An Insider's Critique of

THE KAZAKH

PEOPLE AND NATION

Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli

Garifolla Yesim

(Translated and edited, with a Preface, by R. Charles Weller, assisted by Tatyana Galkina)

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To the spirit of Abai

Portrait of Abai Kunanbai-uhli, 1845-1904.
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About the Book

Making an entirely new contribution to the study of Eastern philosophy and history, *An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation* offers "a window on the Kazakh world" through one of the most prominent and treasured national philosopher-reformers to have appeared in their history: Abai Kunanbai-uhli, the great Kazakh poet-philosopher-prophet who lived and wrote in Kazakhstan from the latter part of the 19th to early 20th century as a pioneering and central figure in the Kazakh-Turkic Muslim-Jadid renaissance movement. His writings have received international recognition, with translations into Russian, French, German, Chinese, English and other world languages. They are herein complimented with and conveyed through the commentary of a top national post-Soviet Kazakh scholar. The entire range of Kazakh religious, cultural, social and political lifeways and institutions is covered against the backdrop of late Tsarist Russian imperial rule in Central Asia.
Garifolla Yesim is a post-doctoral graduate and professor of philosophy who currently serves, since 2001, as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science at Kazakh National (i.e. State) University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He is a seasoned scholar of top national honors who contributes regularly to national television and radio programs as well as newspaper, magazine and journal publications. He has published numerous books and articles in both Kazakh and Russian, including *The Elite Scholar Abai* (1994), *The Essence of Mind: Reflections on Politics and Culture* (1995-2007, 10 vols), *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (2000 and 2004), *Human-ity* (2001), *Kazakh Philosophy* (2005) and *Kazakh Renaissance* (2006). He is a Muslim Kazakh scholar of the post-Soviet era who advocates peace and tolerance as well as freedom of thought and expression in the course of open, academic inquiry and interreligious-intercultural world dialogue.


About the English Version

The core of this book represents an English translation of the third and final section "Сөздер тұрақты сөздер" ("Words About Words") in Гарифолла Есім, 1994, Хәкім Абай (Garifolla Yesim, 1994, The Elite Scholar Abai, Алматы: Атамұра). The author himself also produced a Russian version of the same work under the same title. The Russian version is not a mere 'rote translation' of the Kazakh, it is a 'free rendering' of its essential message which the author himself slightly condensed and modified for a Russian-speaking audience.

Making use of both the original Kazakh and the modified Russian versions, our approach to translating and producing the present English version has been 'eclectic'. First, using her highly developed English skills together with her own personal commitment to precision and excellence, Ms. Tatyana Galkina of Kazakhstan translated sections two and three of the Russian version into English. She worked quite tediously, checking the Russian against the Kazakh at points and consulting with myself as well as other Kazakh and Russian scholars, to ascertain as precisely as possible the intended meaning and sense of the Russian.

I then took her translation and did three things: One: I chose to edit and publish sections two and three as two separate volumes. The current volume, again, represents section three of the original work(s), comprising commentary on Abai's 'Words', with the hope expressed that section two, comprising commentary on Abai's poems and songs, will 'see the light of day' in the next year or two. As the Kazakhs say, Az-azdan ('little by little')! Two: I edited Ms. Galkina's English translation to achieve native-level accuracy and style, clarifying
whatever was necessary by way of the original Kazakh version, Ms. Galkina and the author. Thanks to her excellent English abilities, she left me with little to do, i.e. she made this part of my task rather easy. Three: using her English translation as a base, I (re)translated entire select 'Words' and significant portions of others from the original Kazakh, those I deemed to be of special importance, especially those treating matters of religion, culture and politics more explicitly.

One thing worth making special note of in connection with this latter point: I have taken care to translate all quotes of Abai's 'Words' directly from the original Kazakh. Together with the several quotes directly translated in my own previous work on *Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood* (see bibliography), this marks the second small step in a long-term effort being undertaken by Asia Research Associates to produce a fresh, new translation of Abai's 'Words' in English working directly from the original Kazakh in consultation with Dr. Yesim and other Kazakh scholars in the religion and culture departments at Kazakh National University. 'Kudai kalasa' ('Lord willing'), that work will 'see the light of day', perhaps section by section, over the next several years.

A good deal of Kazakh literature has fortunately yet unfortunately come to us via the medium of Russian translation, including the current English version(s) of Abai's *Book of Words*, Mukhtar Auezov's classic novel *Abai zholi* (*The Way of Abai*, translated into English as *Abai: a novel*), Ilias Yesenberlin's classic novel *Koshpendiler*, i.e. *The Nomads* (which became the basis for the 2005 Hollywood movie by the same title) and others. All of these compositions and a number of others which have been translated into English via Russian were originally composed in Kazakh, not Russian, and then translated by a separate, independent party into the latter
language. This has definitely 'colored' the English-speaking world's perception and understanding of the Kazakh world, delivering it to us via a Russian filter which most assuredly has eclipsed and even at times distorted that world in significant ways. Needless to say, all such translations, while retaining a great deal of value, need to be 'taken with a grain of salt'.

The present case should be clearly distinguished from such occasions, however, since the Russian version employed herein is again not a translation, but a version of the author's original work which has been produced afresh by the author himself and intentionally condensed as well as adapted by him for a Russian-speaking audience. Our translation, therefore, whether based upon the Russian or Kazakh version, comprises a direct translation representing the author's own original message. In the end, the reader holds in their hands an eclectic, but highly reliable 'dynamic translation' of the original message of the Kazakh author which comes with the full knowledge, confidence and approval of the author himself.

A few final points here, then, which should be born in mind by the reader regarding the present English version. First, I have not always followed the same paragraph formatting as occurs in the originals. Second, I have intentionally chosen to break English grammatical rules by using plural referents for singular subjects in certain cases, as was just encountered in the previous paragraph when I said "the reader holds in their hands..." My reason for this is that I am entirely sympathetic to the issue of inclusive language, i.e. addressing both male and female readers, but am entirely unsympathetic to the cumbersome manner in which English works have become burdened with multiple variations of 'he/she', 'he or she', '(s)he', etc, in their attempts to 'tackle' this problem. Third, I have translated the term 'Allah' as 'God',
since, although it is used frequently in Kazakh, it is more properly an Arabic term and this is its normal, natural meaning in English. Fourth and finally, I have taken liberty to supply in the main text, without the use of distracting brackets, etc, important cultural and/or historical information which is implicit in the original work, things the average Kazakh or even Russian reader would know and understand, but which may be in need of clarification for the English reader. I have, likewise, taken liberty to produce a translation which remains as faithful to the original as possible, yet which departs from 'wooden literalism' when necessary in order to fully and faithfully communicate the intended sense of the original in a vocabulary and style natural to English (cf. Dankoff 1983, Beisenbai 2004). Beyond that, nothing comes to mind of an essential nature and I herein commend this work to the reader with the "Preface" that follows.
Abai and His Times

Abai. The name alone, if mentioned in the Kazakh-Turkic world, immediately calls to mind the great Kazakh poet-philosopher-prophet who lived and wrote in northeastern Kazakhstan, in the regions of Semei, in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century – 1845-1904 to be exact. This means he lived and wrote near the end of a long and rather important chapter in Kazakh history, namely the latter side of nearly 200 years of Russian Tsarist imperial rule dominated by the Romanov dynasty and 'complimented' by Russian Orthodox Christian missions.

Thus Abai's times would have commenced late in the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55), with Abai coming into the world right on the tail end of the Kazakh national liberation movement (1837-47) taking place on the Kazakh Steppe during the first few years of his life. It was led by the great Kazakh national hero Kenesari Kasimuhli who "set before himself the clear intention of restoring the territorial solidarity and independence... of the Kazakh nation." The prime of Abai's youth and adulthood would have witnessed 'The Great Reforms' carried out under Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881). These 'reforms' included the abolishment of
serfdom in the Russian homeland in 1861, an act that sent waves of Russian peasants into the Kazakh homeland to lay claim to thousands of square miles of so-called 'unused' Kazakh lands. It was the same year that the U.S. Civil War started, creating a cotton-shortage in Russia that caused them to turn their attentions toward the 'fertile lands' in Central Asia for production of their cotton needs. It was a tradition the Soviets would later continue, resulting in the great Aral Sea tragedy, which still ranks among Kazakhstan's most severe ecological catastrophes to this day. 1861 was also the year – and not by coincidence – that building of the TransCaspian Railway across the Central Asian heartland was begun.

By no means distant from all these significant historical events and still lingering in their background was the fact that Russia had been halted in its advance (south)westward against the Turkish Ottoman Empire through defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856). This appears to have been a clear underlying factor in the Russian conquest of Central Asia. 'The Great Game', i.e. the 19th century struggle between the British and Russian Empires for control of the borderlands lying between northern India as well as northwest China and Central Asia should also be noted.

Regardless, this 'chapter' of Russian Tsarist Orthodox imperial rule in Kazakh history was of course, not long after Abai's time, 'destined' (with considerable uncertainty between 1917 and the early 1920s) to be replaced by 70 more years of Russian Communist Atheist imperial rule, with both forms of imperial rule leaving their respective marks indelibly upon the lands and peoples of Turkic Muslim Central Asia, not to mention lands and peoples far beyond in every direction.

As I. Yerofeeva notes in an article on "Kazakhstan Under the Power of the Russian Empire," the beginnings of this
important chapter in Kazakh history can traced back to the early 18th century, for:

The Russian Tsar's plans of penetration to the Middle East and from there to the fabulous wealth of India were influenced by new knowledge acquired about Central Asia which had been received in Russia. ...With the aim of establishing direct means of communication via waterways between Russia, India and other eastern countries, reconnaissance expeditions were sent by Peter the First. The first one headed by Prince A. Bekovich-Cherkassky was dispatched to the Caspian Sea and Khiva (1715-1717) and the second and third ones under the supervision of I.D. Bukhgoltz (1717-1718) and I.M. Likharev (1719-1720) were sent up the Irtysh River. During the two last expeditions, the foundations for the building of the line of Russian military fortifications on the north-eastern border lines of the Kazakh nomadic camps were laid. ...In 1722, during his stay in
Astrakhan on the way from Persia to St. Petersburg, Peter the First, as it was admitted by the competent eyewitness A.I. Tevkeley, "was informed through many people" about the Kazakh lands and defined their significance for the geopolitical and trade-economic interests of Russia in Central Asia as the sought after "Key and Gate." ...The Period of the formation of the Eastern Doctrine of Peter the First chronologically coincided with the epoch of an arising crisis in the internal-political situation of Kazakh nomadic society and the deterioration of the status of Kazakhstan in the world arena.9

In further elucidating this historical context, a brief sketch of the entire Russian advance can be drawn here at length from my 2006 work, Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood (pp 108-9), wherein it is noted that:

...apart from the limited military outposts along the far northern borders, no significant Russian presence was sent into Kazakhstan, i.e. 'the land of the Kazakhs', until the early or middle 1800s. On this score, it should be observed that G. Yesim, in the foreword to this book [i.e. the one now being quoted], says: "The Kazakh people who had been associated with the Kazakh State established in 1466 were cut off from their nationhood through the official resolution of the Russian Empire in 1822." ...In similar manner, though placing the emphasis on slightly later events and actions instead of on the "official resolution" itself, the Kazakh historian A. Abdakimuhli (1997:113) says that is was especially between 1867-68 in Zhetisu, Sirdaria, Orinbor and Western Siberia that "legal rights were given like smoke into the hands of the Russians who were carrying out – with respect to government, military, economy, and religion – the entire matter of oppressive lordship over the traditional [Kazakh] system of oversight." In fact, these actions immediately followed strong intensification
of Russian military action and occupation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the 1860s which reached to Tashkent by 1865.

All this accords with Shildebai's (2002, ch 1) division of Russian Tsarist occupation into three major periods or phases: 1731-1822, 1822-1867 and 1867-1891. The first period (1731-1822) is considered somewhat insignificant with respect to the actual carrying out of colonial-imperial policy in Central Asia. Thus, it is in the second period or phase that the brunt of colonial force came in, actually 'transforming' Kazakhstan from an 'independent nation' into a 'colonial nation'.

This historical context, i.e. late Russian Tsarist Orthodox imperial rule in Kazakhstan, surfaces at various points throughout 'the Words' of Abai and, therefore, throughout the commentary offered upon his writings by the nationally-acclaimed scholar of 'Abai Studies' in modern post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Garifolla 'Gary' Yesim. Indeed, Dr. Yesim speaks in section one of the original Kazakh work of "the lamentful 19th century for the Kazakh people" when...

...in this century, the Kazakh khanates went off into oblivion via a decree of the Russian Empire. The people were stripped of their right to rule themselves. The people turned into prisoners of oppressive political policies. In place of the traditional Kazakh khans and judges, Russian administrative officials ruled the nation. Breaking apart the people, who were integrally united, they split them up into several large regions (lit. 'Governorates-General') and made them directly subject to the tsar (1994:30, Hakim Abai).

