

Mkrtich Naghash

I. Poem Composed on the Exile

—Soul, don't say exile or my heart will bleed,
The exile in a foreign land has a hard time of it indeed.
Like a bird that veers off from its flock finds nowhere to rest,
So he is disoriented until he reaches his destination.

—Exile, don't take it to heart, these difficult days will pass.
Every exile has made it home. Don't be concerned it won't work out for you.
They call God merciful, he takes pity on every exile.
He'll help you, too, to attain your heart's desire.

—Soul, you'd do better to say my heart is blacker than coal.
From the worry of exile the color has drained from my face.
When I consider my brothers and my loved ones,
My soul leaps to my mouth, but has no means to break out.

—Exile, don't agonize, no one gains from agonizing.
Many a young man agonizes, he falls victim rather than gains.
Agonizing brings pain to many, from the pain the person dies,
Whatever his heart desires, it is denied it all.

—Alas for the exile, I say, who sojourns in a foreign land.
His eyes well up with tears, they stream down his face.
When he sits in company, for sure his heart bleeds,
He casts his eye over everyone, but has no one to call his own.

—We are all exiles, brothers, no one has any permanent home.
We are bound to leave uniformly, for that life is home for us.
While you're here, see to it that there your soul's not in torment.
Have the saints for brother and make the angels your loved ones.

II. On Exiles

To God, lover of men, be glory for ever,
Who created the diversity of creatures.
East, north, south, west,
Man is king over all, he has no equal.

But the exile's life is pitiful, worthy of lament,
Bitter and gall, full of aggravation in a pokey cell.
While he wanders about in foreign parts
Strangers don't recognize the exile, they don't acknowledge him.

There he has neither brother, loved one, nor kin
He finds none of his own to take him in.
Though he be the son of a man of means, and has no equal.
They insolently label him 'of no fixed abode'.

The exile's bread is tart, he doesn't recognize it,
Bitter and gall, mixed with tears is the water he drinks.
If they give him almonds and sugar all day to eat,
When he groans, he spits up blood from his heart.

The exile's heart is in mourning disconsolate,
When he groans, his heart churns in his bowels.
When he thinks of his loved ones all together,
From his eyes the blood pours down his face.

The exile's wits are gone, his mind's deranged,
And if he's mentally more acute than Solomon,
And when he speaks scatters several priceless pearls,
Still they reprove him, "Be silent, idiot, fool."

The exile's day is miserable, his night is woe,
Sleep has left his eyes and won't return,
His mind's oppressed and gets no rest all night.
"Tomorrow what awaits me, slave that I am, at dawn?"

Woe betide the exile when he fell hungry.
Eyes lowered, he begged along the streets.
Many shut their doors in his face, he sat and wept,
"The slave asked a drop of water, but no one would give him."

The exile's poverty is extremely abject.
Harassed by everyone, he lacked the means to hold his own.
The exile was a stranger, an alien in a foreign land,
Though the slave asked for money, no one gave him any.

The exile crept fearfully into the house,
Into his master's house, as if terrified of a dog.
When they see him, they jeer at him and shove him out,
And he turns back with sorrowful tears.

Many would set a table laden with a thousand bounties,
The exile would come and enter diffidently.

Immediately they'd hurl a thousand insults at him,
Then grumbling maybe give him a piece of bread.

The exile was pitiable when he suddenly took ill,
Fallen on a foreign street, he lay rolling in the dust,
Though he had many loved ones, none was there,
So he lay fallen on his face, and wept bitterly.

The exile wept and groaned "What is to become of me?
Alas, do my loved ones know what state I'm in?
An exile, foreigner, and alien, weeping bitterly.
I have none of my loved ones or relations here."

Fallen, the exile rolled about pitiable,
For the hour of his death had come and the dread judgment.
The exile had no pillow to lay his head, no bed,
The flagstone was his prop, the sand his bed.

The exile took his legs and stretched in his death pangs.
He held his arm extended, he released his spirit,
Poor wretch, he looked pitiable to right and left,
But there was none to give the exile a drop of water.

In his death-throes the exile called for a priest,
But there was no one to respond to his plea,
No loved one, no relative stood by his side,
While he wept bitterly and groaned from his wound.

The exile's lord is God, he heard him,
He aroused pity in the priest's heart,
And coming, he communed him for God's sake,
He gladdened the exile's heart with communion.

The exile's day of death had arrived,
Sighing bitterly, he gave up the ghost,
And lay fallen in the street with no one to care,
No one came to see the exile, none to assist.

See how bitter is the exile's life and death,
There was none to place his hands crosswise over his heart.,
Joking, they picked him up and carried him to the edge of the plot,
No one came there for the exile's funeral.

Naghash said, the exile's life is grievous.
I know the exile's plight and wail with woe.
Though I saw everyone to be kind and generous,
When I recall being in exile, I have the shakes worse than the willow.

Naghash said the exile's heart is tender.
The sweet appears sour to him, the rose, a thorn.
I beg you, speak sweetly with the exile,
Give him alms and atone for the thorn of sin.

Most blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God,
I implore you, be a helper to the exile,

See that every exile successfully attains his desire.
And we all venerate you, Mother of God.

III. Lament on those who pass away in foreign parts

I had some hope, a fancy you might come,
My heart was expecting you and hung on for a glimpse of your precious sight.
Then they brought a letter that brought sudden death;
“Take, read, brother, and come to terms with it— I’m not coming.

This last letter and the news that “I’m not coming,”
I’ve neither hand, nor fingers to write a reply.
If you have, do something, come aid my soul
Death has come and is dragging me away to a far-off land.

Hey, soul, hold on a while, someone’s on his way,
I implore you, angel, for God’s sake,
Bear with me for the space of one night.
I have a brother, who may come, he’s very far from here.

Hey, soul, why have you taken offense, or over what?
Hasn’t the sound of my weeping reached your ear?
My eyes well up and the tears flow down like a river,
There is much complaint in my heart I have to tell you.

Hill and dale, sea and dry land, stop your weeping,
Cried man and beast and every tongue.
I’m in dire need, for God’s sake, come to my aid.
I’m breathing my last for want of seeing my brother.

The first man was Adam and from him till Noah,
From Noah up to Abraham’s generation,
No one was as wretched as I, nor will be,
I’m desperate from want of seeing my brother.

My mind has spilled from my head, I’ve got no tongue,
The color’s been drawn from my face, my eye from the light.
My whole body’s gone limp, like a dead man,
I’m dying and have no chance of recovery.

Snap out of it, soul, and rouse yourself from wine,
If you’re drunk; or if asleep, wake up.
When a man gets to the gates of death,
No brother helps brother, nor father child.

Most blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
We venerate you and your Son and the Holy Spirit.
Bring every exile safely back home,
And we all venerate you, temple of light.