instruct you in the devil's types.

15. How strong is his poison,
upsetting the whole world.
Who can hold back the sea
of that bitter one?
Everyone contains drops of it
that can harm you.
Judas was the treasurer⁷
of his poison,
and although Satan's form is hidden,
in Judas he is totally visible;
though Satan's history is a long one,
it is summed up in the Iscariot.

16. Let the ass put the serpent to shame
with its brief words:
it spoke the truth,
while from the serpent issued falsehood;

⁷John 12:6.

it turned aside to turn away greedy Balaam
who had gone awry.⁸
The serpent too turned aside,*
and caused us to go aside to our destruction;
it made crooked our thoughts,
and so God made crooked its path;
the course it travels
indicates how it turned awry our road.

17. All this, and similar things
that I have read in the Scriptures,
have helped depict in my mind
that Garden of Life;
blessed is the person who is worthy to attain
its enjoyment.
May the Merciful One
bring me to its fruits,
may their taste give me life,
or their scent strike me,
or their radiance reach me,
or their dew bathe me!

⁸Num. 22:23.