Against this historic background, he reflects upon Abai's Third Word, noting how "the Kazakh people, who had lost their former freedom, had begun to sink into decline," referring to "the loss of independence" when "the Kazakh land
had become a Russian colony." Then again, in commenting upon Word Five, he draws out Abai's nearness of heart with the early 20th century Kazakh socio-political reformers of the Alush movement and their battle-cry 'Awake, Kazakh' when he interprets Abai to say: "The people must awake and realize that different times were upon them. The time of Abai was the time of domination by Russian officials. Kazakhs stopped being one nation united by their own leaders."

We find in this latter assessment a hint at the fact that Dr. Yesim places clear, though limited, blame for certain ills of Kazakh society which Abai addresses squarely upon the shoulders of the Russian imperial rulers and their presence in Kazakhstan. For example, in reflecting upon Word Six, "The Wisdom of Unity," he expounds on the above thought by asking: "What kind of unity can there be among a people who have fallen into subjection to another power and who, as a nation, no longer rule themselves?" In commenting upon Word Eleven, Dr. Yesim goes on to suggest that:

The colonial policy of Tsarism brought stealing, pillage and plunder to the Kazakh Steppe. This does not mean that these things were unknown before. As long as humans have existed, theft and plunder have accompanied them throughout the entire span of their lives. But in Abai's time these vices became an incurable disease of the society and, as a result, the ordinary people suffered most of all. ...Before, the thieves and robbers were afraid of the respected figures of the clan. Since Russian officials became the authority, however, the rich were also infected with this disease.

The "disease" here in view is that of taking "bribes from both the thief who was trying to avoid punishment and the plaintiff who hoped to win a case."
In balance, however, both Abai and his post-Tsarist-Soviet interpreter have plenty of praise for the Russians and the positive contributions which they brought with them to the Kazakh steppe. In reflecting upon Word Two, 'Knowing Yourself Through the Eyes of Others', Dr. Yesim, in willing agreement, notes how "Abai readily confesses" that the Kazakh people of his time could "not even hold a candle to [Russian] servants." This thought is further elucidated in Word Twenty-Five, where "[l]earning the Russian language and culture are keys to a world heritage." Indeed, in that Word, Abai goes so far as to urge that the Kazakhs:

...should study Russian; wisdom and cattle [raising] and scholarship – the Russians have them all. In order to avoid their harmful ways, yet] partake of their profits, one must know their language, studies and scholarship. For that they [themselves] knew the world's languages, this is how it was [achieved]. If you study their language, your inner-eyes will be enlightened. The person who knows the language and skills of someone [else] will with that enter into equal standing with them; he will not have to plead [for help] and be debased [with] exceeding shame. [Such] knowledge, it is even beneficial for religion. ...Russian learning and culture are the keys to the world; for the one who knows this, the world will be brought down to him with much less expense."11

Indeed, far more than criticism or blame of the Russian colonial powers and their impact within and upon the Kazakh world, Abai and his late 20th century Kazakh interpreter each respectively offer us a genuine Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation. In this, they both take up a Turkic-Jadid view and approach which found room not only to praise and emulate Russian-European ways, but to criticize its own
Central Asian religious-cultural and socio-political traditions in favor of the 'new method' of modern 'enlightened' European education and reform. "Abai thus proclaims in his Thirty-Eighth 'Word':

The mullahs of this (present) time are enemies to the name of (Muslim) scholarship. ...The learning of scholarship these days is in the tradition of the old medreses (or Muslim religious schools), they have no profit for the present time. ...Choosing to remain uninformed of this world's scientific knowledge is great [and] harmful (darkened) ignorance, it is reproved in the Qur'an."

Such a view and approach was informed by a man who himself had been trained up during his childhood, between the ages of 8-13, in the very Muslim medreses he found himself now, in his much later years, critiquing. This included, together with two of study in the Yeskitam Medrese which his father had built, three years of study in the Ahmet Riza Medrese in the city of Semei. Later in life, from 1875-1878, i.e. from ages 30-34, he had also served as an administrative official for the Kongirkwoksheh region in Semei, helping govern the political affairs of his community and nation. He was considered an exceptional leader upright in his ways and dealings. He was, indeed, one intimately acquainted from the inside with the very Kazakh lifeways and institutions he would later critique in his 'Words'.

Of course, Dr. Yesim, an insider himself from the Soviet and now post-Soviet generation, notes how "[t]he places in Abai's writings where he criticizes Kazakh lifeways and scorns the dogmatic mullahs as well as the cases in which he censures the inconsistencies in Kazakh society — these were well-liked by the exacting and restrictive ideology of the Soviets."
Tsarists, no doubt, would have enjoyed them as well, as would a good many Westerners eager to extol their own Western 'civilized' virtues and achievements above what they often (want to) perceive and portray as the 'uncivilized, backward and divisive' ways of the Kazakhs. Such views and approaches are found, for example, among those seeking to move the Kazakhs from 'tribalism' to 'modern democratic nationhood' or perhaps in some other more 'modern, civilized' direction.\(^\text{14}\)

A word of caution is, therefore, in order for 'outsiders' who find themselves 'attracted' to these places of critique and feel they might find in them material they can 'exploit' in the cause of accomplishing whatever religious-cultural and/or social-political aims they may have in view. While Edward W. Said's critique of Western *Orientalism* is not without its problems,\(^\text{15}\) I would be in essential agreement with him (2003:xix) when he notes:

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the [Central Asian] and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living room. ...there is a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion.

But while the Tsarists, Soviets and others were and perhaps still are drawn to these places of critique in Abai's writings, "...the idea that Altinsarin or Abai (and even Shokan Ualihanov, 1830-65) were agents of the Russians, mere
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propaganda tools whose 'national hero' status was created and used by especially the Soviets to promote their agenda of 'the superior Soviet person'...does not hold. Abai and company were Jadidists, not Russian cultural-political agents, even though the Russians used them to accomplish their own aims. Abai critiqued his people in true Turkic-Jadid heart and style, admiring and emulating Russian cultural-political achievement but applying it to and safeguarding their own national Kazakh-Turkic heart and heritage" (Weller 2006:200). As Rollan Seisenbaev, another well-known scholar of 'Abai Studies' in modern Kazakhstan, puts it:

All his powers were dedicated to the enlightenment of his people... Like no one else, Abai achieved the renewal of ideas in Kazakh society. This could only be achieved by awakening the old national feelings and resurrecting the genuine folk traditions. ...but the people only appreciated the enchanting melodies of his songs, and did not comprehend the deep essence of his thoughts, [they] did not follow his wise advice.16

If I may offer just one, final example of the historical context which lies behind these Reflections here, we find, in Word Sixteen, on the topic of "Submission to God," reference to the fact that "[t]he mosques responsible for cleanness and depth of faith are located mostly in the cities and Tatars manage there." Of course, as was well known to Abai and his late 19th century audience, the reason that "Tatars manage[d]" in the Kazakh city mosques in Abai's day was due to the 'happy fact' that Catherine II (1762-1796) had "sent Tatar missionaries to the Kazakh Steppe in an effort to help 'civilize' and bring the illiterate nomadic Kazakhs under Russian imperial control" through the auspices of Islamic religion (Weller 2006:116). Indeed, this is precisely the same
historical context in which another great figure from roughly the same era of Kazakh history, the great Kazakh Jadid educational reformer Ibirai Altinsarin (1841-1889), could bemoan the fact that "the school teachers, when teaching the Kazakh children, are forced to use the Tatar language in place of the Kazakh language" because much of the available literature on the Kazakh steppe at that time had been produced by the Tatar missionaries and their descendents which Catherine had sent.

Whatever the historical context though, Islam has surely found a significant place among the Kazakhs dating back not merely to the time of Catherine II, but all the way to the beginnings of Kazakh nationhood in the 14th-15th centuries and even beyond in the roots of Islam among their Turkic Central Asian ancestors reaching back to the 10th-11th centuries. Three main strands of Islamic tradition have developed among them, namely the more traditional mosque-based type, the modernist-oriented Turkic-Jadid reformist school and the Sufi tradition grounded in saint veneration and shrine pilgrimage with a much greater emphasis upon mystical experience of the Divine and the attainment of 'the likeness of God' through love. All three of these forms surface in Abai's writings. It would be this latter form which most deeply influences and underlies Abai and his Muslim worldview.

But whatever the form, Abai is clearly an avid proponent of Muslim devotion among the Kazakhs as a base for healthy cultural, social and even political practices and he therefore deals at length in addressing authentic Muslim devotion among his people. Dr. Yesim follows suit. What is refreshing about this in an age when, at least in the West, a more radical message of Islamic devotion seems to dominate the media as well as our attention is that both Abai and Dr. Yesim insist on
following the Turkic-Jadid reformist school undergirded with a strong dose of the Sufi pursuit of individual godly character grounded in simple, genuine and non-violent love for God and others. They insist that

...what we mean by faith (iman), that is, what we mean by serving or, in common Islamic language, being 'a slave' of God, is to pay one's debt of love. ...People are brothers. ...A Muslim, according to Abai, is one able to think freely, unconstrained by religious orthodoxy, a person who recognizes other religions and considers that the main principle of Islam is the brotherly love of people.19

Elsewhere — indeed at the very pinnacle and climax of the book — Abai's great word, "Love all humanity, calling them your brothers and sisters," is cited.

But, for Abai as for his Kazakh interpreter, Islam is not primarily about 'other-wordly' pursuits. "If there is no thought of living in this world, the people and nation would have been cut off from their nationhood and become an easy prey for unbelievers, the world would have fallen into complete desolation."20

Closely connected with this life of faith and action, Abai and his interpreter seek to tackle the question of "What Exactly is Shame?" (Word Thirty-Six):

The essential meaning of shame is not to cover the face and get uptight over something which should not be done, it is to find one's own place in the world, living a productive and active life, saying the things you intend to say without being intimidated, leaving behind a trail of deeds which neither you nor your descendents will regret. Actions and behavior such as laziness, reluctance, cowardice, unbridled behavior and irresponsibility are the things which shame born from ignorance is made of.
Therefore, accepting the rule of the Prophet that 'where there is no shame there is no faith' and the Kazakh proverb 'whoever has shame has faith', it cannot be said that shame is strictly something negative.

Dr. Yesim insists with respect to the Abai's relevance for the broader world community that "values common to all humankind form the basis of Abai's humanistic poetry." Indeed, Abai has bequeathed to his people as well as to the world a rich heritage of critical, philosophical and poetic reflection. As Seisenbaev (1995:7) notes: "He was extraordinarily well-read and knew thousands of lines by heart. He read books in Arabic, Farsi, old Chagatay, and Russian." He acquainted himself with the works of the great Greek classical philosophers such Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, with well-known Islamic poets and scholars such as the Persian Muslim historian and theologian Al-Tabari (838-923), the Persian Muslim scholar Rashid ad-Din (1247-1318), the Persian Muslim poet of the 15th century Zhami (or Jami, 1414-1492), and the medieval Naqshbandian Sufi writer of Turkeic Central Asia Ali Shar Nawai (1441-1501). He was likewise familiar with the most highly esteemed Russian writers such as A.S. Pushkin (1799-1837), L.N. Tolstoi (1828-1910) and F.M. Dostoevskii (1821-1881), and with well-noted Western figures such as B. Spinoza (1632-1677) and H. Spencer (1820-1903). To this list could be added many others.

Although Abai produced a number of important works in his day, including translations of some of the great Russian writers like Pushkin, the most important and well-known collection which has been compiled is known in Kazakh as Karasoz. The final form(s) of that work are based upon manuscripts compiled in 1905, 1907 and 1910 by Murseit.
with the 'firstfruits' appearing in 1909 via a publisher in St. Petersburg under the title The Kazakh Poet-Sage [Abai] Ibrahim Kunanbaiuli's Songs. Further editions of his poems and songs followed in Orinbor in 1916 and then in Kazan and Tashkent in 1922. The first 'Complete Collection' of his writings did not, to borrow the common Kazakh phrase, 'see the light of day' until 1933 in Kizilorda. Since that time, numerous editions have been issued, with the entire collection eventually being translated into English as Book of Words as well as into numerous other world languages such as Russian, French, Chinese, etc (see biblio for available refs).

In light of its exceeding popularity among not only the Kazakhs, but many in the international community who are familiar with it, it seems appropriate to offer here a 'free' translation of one of Abai's most loved songs, namely Kozimning karasi, The Black of My Eyes:

The black of my eyes,
the state of my heart,
Never ending is
the inner wound of love.

Wisdom of the Kazakhs,
An elder brother of great years,
'I have such' is something
no one else can say
in the same way as you.

Let me speak from the heart,
Though let me not transgress
common courtesy.
Do they not understand it themselves?
Let me not then speak too much,
overextending myself and my welcome.
Such is a sampling of the great Abai's poem-songs, albeit through the rather poor medium of translation and entirely lacking the beautiful background of original music which helps give the song its great appeal. With respect to 'the Words' of Abai dealt with here in this volume, Dr. Yesim notes in his commentary:

The 'Word' is a special genre. It requires very accurate interpretation. In its form and content, it is close to a philosophical treatise, which is why Abai places an emphasis upon logic in the foreground of his Words, displacing figurative speech, which is used more often in his poetry. ...In a day and age when one became a transgressor for expressing their own thoughts, it was of course impossible for the genre of 'the Word' to be developed, and thus for the tradition of Abai to be continued on. It is hoped that this genre can be renewed and continued in our day, since the foundations have been laid for it. That which we call 'pluralism' today was the method of thought which Abai employed in his own time.

The current work, An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation, aims to continue and develop that tradition. It offers "a window on the Kazakh world" viewed through the eyes of one of the most prominent and treasured national and international philosopher-reformers to have appeared in their history – complimented with and conveyed to us through the commentary of a top national post-Soviet Kazakh scholar who specializes in 'Abai Studies'. It covers the entire range of Kazakh religious, cultural, social and political lifeways and institutions viewed against the backdrop of late Russian Tsarist Orthodox imperial rule.

It is hoped that the translation and publishing of this book in English will only add to the rich heritage of Abai Studies
which, since the beginning of the 20th century, has formed into its own unique tradition over the last 100 or more years. It is the heart and aim of Asia Research Associates (ARA) in making this work available to the broader international community through the medium of English to help further that endeavor as an integral part of our valued world and human heritage. It is likewise hoped that the publication of this volume will contribute in some small way to genuine ongoing intercultural and interreligious dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, respect and cooperation among the world's ethnic, religious, national-political and cultural-civilizational groups. It is a clear vision for global peace and friendship which desires to bring proper honor to the one Creator of all humankind and peace on earth to those of good will, for that is the only good and rightful alternative to the war, violence and hatred which currently seems to prevail in our day.27

Alemde beibitshilik-tinishtik bolsin,

R. Charles Weller
Asia Research Associates
March 2007
Kamakura, Japan
Introduction

Delving deep into the heritage of Abai, going deep into the caverns of the great poet-sage's thought is an 'event', an undertaking that will continue on from generation to generation. Abai provides a wonderous, integrated world of reflection and insight which requires mastery through an ever-deepening understanding of the entire width and breadth and depth and height of humanity's existence. In the centuries-long 'trot' of society's development, the birth of thought which he expressed in accordance with the circumstances his own time regarding the great figures who, never perishing, left behind their words is clear. Because of his abiding relevance, Abai remains a contemporary both for us and for future generations. Therefore, going deep into the depths of his heart and mind, studying and learning about the poet-sage by way of wise insight and an observant mind – this is our sacred duty.

In the Soviet era, the spirit of Abai was studied from within the perspective of a narrow field of exacting, restrictive understanding in which shackles were placed upon our national spiritual-cultural heritage. Those precious Kazakh companions who were among the first to express a breath of heart-love and offer a quality representation of Abai, namely Akmet Baitursinuhli (1873-1938), Magzhan Zhumabaev (1893-1938) and Zhusipbek Aimauiuhli (1889-1931) as well as Alihan Bukeihanuhli (1866-1937), who was the honorary veteran member of the early 20th century Kazakh political movement known as Alash and the first to introduce our great poet-sage to Russian
readers — all of these ran headlong into persecution and were seared in the Red Affliction's flames of fire. After the society of "clear, precise thought" (that is, the Soviet ideology) spoken of by one of Abai's most celebrated disciples, Shakirim Kudaiberdi-uhli (1851-1931), was established, the true spirit of Abai became twisted and, in the effort to bequeath the heritage of the poet-sage's writings to the heart and soul of the generations to come, false understandings began to gain a foothold.

Within the bounds of the narrow pastureland of exacting, restrictive totalitarian ideology, the brilliant writer Mukhtar Auezov, who dedicated his entire thought life and literary service to researching the heritage of Abai in all its riches of exceeding complexity and delicate mystery, left worthy works for future generations in accordance with the essence of his own restricted time. Auezov, in writing the epic 2-volume novel *The Way of Abai*, which is ranked among the classic pieces of Kazakh literature, laid the foundation for the scholarly discipline of the study of Abai (lit. *Abaitanu*) and was, through that endeavor, able to raise that scholarly discipline to a remarkable elevation.

The places in Abai's writings where he criticizes Kazakh lifeways and scorns the dogmatic mullahs as well as the cases in which he censures the inconsistencies in Kazakh society — these were well-liked by the exacting and restrictive ideology of the Soviets. Thus the poet-sage was 'lassoed' by the reputation of "enlightener." This understanding, of course, grew up in a place which was weighted-down and burdensome, along a path
previously untrodden. It lacked the strength and ability to fully lift out the keen insight of the poet-sage, who alone was set apart among a thousand. They subjected the him to intensive reflection and research concerning his worldview.

Abai's decisive thoughts regarding human beings, their nature and their mysteries and various qualities require research from a perspective of truth. According to Abai's explanation, the Creator of humankind is God Most High. The humaneness and wisdom-intelligence of human beings is to be observed, first and foremost, in their sense of love for God. The recognition of God and the sense of his wisdom and knowledge turns out to be the source-spring of self-understanding for humanity. The space of Abai's worldview is located between God and humanity. Prophets are the representatives of the unchanging eternal world, though they also are human as much as the rest of us. That is why even prophets are unable to fully answer the question 'what is truth'? The one who gives a clear, straight answer to that question is God. But as for humanity, Abai offers an explanation of the truth's essence in his 38th Word, "Life is Truth." Among the treasures of that Word, what kind of truth can possibly flow from human life? Only where there is life can there be a word observed, a thought spoken, a book written. Without human life, the essence of our existence would be meaningless. For, if there were no one to speak of the existence or non-existence of life, then who would be left to prove the true essence of one or the other?

For these and the other kinds of ideas which he expressed, we call Abai hakim, that is, a scholar of special insight and knowledge. Hakims clarify, that is, they help make plain the significance of and reason for life's phenomena. They seek to place humankind upon a straight path to follow. This is the perspective of the scholar Abai. As for us, we have dedicated this book to reproducing the poet-sage's ideas and thoughts.
"You are sick with reason and faith; Come for a Word."
— Al-Maari
"Word One"

Thoughts That Came to Me

With respect to its content, 'Word One' of Abai was written as a foreword, a preface to his other "Words." Those who intently read the Words of Abai will quite possibly wind up having two inexplicable feelings arise in their hearts. On the one hand, you see a man exhausted by perpetual struggle, who has experienced a great many troubles and sufferings, who has grown tired and dissatisfied with life and expresses his faintheartedness as he faces his remaining days, a man run headlong into worry to the point of illness. On the other hand, we meet up with a sage who, with philosophical depth and significance, has drawn wise deductions from out of the chaotic affairs he has experienced.

Abai was a man of his time, he analyzed in his poem-songs and Words the matters of chief importance among the main affairs of his day. These were: tending to social-national affairs, tending to livestock, that is, the economy, tending to scholarship and science, tending to religion and tending to the education and upbringing of children.

Eschewing the affairs of government and state while also noting that tending livestock and economic concerns were not his strength, he supplies reasons as to why it is impossible for him to tend to scholarly-scientific pursuits. There simply was no one in his midst to converse with on an academic level and, if that be the case, then from whom can you inquire concerning the things you do not know and to whom will the knowledge you do have be 'medicinal', that is, beneficial? Since such was the state of things, scholarly-scientific pursuit itself is distress of soul.
Abai said that in order to follow the path of Sufi asceticism and tend to religion, peace of heart was needed. But there was no peace, neither in his heart nor the days in which he lived; how, then, he suggested, shall one tend to religion or pursue the ascetic life? Abai ponders over the matter of the ascetic Sufi life more deeply in Word Thirty-eight. But he does not expound his thoughts fully in this first, opening Word. Again, the poet-sage tells us that in order to tend to religion, peace of heart is needed. And in the plain truth of it, is not religion one of the spiritual forces which should bring peace to the nation? Be that as it may, this issue is not fully expounded upon in Abai's Words.

His reasons for not being able to tend to the education and upbringing of children are clear, however. He says, "I have not come to the place where I am convinced of the benefits of progressive life and education for my children; where those benefits are and what the children should do with them I am not sure, what should I tell them to be in tending to their education?"32

Pondering deeply over these thoughts, we cannot conclude that they are an indication of the poet-sage's feeling of despair from life. Rather, they are grievances toward the social conditions of his day, conditions which had become like a narrow cage, leaving no space for people to carry on their lives and activities. Convinced that his efforts in the face of such circumstances were futile, Abai decides: "I will take paper and pen as my companions and start writing down all my thoughts. Should anyone find my words useful and copy them down or memorize them, let it so be; and if no one needs my words, they will remain with me anyway. As for me, I have no concern now other than writing."
To express his thoughts freely, Abai introduced a new original genre: the Word. The poet’s Words are the genre of free thinking expressed in appropriate form. Abai fortunately avoided the lot of many well-known philosophers who tried with less success to find an appropriate form in which to express their thoughts. Unfortunately, however, the genre created by Abai was not developed further in his own native Kazakh culture. But, the culprit of such misfortune must be — to put it in the words of Shakerim Kudaiberdi-uhli, one of the most well-known of Abai’s disciples — the time of "clear, precise thought," that is, the era when 'free thought' was choked out and restricted by 'clear, precise thought', namely that of 'the party line' in the late Tsarist, early Soviet period. In a day and age when one became a transgressor for expressing their own thoughts, it was of course impossible for the genre of ‘the Word' to be developed, and thus for the tradition of Abai to be continued on. It is hoped that this genre can be renewed and continued in our day, since the foundations have been laid for it. That which we call ‘pluralism’ today was the method of thought which Abai employed in his own time.

The careful reader will certainly notice some inconsistency in the poet’s own statements. But this does not mean that Abai actually contradicts himself, it is rather a manifestation and evidence of how his thoughts successively develop. On certain occasions, Abai, who ever-develops his thoughts each time he writes, delves deep into various details and throws the solution of a matter back onto the reader. He puts questions to the reader. This is how he engages his generation. Abai never attempted to give ready answers to all life's phenomena. He spoke about difficult challenges, about the contradictions and paradoxes of life. It is my hope that the reader, after making their way through and familiarizing themselves with all forty-
five of Abai’s 'Words', will become thoroughly convinced of the excellence and enduring value of Abai’s philosophical reflections.

— Word Two —

Knowing Yourself
Through the Eyes of Others

In his second 'Word', Abai clearly demonstrates that the Kazakh's own understanding of themselves can be discerned from the estimates they make of other peoples. The fact that coarse, uncomplimentary ideas which were far from the truth had spread widely among the nation was due to the poverty of the Kazakh's own familiarity with and conception of themselves. Saying that 'we are the best people in this world' is an idea which leads to ethnocentrism. Abai offers the way of cleansing from this warped mentality. The poet-sage says "in my childhood I used to hear the Kazakhs jeering at the Tajiks, Nogais (or Tatars) and Russians, making fun of them. I thought then: 'My God! It turns out that the whole wide world has no worthier people than us'." To the contrary, Abai readily confesses that:

...there is no tastier fruit than the fruit in the garden of an Uzbek; there is nothing he is unable to make. When the Russians came, the Uzbeks adopted their innovations more quickly than we, the Kazakhs, did. And they live in peace and seek no enmity. What can we say, the Uzbeks have even provided the Kazakhs with the burial robes for the dead and clothes for the living."

As for the Tatars, they make fine soldiers and they bear poverty stoically, they safeguard their schools and honor
religion. They know how to work hard and be prosperous and they are tidy. As for us, we labor for their rich men for a crust of bread.

I will not speak of the Russians. We cannot even hold a candle to their servants. What is our Kazakh superiority based on then?"

In saying this, Abai does not humiliate his fellow countrymen, but tries to touch the sensitive, raw nerves of their heart and awaken their true dignity and honor. Without diminishing the good qualities of his people, he points out the flaws of some of its representatives and tries to help get rid of them. In his opinion, it is possible to learn to plant gardens, be pious, to be equal in knowledge with the Russians if one looks at oneself through the eyes of other people.

In this short Word, then, Abai designed a program of development for the nation and set forth the way that the people should follow.

— Word Three —

"If There are Two Judges, There Will Be Four Disputes"
(Kazakh proverb)

In his third 'Word', Abai speaks from the heart regarding the problems of authority and government. In the time of the poet-sage, the Kazakh people, who had lost their former freedom, had begun to sink into decline. Earlier, when their khans and judges, heroes and zhiraus (that is, poet-musicians and counselors to the khans) were around, there was no historical-social foundation for immorality and vice just as
there were no good reasons to be found for envy, meanness and hypocrisy. Worthless people were not even invited to the community meetings, not to mention the meetings between the various clans. Everyone knew his own business and the interests of the people were the main guide for them. The young men spent most of their life on horseback. Military service was the most important thing for them.

With the loss of independence, since the Kazakh land had become a Russian colony, there was no longer a need to defend it day and night on horseback from its enemies. Humdrum life began when everyone was responsible for only themselves. There were no more khans, elected by the people as they had been, no more judges who told the truth, and the zhiraus lost their high status as musical poetic counselors to the khan. Their places were occupied instead by Russian officials, who professed a different faith, spoke a different language and had different ideas regarding life.

The Kazakhs were left the right to elect the chiefs of the administrative districts established by the Tsarist government for a three-year term. As Abai correctly noted, they spent their first year in office listening to all kinds of grievances and complaints. "What did we elect you for? You do nothing for us!" Their second year is given over to fighting possible future rivals, and the last year to their campaign for re-election.

Abai expresses his bitter disapproval of it. Why could not the authorities of the larger Tsarist administrative territories and the military governors appoint the chiefs of the administrative districts from among men who have had at least some Russian education and do not consider the people a simple means to get rich by?

Watching his fellow countrymen sink deeper and deeper into discord and squabbles, Abai understood that it is the
ordinary people who suffer first and foremost from such circumstances. As part of the remedy, he insists that the regional administrative chiefs who are elected need to know all the laws passed down from the Kazakh forefathers: Kasim khan’s (1511-1520) 'Straight Path', Yesim khan’s (1598-1643) 'Ancient Pathway' and Az Tauke khan’s (1680-1715) 'Seven Decrees'. Understanding that many things in these laws had become outdated, Abai regrets that the present judges, i.e. the chiefs of the administrative districts, are unable to draw useful guidance from the khans' system and guidelines of management in a way which applies their teachings to the present social and historical context.

Abai writes: "Old people say: 'When two judges get together, there is sure to be four disputes.' An even number of judges will never lead to a unanimous opinion. Would it not be better to elect three judges from each regional administrative district?" The poet knew that the time of just judges had passed. 'Dodgers' who could barely manage to read and write in Russian had replaced them. Having stopped believing in the establishment of a just system, Abai thought that the regional administrative chiefs should be appointed by the governor. Then, in his opinion, the rivalry between people in courting their favor would be stopped. Young people would strive for knowledge and the (appointed not elected) regional administrative chiefs would not serve to please the rich, but would settle all cases justly.

Abai’s point of view might be considered by some people as lending support to the Tsarist colonial regime, which brought in its officials everywhere. But as a matter of fact it would be more useful for the Kazakhs to do farming, develop crafts and take the path of enlightenment rather than wallow in the vanity of pre-election squabbles. Skillfully using a pre-
election fight, the Russian officials took bribes from the opposing parties and, at the same time, set them even further against one another.

The problems of government are addressed in some of Abai’s other Words as well. The thought of just regional administrative chiefs runs throughout them. Pondering on the main public and political functions of government, Abai made a number of proposals, which unfortunately were ignored.

— Word Four —

"People are Born Crying, and Die in Sorrow"

Human nature is a mystery. A human being is a creature which tends to go through continual change throughout their life. Abai explains that the two main states of human existence are joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. Is there anyone on earth who has not experienced joy, not known sorrow? Laughter and tears change each other in turn, do they not?

But Abai also speaks of something else here. There are people who spend their lives in idleness and wanton pleasures. They think life is a continuous feast. Others are always despondent. They are not able to find joy in life. They see everything in dark colors. Abai thinks that senseless laughter resembles drunkenness. But drunkenness leads to misbehavior; a conversation with a drunkard gives one a headache. Anyone who constantly indulges in senseless merriment neglects his responsibilities in a slipshod manner.

Others, being depressed, are prepared in advance for all kinds of misfortunes and troubles, providing themselves even with burial robes long before their appointed day. But should a
person always be downcast? A person who is in constant sorrow can seriously fall ill. Laughter and joy are as the rain which comes during a drought in summer; they feed the soul with life-giving moisture. Everything, as much as possible, should be done with joy, smiles and good spirits.

Abai tells how to achieve that: "Laugh at the absurdities of a fool, and do it with a feeling of righteous anger. But such laughter should not be indulged in too often, for it is bitter. When you see someone who leads a good life, whose kind deeds are worthy of emulation, laugh with a glad heart, with sincere joy." A good example teaches you a lot of useful things.

Human beings come into this world crying and they leave it in sorrow. The person who lives without thinking of the purpose of life simply vegetates and 'exists' or 'survives'. Life spent in idleness is useless and futile. The rich console themselves with the thought that they can buy everything that pleases the eye and flesh, but when the time of death comes all their wealth will seem worthless compared to life, the only thing that could not be bought. And the understanding of this truth is a sad awakening for those searching out the purpose of their earthly existence, is it not?

Death is inevitable for every living creature, even our famous forefather Korkit-ata, the great Turkic mystic philosopher and poet-musician of the 9-10th century, could not avoid it. If a man works hard, trusting in his own powers, he can learn to value both joy and grief.

Summarizing his thoughts about the purpose of life, Abai says: "Put your faith in God and trust in your powers and abilities. Even the hardest land will yield good crops to honest and selfless toil."
"Is This the Nation We Were Seeking?"

In 'Word Five', Abai analyzes the philosophy of backwardness which has been thoroughly absorbed into the mind of his people. He explains how we can understand the petition of the Kazakhs: "Oh God, make us as troublefree as babes." What is their understanding of being like little children? To the point, it is making no effort to engage in industrious activity, being satisfied with what one has, i.e. complacency, taking no thought of what is lacking, living with the understanding and mentality of a child.

Abai discovers this mentality in Kazakh proverbs and sayings: "A heroic person and a wolf will both find their food along the way," "The hand that takes also gives," "If you can't rely on the judge, don't count on God either," "If you are famished, attend a funerary feast," "A rich man has a countenance full of light, a poor man as hard as stone," and others. Based on these proverbs, the poet concludes that the troublesome sorrow of the Kazakhs is in their livestock, but they take no concern for them, they do not know how to make the most of their livestock. For them, deceiving those who are rich in cattle or, becoming enemies with them, doing crafty, treacherous things are of no shame or trouble. But to think about how they themselves can increase their own livestock and then make a diligent effort toward that end, this is trouble and sorrow. And for that reason they love being troublefree as babes.

Abai seeks to move the people from their traditional pastoral economy to other vocational activities. The zeal of the Kazakhs is only in their livestock. But increasing one's
livestock and thinking together as a community of ways to go about that task require well-thought-out action. The fact that the people are still unable to deal with those problems and, instead, desire to be only carefree as babes vexes the poet-sage.

Abai is struggling from the heart in this 'Word' with advanced, vital issues. That the Kazakhs take no thought for science, education and justice and instead only weep and moan over livestock is a destitute state of affairs. Abai says that the way to wealth, property and power comes through knowledge and education. Only education can help get rid of evil vices and the habit of seeking to live light-heartedly, being complacent. The people must awake and realize that different times were upon them. The time of Abai was the time of domination by Russian officials. Kazakhs stopped being one nation united by their own leaders.

Abai clearly realized that people were becoming involved in petty living, that their morals and manners had taken a turn for the worse. Feeling that he could not change much of anything, Abai addressed words of reproach and compassion to his enslaved people: "Is this the people whom I love with all my heart?"

—Word Six—

The Unity of Wisdom

In this 'Word', Abai offers philosophical reflections upon the Kazakh proverb: "The beginning of skill is unity, the beginning of prosperity is life (or having one's existence)." All of us use proverbs at times, but do we ever stop to reflect upon their inner meaning? Abai raises the problem of just what
kind of people or nation can have unity. What kind of unity can there be among a people who have fallen into subjection to another power and who, as a nation, no longer rule themselves?

The Kazakhs do not fully understand unity, they think that if they share a horse, a meal, clothing and wealth, they have unity. Abai critiques this petty nit-picking, this narrow pastureland of Kazakh thoughtlife. Who can guarantee that such people will, being neither rich or poor, not turn into lazy bums who lie around drinking all day until their common prosperity disappears instead of working to increase their livestock, i.e. make an honest profit? That kind of 'unity' spans only a brief, passing moment, like snow melting into water. If someone's relative tries to attain unity, then he is bound to flirt with disaster, since he goes off and does his own thing, finding no profit in the end. This kind of unity also breaks down when their common prosperity dries up and withers away.

Abai tosses out all such ideas of unity and says that true unity is the unity of reason and wisdom. The poet-sage has not come upon this idea for nothing. It has many aspects which can be developed. For example, to consider the well-being of the nation, putting the matter to mutual counsel by reason and wisdom, this is true unity. Abai must surely be indicating this direction at the root of all that he is saying in this Word.

Then Abai, after having shared these kinds of thoughts regarding "unity," delves into the meaning of the term "life" or "existence" which occurs in the second part of the proverb. He says that life is the source of well-being. What kind of life do we lead? Is it only about commonplace living, for the soul not to give up its body? Even an animal can lead such a life. Is that life? No, it is about life with a clever mind and a living
soul. If you are alive but your soul is dead, words of reason will not reach you.

There is no strength of heart on the road which knows not how to increase livestock with good, honest hard work and, instead, has fallen prey to a parasitic means for making one's living:

A loafer and a servile self-seeking flatterer,
One who barely scrapes out their existence,
Living one meal at a time, hand-to-mouth.

Outwardly they appear energetic,
but they are craven in their heart,
With no sense of shame,
taking no thought of their end.

Abai thinks that a righteous death is better than such an existence. Meditating on the meaning of life, he urges not just existence but dignity and conscience. "Can one forgo dignity, conscience and principles for a crust of bread?" Abai's opinion is confirmed in his words from the verse dedicated to the death of his brother Ospan: "Your death is blessed, for you did not have to abase yourself for a piece of bread, you did not experience the corruptibility of others."

Sometimes death is better than life when it does not make one happy, but becomes a dreadful burden which utterly corrupts the soul. The proverb "work is the beginning of success" is true because work is the source of all benefits, you can earn a living fairly.
Desire is a broad concept. This quality given us by nature makes us different from animals. There are desires of the flesh and desires of the soul. Born into this world a person inherits two essential needs. These are the need of the flesh to eat, drink and sleep, without which the body cannot be the house of the soul and will not grow in height and strength. Once he or she has become accustomed to living in comfort a person will not want to live under any other circumstances.

I think the reason why upon growing up a person likes the pleasures of the flesh more than of the soul is disclosed in the following words of Abai:

We subjugated our soul to our body and contemplated everything around us with our eyes, but not with our minds; we do not trust the impulses of our soul. Satisfied with outward appearances, we make no attempt to uncover inner mysteries in the vain belief that we shall lose nothing by such ignorance. In what way, then, do we differ from animals if we perceive things only with our eyes? We know nothing, but will defend our ignorance and try to pass off our ignorance as knowledge.

It seems we were better off in our childhood. We were human then, for we sought to learn as much as possible. If, after childhood, the desire of the soul overrides the desire of flesh, then a person has the right to be called an adult, a full-grown human being. What is the desire of the soul? It is the wish to get to know, to see and to learn. A child, when he or she sees unknown objects or hears unknown sounds, asks numerous questions: 'What's that? Why? How?' Why, then, upon growing up and supposedly gaining in wisdom,
do we not seek to satisfy our curiosity? Why do we not tread in the path of those who seek knowledge?

This Word contains more questions than answers. And it is clear why. Intellectual aspiration is not just the wish to get to know, see and learn. It is the gift of God, and not everyone can have it.

Everyone has abilities given them by nature. Most people do not go deep into the root of the matter. They are satisfied with simple surface contemplation. Abai says: "A person becomes firmly established on the earth by learning the mysteries of nature and drawing sound conclusions. That sets humans apart from animals. They have reason, will and soul."

The nature of a human and an animal are different. An animal knows nothing and has no aim in life, but the potential of human beings is inexhaustible because they have perception and discernment. Their conscious activity is the evidence of their intellect. But people do not think about food for their soul, they are satisfied with what they have learned, though their knowledge is rather limited. Abai called them people without light in their soul.

— Word Eight —

Who Needs Wisdom and Instruction?

Abai starts his eighth Word with a question: "Who will heed our advice and listen to our counsel?" Indeed, who needs them? Abai enumerates those who may need wise advice.

One man may be a regional administrative chief, another a judge. Do they need wisdom and advice? No, because these
people consider themselves quite clever enough and seek power so as to teach and give guidance to others. Are they the kind who would spare time to listen to us? Their minds are filled with other concerns: not to offend their superiors inadvertently, not to provoke the anger of the thief, not to cause trouble and confusion among the people, and not to wind up on the losing side, but gain some personal advantage. No, judges and district administrative chiefs are too busy.

Maybe the rich? No, says Abai:

They think they possess the treasures of almost half the world. They can pay in livestock for whatever they lack. They are certain that if they own livestock they will be able to bribe even the Most High. Their herds take the place of everything else for them – their native land, people, religion, family and learning. He must feed and water livestock, protect it from thieves and wolves and shelter it from the cold. No, the rich are too busy to heed good counsel. As for thieves and scoundrels, they obviously would not listen anyway. The poor are only concerned about getting their daily bread. What good are advice, wisdom and learning to them when even the rich do not want it? If a wise mind is not honored by people, is there any need of a wise man?

With such questions, Abai draws Word Eight to a close.
"This is Who I Am, I am a Kazakh"

Abai starts Word Nine with these words: "If I am a Kazakh and must love my people, then which of the Kazakhs ways should I affirm and support, determined to love them, and which ones should I despise and determine to hate?" He then further meditates on the qualities of his people which are close to his heart and those in which he should find cause for blame. But he does not offer answers to the questions he poses. He does not believe that his people will correct their misguided ways. Abai says in bitterness: "Even though I live, I do not consider myself alive. Outwardly I am alive, but I am dead within." These words of Abai should not be interpreted in the manner which the great Asan Kaigi, musical poet-philosopher and counselor to Zhanibek khan in the 15th century, interpreted similar words in his own time. To give an impartial assessment of oneself, to look for the cause of evil in oneself, to find and cure it — these are the main views and aims of Abai's philosophy.

Since the times of Korkit-ata and Asan Kaigi, philosophical outlooks on life and death went hand-in-hand. In Western Europe this trend was called existentialism. The Kazakhs have a custom of pondering life and death, of reflecting on the transience of earthly existence and the inevitability of death. That is why they did not take death as something unexpected, but took it quite naturally and made preparations for it in advance. As a part of Kazakh lifeways, it was customary to leave behind thoughts about death which would never die. It is for this reason that Abai, without sorrow, desires that which he first desired, and holding no regret for the past, says: "This
also is good, that in the time of dying, alas, those, yes those cares of mine have been left behind!"

Does not such an attitude toward death reveal a deep understanding of its meaning? On the other hand, to accept death without any regret, is that not a recognition of the uselessness of life? For many thousands of years people have been asking this question, but there is still no answer because no one has yet understood entirely the meaning of life and death. Indeed, no one can possibly understand this great mystery of nature. We bow our heads to it.

This is what Abai ponders in Word Nine.  

--- Word Ten ---

On Parents and Children

This Word speaks of the relationship between a parent and a child. "People pray to God to send them a child. What does a person need a child for?", asks the poet. Is there any greater love than the love of parents for their children? The parents see the child as their support. According to the Kazakhs, a home with children is a bazaar, that is, a 'marketplace'.

But Abai considers this problem a bit differently. The poet pays attention to the fact that most of those praying to God to send them a child do not think about their responsibility for that child:

What kind of statement is it to say 'Let my child fill my place when I am gone'? Are you concerned that the world of wealth and achievement which you leave behind may wind up with no one to inherit or take possession of it? ...Is this something you say out of jealousy for others while you are heading off for your death bed? You who cannot cut
yourself loose from jealousy of others, what sort of superior place would you have. The good of a child is your desire and good pleasure, the bad is your grief and sorrow. Did you inquire and learn what kind they would be? Were the dog-like vile deeds you yourself committed few in number? So now why are you so eager like this to have a child, make them a dog and show them insult as well?38

The poet states that people are responsible for their descendants. Who has not dreamed of having children? This is the sacred duty of parents. But if your child is bad, then your life will become a living hell. A good child can make your life happy. Is there anyone who has never experienced hardships and troubles? Life passes in the struggle for survival. A person always lacks something or faces difficulty and tries to find a way out. Are you sure your child will avoid such a lot? What should they come into this world for? To live the years given them by fate in suffering? This problem should be well thought out. But there is no time or opportunity for that. When children are born, the parents' problems come together with them. And no one can avoid these problems. This is the law of life. There has always existed a conflict between parents and their children. So, as a parent, you should be ready for that if you wish to have a child.

Abai does not say how to establish good relations between parents and their children. He considers the problem of responsibility of an individual to society and reflects upon the issue of descendants and the problems they may face in their lifetime. The parents want to have a child to pray for them after their death. This is one of the main postulates of Muslim law. And in our opinion, reading verses of the Qur'an in commemoration of the diseased is not only a privilege of a
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pious Muslim, but also a tribute to the ancestors. Abai, however, says:

You say 'Let my child have the Qur'an read for me after I am gone', but if the people you have done good to are many, who will not have the Qur'an read for you? If, on the other hand, you have done much evil, then what will your child's Qur'an readings accomplish? The things which you yourself have not accomplished in this life, can your child, after you have died, undertake a trade and accomplish them for you? Your desire for a child in order to use them as a cover over you like a burial shroud is nothing other than your wishing of death upon your child in the prime of their years. If you say 'Let them grow up and become adults', then is there any child born of the Kazakhs who themselves reaches adulthood and is able to save their father and mother from hell? I can only wonder whether there is any father like you or nation like yours who can raise up a such a child?

These are extremely wise thoughts. A good person is good in both this life and in death. The entire nation will respect such a person as if all of them together were such a person's child. Therefore we can only wonder whether your child will ever be able to accomplish in your stead the good things you yourself were never able to achieve.

Pondering the matter in this way, Abai comes to the conclusion that the parents should use their wealth to give their children an education. There will be neither faith nor well-being without an education, that is why every child should learn.

In this Word, Abai again repeats his thought that the sense of life is to be sought in an education, not in wealth. This idea is met up with regularly in the poet-sage's poem-songs, as for example his well-known poem "Having not yet discovered
knowledge and learning, be not proud..." Abai interpreted the word "knowledge" in a broad sense, not simply in rationalistic terms. According to the poet-sage, 'knowledge' is a synthesis of wisdom and sense-intuition. He used 'knowledge' in the sense in which it underlies one's entire outlook and worldview.

— Word Eleven —

No Way Out?!

The colonial policy of Tsarism brought stealing, pillage and plunder to the Kazakh Steppe. This does not mean that these things were unknown before. As long as humans have existed, theft and plunder have accompanied them throughout the entire span of their lives. But in Abai’s time these vices became an incurable disease of the society and, as a result, the ordinary people suffered most of all. The reason for this is that not only did the thieves steal, but also those in authority did the same by promising the former that they would help them to evade justice. How could this happen? The explanation was quite simple: theft remained unpunished because it was good for the regional administrative chiefs and other officials. They took bribes from both the thief who was trying to avoid punishment and the plaintiff who hoped to win a case.

Therefore, if each case of theft is an opportunity for our judges to make money, then they are not in a hurry to punish criminals. The crooks also contribute to the enrichment of the authorities because the ordinary people will make request of the latter — and not empty-handed of course.

Before, the thieves and robbers were afraid of the respected figures of the clan. Since Russian officials became
the authority, however, the rich were also infected with this disease. They squandered their property and lived fast, not understanding that they were throwing people into new troubles and suffering. These two vices are a common trouble in Abai’s opinion. If everyone starts stealing, who will correct them? Will such moral qualities as honor and commitment, loyalty and conscience sink into oblivion? The rich might set the people on the right path because they have power and money, but they themselves cast prudence to the wind.

What could be expected from a people who had lost its freedom and unity? Understanding that the situation was critical, Abai desperately sought a way out.

— Word Twelve —

On Faith and Devotion

The term *iman*, i.e. "faith," entered Kazakh mentality through Islam and became one of its ethical concepts. Kazakhs call a good person a 'righteous' person. According to the Muslims, a righteous person is one who does good deeds. A good deed is the duty of a Muslim. Abai says that any good deed done by a pious Muslim should be encouraged. But he should not be forced to do it because it is a voluntary act.

A person who believes in their knowledge must not be satisfied with what they know, but continually improve their mind. Those who have abandoned learning deprive themselves of a divine blessing and you will look in vain for any benefit from their teaching. Their good deed will turn evil, to inhibit learning or fail to build upon one's knowledge is not a righteous thing. This is the essence of one of Abai’s attempts to reform the religious teachings of Islam. Abai’s brilliant idea
that aspiration for knowledge is a righteous thing is based upon his deep belief in the inexhaustible potential of human beings.

"Do your righteous deed, whatever it may be, sincerely without sanctimony and hypocrisy," said Abai. He used the word 'holiness' not only in the religious sense. Sufism had a strong influence on the formation of his outlook. Explaining the essence of righteousness, Abai wanted to discover the nature of human relationships.

People have an excuse: God forgives everything. What righteousness do we speak of then? Abai does not solve the problem, he raises it. It is impossible to force people to do good deeds. For real righteousness, it is necessary first to prove the existence of God with logical methods and argumentation. If you are ignorant or do not have enough knowledge, you have just to believe that God is unique. Such are Abai's thoughts about righteousness. Abai says that people
do not have true righteousness because of their ignorance and illiteracy.

"There is no oath that a sword cannot cut. There is no sin that God will not forgive," say simple-minded Kazakhs. They do not understand the detriment and viciousness of these false proverbs. However, meditating on the degree of true faith his countrymen have, Abai does not say why there are no true believers among those whose faith will not be shaken even by the threat of death, who have fearless hearts. Imandilik, faith, was considered by Abai not as blind faith in holiness, but as a person's attitude toward life, which was traditional for Islam.

He goes further than typical traditional interpretations of this concept and regrets that some of his countrymen are negligent in their work and dishonest with regards to their religious duties.

— Word Thirteen —

What is True Faith?

Abai continues the subject of devotion and faith in this Word. Offering a definition of "faith," he says there are two kinds of things one needs in order to bring about 'faith' and attain to a state of belief: Some simply embrace faith, perceiving the vital need for it and its truth, and then strengthen their belief by means of reasonable arguments. This is a conscious faith. But it is not easy because to attain
it, great knowledge is required. In Abai’s opinion, there are no such people among his countrymen, and if there are, they do not have enough knowledge to be called knowledgeable people.

Others believe by means of drawing wisdom from books and from the words of the mullah. Once they have become believers, they are zealously faithful and even the threat of death will not make them recant their beliefs. Abai says they are stoic; they have a fearless heart and unshakeable spirit. Though people typically come to faith this way, yet there are a lot of people who are not ready to defend their faith and thus easily turn aside from the path of righteousness.

Abai does not say which way is more preferable because everyone should make their own choice. To have true faith is to know God by reflecting upon him logically. If you lack knowledge, you have nothing to do but believe in the existence of God based on someone else’s words.

Such are Abai’s thoughts and conclusions about faith. The poet could not find those who had faith among his people. We cannot call them true believers because they do not have faith. It is impossible to find zealous believers because people are not strong in their beliefs. Moreover, they simply console themselves with the words "God will forgive everything." So then, who can understand a person and their faith after that? Abai grieves over that; he does not make any attempts to say why there are no true believers.
"If the Tongue Obeys the Heart..."

The Kazakhs talk a great deal about the heart, but they do not understand that the best human qualities such as mercy, compassion and philanthropy are commands of the heart. Calling someone 'a person of brave heart', people respect them as a batir, i.e. a courageous person or 'hero'. People say a batir is 'zhurekti', or 'one with heart', which again means brave, just or courageous. These qualities are attributable to a person who can listen to wise counsel, control their emotions, who has a strong will and can be patient. The problem with the Kazakh people is that they cannot listen to the lectures or speeches of learned people and that some of them, upon hearing them, are unable to do away readily with their mistaken ways or ideas.

Abai's words remind us of the people's tragedy in the 1930s when many were put to death under Stalin. We regret the poet's words were not heard by the then rulers of that time. Who knows, maybe numerous deaths could have been avoided.

Strong will and conviction should be in every great action. The worst qualities of a human being are boastfulness, weakness of will and laziness. Such a person obeys destiny like a dog that follows a caravan lost in the desert sands. If a person is able to free themselves from the vices which control them, then they can be counted a healthy person.

This is the main quality in the definition of the word 'zhurekti'. "A mind that obeys the heart will tell no lie."
In life, there are both wise and unwise people. "Every person is 'a child of humanity'." Coming into this world, a person cannot live without being attracted to and excited by the fascinating things around them. Those days of questioning and of passionate interests remain in a person's memory as the brightest period of life.

The difference between people is discerned through their deeds and actions. A person will live a good life if they have a genuine interest in this life, i.e. a passion to live. That interest stirs up the imagination, it reveals the person's capabilities. Upon growing up, a person will recall the unforgettable time of their first searching and discoveries. It is at this age when the difference between wise and unwise people comes to light.

A sensible person will interest themselves in worthy and serious matters. Those who are unwise will frivol away their time in worthless, futile and absurd undertakings. Having indulged in delights, when they come to their senses, they realize that their best years have swiftly passed in vain. In these younger days, they behave as if youth is eternal. Yet too soon they lose their former strength and become good for nothing.

To achieve a goal you need intelligence and volition. Our intelligence is determined by our choice of useful undertakings. These are values a person chooses for themselves. What do human values include?

According to the philosophical sense of Abai, it is such activities, i.e. useful undertakings, which help a person to disclose new qualities and merits, as for example, the joy of having a child and raising them. Taking stock in youth is a delight. Aspiration for knowledge is also good and natural.
But to make one's life meaningful, aspirations themselves are not enough. You should have a strong enough volition to carry them out and not everyone is able to achieve that. Life is full of temptations. Temptations destroy a weak person. The poet says: "And yet another temptation lurks in the path of passionate souls." Success intoxicates their feelings, clouds their reason and causes them to commit blunders. It is also poses a great trial for those who attain it and not everyone can pass the test because it is such an intoxicating feeling; you feel you are a champion, a conqueror of the universe. When you come to your senses, you recall how many boastful speeches were made and blunders were committed.

"If you wish to be counted among the intelligent, then ask yourself once a day, once a week, or at least once a month: "How do I live? Have I done anything to improve my learning, my worldly life or my life hereafter? Will I swallow the bitter dregs of regret later on?" Or perhaps you don't know or remember how you have lived and why?

In the philosophical sense, Abai’s precepts here are of great importance.

— Word Sixteen —

Submission to God

Abai said the Kazakhs could not be called a religiously devoted people. Religion did not go deep into their minds and that is why rising and prostrating to the ground in supplication was nothing more than a habit for them. There are no links and events in the world without reasons. In Abai’s opinion, the
indifferent attitude of the Kazakhs to religion is in the following.

First of all, Islam had not been absorbed into the heart and soul of the people. The mosques responsible for cleanness and depth of faith are located mostly in the cities and Tatars manage there. In the village and other communities (lit. auyls) there are no preachers, except the mullahs, and the amount of religious literature is insufficient. Second, the Kazakhs were nomads and their nomadic way of life made them use only what was necessary. It was difficult to observe religious ceremonies in such conditions. That was the way of life of a nomad warrior crafted, as it was, by the ages of time.

Third, much of Islamic doctrine was concordant with the outlook of the Kazakhs and serves as the basis for their lifestyle. That is why the Kazakhs took from Islam what they thought was useful for them, but they did not accept it as a religion. For instance, if the ascetic forms of Sufism took the form of orthodoxy in the more southern parts of Central Asia, with the Kazakhs, the same doctrines came to be reflected in folk poetry. I think the lyrical poetry of the Kazakhs has blossomed under the influence of Sufism. Kazakhs have never been fanatical Muslims. This is confirmed by the fact that Kazakhs are not avid attenders of religious ceremonies. The conditions of Steppe life have contributed to this situation.

— Word Seventeen —

"I Shall Give Preference to My Heart"

"I shall give preference to my heart," say the Oriental philosophers. Such trends as rationalism and sensualism prevail
in Western philosophy. Reason is the most important thing in rationalism. Feeling is the basis of sensualism. Oriental philosophy does not have such a contrast. That is why we cannot assign it to any certain trend, because when speaking of reason the poet, that is, Abai, always adds heart and will to it.

Reason, Heart and Will are inseparable in his poetry and other writings. These three notions stand together as a whole in Abai’s Word. It is not important for us whether the dispute between 'Reason, Heart and Will' which the poet speaks of in this Word actually took place or not. It is not important to know the story's source. Abai's thoughts about Reason, Heart and Will are much more interesting for us than finding out whether the dispute actually occurred.

In Word Seventeen, Reason, Will and Heart argue about who was the most important among them. At the beginning of life they are all equally important to a person. The sensitive reader will discover a good many new things for themselves in the definitions of these notions. First of all, each of them speaks of themselves; secondly, Knowledge, to whom they all appeal to settle their argument, has her own opinion of each of them.

Thus, Knowledge unites Will, Reason and Heart. What is Knowledge, then? Abai does not explain it in simplistic terms. He says that it is a 'bookish' word, i.e. a word connected with the reading and study of books. There is nothing more important in the world than knowledge. Abai considers reason separately. He says reason is 'the tongue' of knowledge. Abai does not deny his mystical attitude to knowledge.

When Abai says knowledge is a bookish word he does not mean secular books, he means God’s Word. A scholar tells ordinary people the essence of this or that book, and explains it to them. Abai calls such work naklia. In such cases, a scholar
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tells of knowledge which has been attained beforehand by others. If a scholar tries in theirs writings to get to the root of known truths, to find an explanation for them, then these works will be called \textit{gaklia}.

Based on these definitions, Abai’s Word is \textit{naklia} because it does not contain new truth(s). Will, Heart and Reason are considered from the point of view of objective ideas. The Greek philosopher Plato was the founder of this point of view. Consideration of these notions as separate ideas was traditional in oriental philosophy.

There is no need to search for the meaning of these notions in Western philosophy because this oriental approach is one of the methods of the epistemological search for truth in Islam.

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\textbf{On Beauty and Vanity\textsuperscript{39}}

It is a part of human nature to dress in beautiful clothes, which stimulates a warm mood and makes a person attractive in the eyes of others. The skill to dress beautifully speaks of good taste. Abai, approving of a person’s desire to look beautiful, at the same time criticizes beauty which is taken to extreme measures.

There are two types of beauty, says Abai. One is in paying attention to the face, cultivating one’s moustache and beard, pinching out and painting brows, pampering the body and trying to make a show of good manners. Another goes out of their way, finding no greater pleasure than to arouse envy among the people with their rich apparel and Arabian horse. "But this is absurd and shameful," notes Abai. "No one should get carried away by such desire for beauty, otherwise they will..."
find it hard to look like a normal human being again. A person should distinguish themselves by virtue of their reason, knowledge, conscience and goodness. Only a fool thinks they can gain distinction by other means."

In this Word then, Abai gives the definition of the word "beauty." There is nothing bad in this word. Beauty is only bad if a person is so caught up with it that they take no concern for reason or knowledge. Our famous judges showed off their manners and sharp thinking, not their stylish dresses.

"Poetry is the ruler of language, the genius that carves marvelous things out of stone." Are not Abai’s words here true beauty flowing forth from the poet-sage’s figurative thought? It is in this sense we say that Abai is the embodiment of beauty itself. Having studied carefully his heritage, I came to this conclusion because he wrote down and left behind a full explanation of the nature of beauty. 'Beauty' is a lofty word. No one should underestimate its significance because, in essence, it indicates the human search for beauty.

— Word Nineteen —

Being Attentive

The Kazakhs have a proverb: "Observing much you will become a prince, ever speaking good words of counsel you will become an orator of wisdom." What we mean by 'attentiveness' is not, as is said in the proverb, an innate ability of people that comes with merely being born; it comes as a result of intentional familiarity with the world. In order to be attentive, the poet says you must bear in mind the words of those who are attentive. But being attentive by itself in general does not come to anything. What counts is bearing in mind the
good things which one has heard and gained knowledge of from those who are attentive, while at the same time taking care to steer clear of evil. Abai grieves over the deficiency of people who do nothing other than bear in mind the words of those who are attentive. Abai informs us that a certain scholar of special knowledge and insight (lit. hakim) once said: It is better to tend pigs which can at least recognize you as opposed to wasting your time speaking to the crowds who cannot recognize or understand the word which is being imparted to them.

Those who listened and understood ‘the word’ which was spoken to them were few in Abai’s day, and it is still so now. They do not concern themselves with the words of the attentive, with those who count knowledge their chief obligation and calling, which is why attentiveness itself is one measurement of a people’s social mentality and outlook.

— Word Twenty —

Growing Weary

Abai did not acknowledge asceticism as a way of life. He stood for a life filled with work, everyday concerns and cares. The poet thinks that asceticism does not allow a person to fully enjoy life, to realize the joy of existence as he or she properly should. An ascetic person does not value life in this world; it seems senseless and useless to them.

Without denying the philosophy of asceticism altogether, Abai in this Word thinks of weariness, moments when life seems a burden. A good many things cause people to be filled to the point of satiety. For the most part, there is nothing more or less with which a person cannot be satiated: food,
amusements, fashion, feasts and parties, the desire to excel beyond others, sexual pleasure, etc. Sooner or later, discovering the vanity and viciousness of all that, a person will become disenchanted and indifferent.

"Weariness is the lot of clever people who seek perfection in life, who know the worth of many things, who are meticulous and discerning and can perceive the vanity of human existence. Those who have realized the transitory nature of earthly joys will grow weary of life," says Abai.

A wise person is accustomed to thinking over everything and drawing sound conclusions. The life of a careless person is full amusements and cloudless happiness. The poet ironically notes that thoughtlessness and carelessness are also the qualities of human nature.

The questions Abai asks in Word Twenty find their answers only with the passing of much time. The question is: How to live the right life? Whether to spend time in thinking and searching for the purpose of life, to have a partial attitude toward everything or to indulge in amusements? The answers to these questions can be found in Abai’s poetry. A person has one life and life is short. Therefore it makes no sense to be in constant sorrow, burdening the soul with grave thoughts. Those who are sated with pleasures and disappointed with the shortness of earthly existence finally reject the earthly things and come to God. The world is unstable; human life is subject to change. With age a person becomes weak, they feel their end near at hand. Therefore they change their views, habits and occupation. But I think a person should never tire of searching for truth, nor be satisfied with the level of knowledge they have attained.
Maturity and Pride

Abai identifies two kinds of self-satisfaction, that is, complacency: they are pride and boastfulness. "A person of dignity and honor has a high estimation of their own worth. They will do the utmost to ensure they are not regarded as an ignorant and unreliable person who does not keep their promises, as ill-mannered, arrogant, a shameless liar, a spiteful critic or a crook. Aware of the baseness of these vices, they will aspire to be above them. This quality is unique to a person of conscience, who is reasonable and high-minded. Such a person dislikes hearing people sing praises about them but, on the other hand, they will allow no one to tarnish or defile their name."

To identify who is who, and appreciate them fairly, to speak openly about them is not boastfulness, rather it is the only real opportunity there is to determine who can rule or who might be capable of accomplishing something heroic, said the poet. Praising those who deserve it is a concept which has not yet found its proper place in Kazakh ethics yet.

The role of worthy elders and patriarchs in Kazakh society was special. Respect and recognition from the people came not only with age. A worthy person was known by their qualities, such as decency and honesty. The status of a worthy person played an important role in the life of the Kazakhs. What people of high repute said was taken as fact. A person could achieve a respected status even in youth. Kazibek biy, former judge of the Senior Zhuz, was called Kaz Dauistuh, i.e. Kaz, the one with a strong, commanding voice. He received that nickname when he was young.
Abai speaks of three types of braggarts. The first is eager to gain fame abroad, among strangers. This is an ignorant and unwise person, but they still retain some human virtues. Wishing to be praised by strangers, they hope to be famous among their own people. They do not care whether they have done any good deeds. Though such a person is unwise, still they are human. As a rule, that concerns especially the rulers.

The second type of braggart wants to be famous among their own kin. They wait for praise but do not know what it should be for. This kind of person is a complete ignoramus.

The third is a notorious braggart who shows off before their family or in their native village. This type is the most ignorant of all, losing all grasp on their humaneness, which is why they seek after the praise of their family. However, the one who is praised by their family is shameless because they are master in their family. They are sure they will get the praise they desire by extolling and praising themselves to the skies. This type of braggart is lazy, unwise and weak-willed.

Bragging will give rise to a great many vices: disgrace, ill gain, licentiousness, vanity, falsity, guile, baseness. The worst thing is that a braggart, seeing these vices, does not try to correct them. They care only of hearing praise for themselves whether deserved or not.

Abai in this Word explains the meaning of three ideas: praise, praising the one who deserves it and braging. Each one serves a person differently. "It is difficult to protect oneself from praises," says Abai. There are many proverbs about it. "Praise is half the work," "Praise the worthy, let them be joyful, blame the unworthy, let them turn pale." Abai said praising the one who deserves it is an example to follow.
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To reprove a braggart for their ignorance is to educate the others.

— Word Twenty-Two —

The Poor Rich Ones

When reading the twenty-second Word of Abai we will not find his usual accusations of the rich and expressions of sympathy for the humiliated and offended. To the contrary, it is for this Word Abai was marked out as a mouthpiece of the rich people's ideology. But the thoughtful reader will understand that it has a much deeper sense. In this Word, Abai gives a thorough analysis of the social system and all the layers of Kazakh society. He speaks of his attitude toward each of them.

He says he would have respected a rich person, but there are no truly rich people anymore. "He is not the master of his will and wealth and worthless people of every kind live at his expense." He would have respected a myrza — i.e. a 'sir' or 'lord' in the traditional British-English sense — but now you cannot find a truly generous one. "Their own personal wellbeing is their main concern. They do not care about the people." If we come to the regional administrative chiefs and judges, their power has been purchased not through God's will, but with livestock, thus they are unstable, like the snow which melts and turns to water.

"I could have respected a strong man but I see that everyone among us has the strength to do evil deeds; one cannot find anyone prepared to do good," continues Abai. There is no wise person to honor, for there is none ready to use their intelligence to serve the cause of good conscience and
justice. One and all are quick to guile and treachery. Who else is left? Only feeble beggars whom I might have respected, but they are so lazy they cannot even climb on the back of a camel. And their cunning and grasping at all they can possibly get their hands on will not stop until they ruin others completely.

Whom shall I love and believe on this earth?," asks Abai with bitterness. His conclusion is that we shall pity a peaceable rich person who by virtue of his meekness lives by the saying: "If you want to prosper, avoid discord." Life taught them a lesson: to give away half of their wealth to protect the other half. Yes, they are the victims, but they are meek. Maybe it is them we should pray for?

In these words of Abai we find the answer to the question about those who were rich among our Kazakh ancestors. There was no state mechanism to protect their wealth. They had no rights, only duties. ‘Rich people are a calamity waiting to happen’, concludes Abai. He thinks that Kazakhs should live
relying on the mercy of rich people who have wealth. The role of the rich in the life of nomads was special. They decided their fate, united them into *auyls*, i.e. communities, and coordinated their actions. That is why Abai supports them and feels sympathy for them.

— Word Twenty-Three —

"Given Over to Evil, Can There Be Any Good?"

The Kazakhs are a meek and plain people. The simplicity of Abai's countrymen was that they could rejoice when there was no reason to rejoice or find consolation in things which otherwise would not be counted consolation at all. But this simplicity can play a nasty trick on some of them, developing into such qualities as laziness, weak will and lack of initiative.

It is not important if other peoples have similar vices. Abai does not take note of that. He says some of his countrymen console themselves irrespective of whatever grief has come upon them. The poet writes:

They rejoice when they meet a wicked person or see a wicked deed: 'May God preserve us from that!' But did God say that is enough for them to be better than such-and-such a person? Or perhaps clever people promised they would not be counted among the wicked if they could find someone more ignorant and vicious than themselves? But can you become better by comparing yourself with a scoundrel?
To laugh at a person you think is worse off in some way than you is a sign of ignorance and you should avoid showing such feelings. You should not try to compare yourself with those who are weaker than you, rather compare yourself with the best and then your joy will be justified. The thought that they are better than someone, that they surpass someone should not be cause for rejoicing. Joy should accompany things which are connected with risk.

You should also remember that joy only lasts for a brief moment in time. It can stop a person half way, dim their enthusiasm and even consume their energy. Joy is evidence of some sort of victory, but if you dwell on what is achieved and 'rest on your laurels' you will soon be sick at heart.

Intoxicated with the joy of victory, forgetting that new heights are awaiting them, being complacent, this is what hampers people in their lives. There were many people in Abai's time and afterwards who had this kind of 'psychology of complacency'. It is wide-spread nowadays as well. You should get rid of it because there is nothing good in it.

Looking for the right way to live, Abai considered joy from this point of view. Joy cannot be the foundation of serious matters, it is a passing feeling a person experiences when they dream and see the dream come true. Joy quickly wanes, a person experiencing such a feeling should know that and be ready to press on to do new good deeds.

"Company in distress makes trouble less"; a powerful argument can be made for this popular saying. The social system of the Kazakhs assumed that they should stick together, but this principle invalidated the uniqueness of each individual. The multitude is not the people; it is a crowd. The highest knowledge cannot be attained by everyone, it is accessible only to a chosen few. Only one in a thousand will be found who is
Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli

endowed with genius. A crowd cannot feel it; it obediently follows the person who tells the truth. The problem is that the crowd often does not listen to the words of a wise person, but on the contrary is ready to throw stones at them.

Abai finishes the Word as follows: "Will one who courts a woman win his intended bride if he tells her that all his family suffers from bad breath? Will his betrothed be comforted by the thought that he alone is hers?"

Speaking of consolation Abai expressed his thoughts in the form of questions. He gives the reader an opportunity to think. The poet sees that the old patriarchal way of life among the Kazakhs is dying out, coming increasingly into conflict with the new age. This is the age which puts an individual in the forefront, along with development of the individual capabilities of each person. Word Twenty-Three is confirmation of that.

— Word Twenty-Four —

Kazakh-ness

In this Word Abai thinks about his people, the Kazakhs; he is concerned about their future. He says that the Kazakhs are unlike any other people in showing their friendliness and strength, in boasting or enmity, in their appreciation of art. They fight with each other, spy on each other and steal from each other. Two hundred people contend with one another over after a hundred head of livestock. They spend their days in grudge and slander. If they continue like that they will destroy one another. And who will profit from it? Who will benefit? Unfortunately, there is no one who thinks about such things. Shall we, indeed, continue to live like this, lying in wait for one another, remaining the meanest people on earth?

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Abai addresses these questions to his descendants. He explains them by lack of common interests, by isolation of the people. In spie of their pretensions to the contrary, the Tsarist authorities were not overly concerned with turning the Kazakhs into a civilized people; and there were no leaders among the Kazakhs who could lead the people along the path to a bright future. All more or less educated people dream only of occupying the position of a regional administrative chief or judge; they do not have time to think of the people’s well-being.

This is what Abai grieves of. This is what his bitter thoughts are about in Word Twenty-Four.

--- Word Twenty-Five ---

"The Path I Spoke of was not the Path of Sparing Your Wealth"

Abai says that, for those among the Kazakhs who have received an education in the Russian schools, the knowledge of a foreign language and culture makes their life much easier. The Russian language and culture are keys to spiritual riches and knowledge. They will help the Kazakhs to understand the world, to adopt the achievements of the Russian people because it is by learning foreign languages and assimilating world cultures that the Russians have become what they are.

Do the Kazakhs educate their children for this purpose or do they try to use their literacy as a proof of their own superiority when quarrelling with their kinfolk? Parents spoil their children and lead them astray. Even so, they are far better than those who have not received an education at all,
for their potential is great. That is why the poet offers a piece of advice:

You do not have to get a wife for your son or leave him ample wealth, but you must give him an education, even if you have to part with all you have earned. For if he remains an unlettered scoundrel, who will benefit? He will not be a solace for you. He will not be happy himself and he will not be able to do any good for his own people.

"The future of the Kazakhs is in education. Don’t begrudge the expense! If you want your child to become a genuinely healthy human being, give them an education!,” says the humanist Abai.

In this Word, Abai expresses a great many deep thoughts. According to him, Russian culture and learning opens our eyes to the world. By learning the Russian language, we study the culture and knowledge of other peoples, we become acquainted with Western European culture, we even learn French, German and English through Russian.

Abai is a realist and looks at the world realistically. Learning the Russian language and culture are keys to a world heritage. And that is the most important thing. "For the one who knows this, the world will be brought down to him with much less expense.” The problem is that it is necessary to set aside petty things, forget squabbles and petty quarrels. Such are Abai’s thoughts in this Word.
"The Kazakhs Have No Other Enemies Besides the Kazakhs"

This Word speaks of irresponsible care-free living. Abai criticizes those who are elated like children at any mere trifle. The Kazakhs are elated if their horse wins a race, if a wrestler of their community wins a match, or if their hound or falcon does well in a chase. Is there is anything that gives them greater joy?

Of course, to some extent we can understand the joy of such a person, but those things should not suffice. Abai speaks about the narrow-mindedness of his countrymen, about their tunnel vision. Their world does not go beyond the limits of their own community. They are satisfied with their scarce knowledge, not knowing what real life is, that it is full of meaning and significance. This is difficult to comprehend. He pours out his bitterness on paper seeing that national peoples other than the Kazakhs are the ones who build cities, teach their children and develop scholarly-scientific inquiry and crafts.

"The Kazakh is an enemy to himself," says Abai with annoyance. If they engage in anything, they do so to provoke the envy of others. To stir up other peoples' animosity is contrary to the Shari'a law of Islam as well as one's own interests and sound reason. Abai considers this problem from the position of human values:

Fast race horses are found now in this village, now in that. The strongest men don't all hail from the same village community either. Those who once won, who came in first and once triumphed, these will not remain the fastest and strongest forever. Why then, knowing these things, are
people as vexed as if some vile deed of theirs had come to light? They feel ashamed of what is not in the least shameful, but behave in the most scandalous fashion without blushing.

These are marks of ignorance and recklessness. Agreeing with Abai in principle, we can still object that the only joys of Kazakhs are a fast horse, a good hunting falcon and the strength of their own hands.

There are 'values' and 'joys'. A fast horse and a good hunting falcon are the values. To participate in a horserace or to hunt with a falcon are also types of art. But there is something else that is of value for us. Abai dreams that Kazakhs will possess these values: "Only great fear or death can wean them from their bad habits. You will not encounter a person here who, admitting their errors, will try to correct and control themselves."

Abai is right in saying so. Obstinacy comes from the inability to think and analyze one's actions. The habit of thinking over words and actions is a necessary quality of human beings, but simply declaring 'this is an activity which was undertaken by my forefathers', unwilling to move beyond their traditional ways when necessary, often leads to irresponsible care-free living.

— Word Twenty-Seven —

Great Boundless Wisdom

This Word is a conversation between the great thinker Socrates and his pupil Aristodemus.

Much was written about this famous ancient Greek philosopher, especially by Plato. Socrates was a great thinker
who said that the basis of human beings was knowledge and learning. He gave preference to reason and expressed certain brave ideas which undermined the authority of God, something for which he was punished. Socrates ridiculed those who worshiped God. He discussed with Aristodemus people's serving the Most High in order to understand the meaning of worshiping God.

Ancient Greek philosophers shaped their thoughts in dialogues. They never gave ready truths. They started seeking the truth by exchanging their opinions, seeking advice from each other, but always reserved the right for the reader to think, discuss and choose their own point of view. At the beginning of the conversation, Socrates and Aristodemus spoke of worshiping God and of admiring things created by human beings.

"Well, Aristodemus, do you think there are people in the world whose creations are worthy of admiration?," asked Socrates.

"There are many of them, master," replied Aristodemus.

"Name at least one of them."

"I admire the greatness of Homer's poetry, the tragedies of Sophocles, the ability of some people to appear in other forms. I admire the paintings of Zeuxis."

"If it is so, who then, do you think, is more worthy of admiration: the Most High who created people endowed with reason and a living soul, or one who creates a lifeless human image?," asked Socrates.

"The Most High, certainly. But only if His creations are the product of reason, not pure chance."

In saying this, Aristodemus reveals his lack of faith in the omnipotence of God. He thinks there are many things which God has not created by means of reason. Why should we
worship God then? What God has created for people causes admiration. But human creations also cause admiration because an artist is also a creator, a creator of new things. For example, the poems of Homer, the tragedies of Sophocles and the paintings of Zeuxis depict not only what exists in life, but also what should happen. That is why their creations cause admiration.

Socrates asks Aristodemus: "The world has many useful things. The purpose of some are obvious, while the purpose of others cannot be discerned by their appearance. What do you think: which of them have been wrought by chance and which by reason?"

"Certainly, the things of which the purpose is obvious are created by reason," replied Aristodemus.

"Good," said Socrates. "Creating humans, the Most High endowed them with five senses, knowing they would be useful for them."

Pondering for a while, Aristodemus acknowledged this. He had no doubt that the Creator made His works with great love. Then Socrates and Aristodemus talked about different types of reason.

"How can you believe, Aristodemus, that none save yourself, a human being, can possess reason? How have you become the master of reason? I know you will say: first comes a soul and then reason comes."

Abai, with the words of Socrates, expresses some deep thoughts about reason. First, he believed that human beings did not possess reason alone. Reason comes to humans together with a soul. A soul is the vessel for reason. "It is thanks to the soul granted to you that you have become a vessel of such high intelligence." The soul lives in the heart. So to become reasonable, you should first of all have a heart. If
this is true, that reason comes to the soul of human beings, then it means that reason is outside a person. This should be pondered.

Secondly, if the soul is a vessel for reason, then what is the soul? Why does it enter a person? What is the reason? The animal also has a soul, but it does not have reason.

Third, a human being cannot comprehend the sublime intelligence of the Creator, but they can perceive His greatness and worship Him.

Wise Socrates went on: "You possess a soul and reason. And what of it? You perceive the harmony of the law whereby nature is created, but you cannot comprehend what you see. You are amazed with its greatness and the inaccessibility of its truth only because our reason is limited. That is why you try to understand it. Where does nature come from? What is its origin? What do you think, is nature the purposeless outcome of chance or is it given birth by the possessor of infinite reason, by the force of immutable laws, which wisely coordinated the purpose of all creation?"

Abai often used such words as the Arabic term falam, which refers to limitlessness or boundlessness. Human beings with their limited knowledge cannot understand limitlessness. This idea could be compared only with an idea of limitless Reason, which a person cannot comprehend.

Aristodemus, having agreed with his teacher’s arguments, said: "I do not doubt the omnipotence of the Creator. Yet I do not cease to wonder why the almighty Creator should need my prayers?"

"You are mistaken, Aristodemus. If there is someone who cares for your well-being, you are indebted to him," Socrates replied.
"But I do not know whether he cares about me or not," said Aristodemus.

"Then observe the animals and look at yourself. Do we perceive reality in the same way? An animal cannot build a town, make tools or weapons and become a skilled artisan. Even if animals possessed human intelligence, their outward form would have hardly matched the capacity to toil, to teach arts and virtue. The fact that God endowed humans with high intelligence and placed this intelligence in such a perfect body, combining both spiritual and moral beauty, is proof that God made human beings with loving care. All that considered, is not humankind obliged to worship him?"

Two significant things should given attention here. First, a human being and an animal perceive reality differently. Second, the outward form of a person matches the form which reason needs. It is this harmony which places people in debt to God. This debt can be paid only by offering him worship.

At the beginning of this Word there is a phrase: "Socrates ridiculed those who worshiped God." It surprises us that Socrates, not being pious himself, convinces Aristodemus that it is necessary to worship God. Abai does not offer any explanations. He simply 'throws the problem open'. And he is right in doing so. For the problem is not submission to God, it is in great, limitless reason. Our submission is in acknowledging this great reason, not who says what about it. Whatever the case, there is some great reason. This is truth. There are many disputes over the truth, and many understandings and explanations of it. Abai does not waste his time analyzing them. Through a hakim (i.e. a special wise) word, Socrates relates a magnificent story about reason.
"Are Poverty and Sickness Really 'the Will of God'?

Why is life made in such a way that some are rich and others are poor, some healthy and others sick? There is always a ready answer to that: "Such is the will of God." Each one should bear the load apportioned them by fate. Does it mean that we have to recognize that God, whom we worship, makes people rich or poor, wise or unwise?

Why is it so? We became believers by believing in the justice and infallibility of God, did we not? This is what Abai writes:

It sometimes happens that God bestows riches upon a despised loafer, while some person who worships God and toils honestly lives from hand to mouth and can barely feed his wife and children. A quiet, humble man is often sick and feeble, while some scoundrel or thief enjoys excellent health. The same parents may have one child who is wise and one who is unwise. Does this not contradict divine mercy and justice?

If everything is in the hands of God and is predestined, willy-nilly you are convinced that all your efforts to change or solve things are futile. This theory is called 'fatalism' in the West. Abai does not think that inactivity is the will of God. God says each person needs reason to become a true believer. It is impossible to know God without reason, for he said: "Let those who possess reason know me." Abai concludes:

To grant that God is infallible, while ascribing imperfections and errors to Him, means we keep silence from fear of Him. A just case need not fear the test of reason. God has
created good and evil, but it is not He who performs them. God has created wealth and poverty, but it is not He who makes human beings rich or poor. God has created diseases, but it is not He who makes people suffer from them.

Pondering over these words I understood two important things: First, God, when creating people, gave them freedom of choice. Everyone takes this freedom differently. A loafer becomes poor; one who works hard increases their wealth. Everyone has an opportunity to take advantage of the freedom which God has given them.

The second thought: God has created good and evil so that people could differentiate between them. God did not interfere; you were free to choose either this or that. Having chosen the evil, you have yielded to the temptations of the Devil. "God exhorts everybody to be virtuous and live righteously."

A person lives in constant struggle. All temptations are temptations of the Devil, that is why you should be moderate in everything, subjugate passions to reason and think of your obligations to God and humanity. If you abandon yourself to your passions, having yielded to the temptations of Satan, blame yourself, not God. God is not guilty in your sins; He only forgives them. To know God is to be a true believer. Each reasonable person should become a believer.
Words Spoken in Ignorance

We are accustomed to thinking that proverbs and sayings contain people's wisdom; we piously believe that they contain infallible truth. Abai scrutinizes some these proverbs.

Indeed, a foolish word uttered once remains by chance in our memory and is presented as a pearl of wisdom from the people. "The Kazakhs have a lot of sayings that merit attention, but there are some that do not." He gives some sayings as an example. Of course, we can agree with Abai's opinion or we can choose not to accept his arguments. We should not agree simply because it was Abai who said it. We speak here of the proverbs and sayings that are widely used among our people.

We should take everything that Abai said wisely. Abai did the same. He has never blindly believed the scholars. Abai took only what was useful from them. He could openly express his opinion if he did not agree.

In this Word, he speaks of seven sayings: "If you live in need, forget your shame," "A clever fellow can set even the snow on fire," "You can get anything if you know how to ask," "If your name is unknown, set the field on fire," "Better one day as a stallion than a hundred days as a gelding (i.e. a castrated male horse)," "A treasure chest is dearer than father and mother, but your own life is dearer than a palace of gold."

We might have agreed with Abai's opinions, but we think he interprets these proverbs rather narrowly, understanding them rather literally.
Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli

— Word Thirty —
"Tireless Cheeks Contribute to a Shameless Face"

In Word Twenty-One, Abai spoke of two types of praising: Praising that which is worthy and boasting. In Word Thirty he writes about "boastful windbags." What are they? Abai says: "They lack self-esteem, they are narrow-minded and shallow, without valor, humaneness or conscience." There is an abyss between their deeds and words as that between heaven and earth.

Most often braggarts prove to be ordinary cowards, windbags and pretenders. According to them, there is no one braver than themselves; they do not bow their heads to anyone. But you should not entrust even a minor task to them. The people came up with a saying about them: "Tireless cheeks contribute to a shameless face." You should not take boastful windbags seriously. They are shallow-minded, thoughtless and unreliable people. They are useless. Squabbles, gossips and scandals arise where they appear. Abai called them unscrupulous, dishonest people.

— Word Thirty-One —

Hinderances of Thought

Abai tells us:

There are four means that promote perception and memory. First, you should acquire spiritual firmness and determination; second, you should heed wise counsel attentively and with an open heart, eager to grasp the meaning of what is said; third, you should ponder over these wise words and repeat them over
and over again so as to imprint them in your memory; fourth, you should avoid harmful states of mind and resist them even in the face of temptation.

The second and the third pieces of advice out of these four do not require any explanation. We should ponder over the first and the fourth ones.

With respect to the first one, we can say that a person has a sincere aspiration for truth if they have purpose in their life and strive for knowledge. Purposefulness assumes spiritual firmness and determination. Secondly, if you have a purpose, you should believe in it. Thirdly, firmness of purpose is a sign of virtue, adherence to principle and conviction. A person deprived of these qualities is not able to sense the impulse to learn the truth. Such is the conclusion we come to after reading the sense of Abai's first piece of advice.

The fourth piece of advice is very deep in its sense. The states of mind defined by Abai are: careless sloth, indifference, senseless argument, the inclination to morose reflection and destructive passion. Defining ignorance Abai speaks of careless sloth and indifference. He says elsewhere that: "The salvation of the people lies in a reasonable person who cares about their future." A careless person is an irresponsible person. They are indifferent to what is going on around them. Those who believe in God should not be indifferent and passive, but active, for they come into this world to live believing God. Life is given to them to live in joy and God endows them with power to believe for such. The fate of a person is in their own hands, therefore they should not be indifferent about things. This is what Abai declares.

Abai condemned senseless amusement in all of his works. According to Abai, it is a sign of ignorance. The motto of the
people who revel in senseless amusements is "dining and amusements." There is a place for fun, laughter and amusement in life, but you should be moderate. To overstep the bounds of decency is ignorance; to stay within the bounds of decency is a sign of reasonableness. A person often errs when they fail to determine the bounds of decency.

Abai wrote much about human sorrow. You should not give way to despair until you are completely exhausted. You should be able to resist the pull of sorrow, keeping firmness of spirit while comprehending the bitterness of loss. Not to lose your dignity is a courageous act. To give way to despair when you are in sorrow is not sound or reasonable. To be always careless is not good either. Grief should have reasonable limits, states Abai.

Another important subject is passion. Love and tenderness are accompanied by passion. One should know when to stop. If you are a slave of your passion, you will come to nothing. If you can overcome it and gain victory, you will achieve a great deal.

"These four vices can destroy both your mind and your talent." With such words Abai finishes Word Thirty-One. A very deep thought, and there is nothing to exclude or add.

— Word Thirty-Two —

The Requisites of Learning

Abai considers the word "aspiration" as a philosophical category. Those who seek to learn should understand certain essential conditions without which they cannot achieve their goal. We can consider each of them one-by-one.
An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh People and Nation

First, if you value knowledge as the supreme blessing in life, each new truth you uncover will bring peace and satisfaction to your soul. You should love learning for its own sake and strive for it. "If you have another purpose in mind, such as seeking knowledge with no other aim than getting rich, your attitude toward learning will be the same as that of a person toward something which is not their own." If your heart and soul are set well upon learning, it will bear its fruit in season, it will surrender its riches to you readily." Your attitude to learning should be as that of a mother toward her own children.

Second, study with clear and noble aims, not to acquire learning so as to be able to argue with other people. Now, arguments within reason help to strengthen one's convictions, but excessive zeal for them can only spoil a person. It is true that disputation is one of the paths to knowledge. Beyond mere disputation, however, there are people who give themselves entirely to learning. Such people will be beyond slander, backbiting and revilement. Abai called them hakims, i.e. scholars of special knowledge and insight.

Third, Abai insists, "if you have succeeded in discovering some truth, do not turn back from it even on pain of death. If you do not value your own knowledge, how can you expect recognition from utter strangers?" If you are not confident of your own knowledge, do not imagine that someone else will respect or appreciate it. But if you count what you say an inflexible dogma, not listening to someone else's opinion, that is also wrong. It is not shameful to learn from others what you do not know. This is one of the conditions for people who want to learn.

Fourth, there are two tools that aid the acquisition of knowledge. One is exchange of opinions or 'debate' and the
other is firmness in defence of one’s views. The poet does not go into details because these ideas are taken from Muslim philosophy and when interpreting them you should attentively study their place and role in Muslim philosophy.

Fifth, the poet says to beware of evils such as careless sloth or idleness, which he mentions in Word Thirty-One. Abai also mentions them in Word Nineteen when he speaks about indifference.

And finally, Abai says to develop character because human character is a vessel containing knowledge and intelligence. "To attain your goal you should foster constancy of purpose, determination and strong will." Determination and strong will are the basis of genuine character.

— Word Thirty-Three —

Behavior that Hinders the Kazakhs

Wealth diminishes with time, but trade does not. He who sells the fruit of his labor without trying to deceive is considered saintly by the people. Yet "those on whom God has bestowed some skills will not avoid certain vices either," says Abai. He lists them in this Word. They are:

1. Lack of initiative. Complacent, such people do not improve their skills by seeking to learn from better artisans. This is their main vice.

2. Laziness. This vice is connected with the first one. There are people who imagine themselves to be rich and successful, and so become lazy, boastful and careless in their work.
3. Bragging. By succumbing to flattery and exaggerated self-confidence a person wastes their valuable time and lets a sly flatterer take advantage of them.

4. Eagerness to make friends. There are certain people who are eager to make friends of any kind. Trying to please others, they will waste their time and run into debts, they will get into quarrels because of these debts. They will live in want and disgrace.

Reading Abai’s words about the eagerness to make friends among the Kazakhs, you automatically recall their former lifestyle. Hospitality was always a notable quality of the Kazakhs. Certainly hospitality is a good thing, but only when it is kept within reasonable limits. How can one understand the beginnings of mastery over our nation, over our land through foreigners who, eager to be guests, came flowing to the Kazakh nation as "guests" and, little-by-little, began saying "the place of honor is mine"? The Kazakh’s rightful acceptance of the sentiments of those who were well-meaning, or the intention to do so, was this 'respect'? And if not, what did the Kazakh people do to have themselves esteemed, saying ‘we hosted those who came’ in numbers to great to applaud.

We can also speak here of one other manifestation of hospitality among the nation’s people. They will share their food and clothes with a guest; they will feed them and give presents to them. Now imagine the same herdsman as a guest in the city. The poor wretch will not even find a place in the hotel, not to mention a hearty meal. These are our morals. Following the old traditions and customs, the people in the village and other community settlements (lit. auyls) do not typically build hotels or canteens. Probably this problem should be given some attention.
Abai completes his thoughts with the following words: "Why does all this happen? Because those inclined to deceive others often themselves fall prey to deception." More than a century has passed since the time when these words were written. But have we in our day gotten rid of these vices mentioned by Abai? We, still like children, can be deceived. Is there some way we can be spared from our naivety and simple-mindedness?

— Word Thirty-Four —

Matters of Life and Death

This Word touches upon the philosophical topic of life and death (cp. Word Nine). Everyone knows that humans are mortal, that death comes not only to the aged and that, once someone passes away, they will never be brought back. People are aware of this, but their humility and resignation to fate do not come through deep reflection. Abai was seeking an answer to this question.

People want to know the truth. They say they believe in God who calls everybody to account when they die. Abai does not trust their words because, on the one hand, they say they seek the truth and believe in it, but on the other hand, they believe in fate determined by the Creator as well as in His punishment.

Humans die according to the will of God and, according to His will, a person should avoid evil and strive for good. This is not coming to faith by knowing the truth, but only the acknowledgment of fate.

You can simply believe in the Creator and His power, but there exists another faith that comes after the truth is opened.
A person proves the truth and then firmly believes in it. Abai doubts that Kazakhs are sincere believers. He says if they truly believed what they say, they would act accordingly. "He who seeks to avoid torments in this world and the next should remember one thing: there cannot be two joys, two passions, two doubts and two sorrows in one’s heart simultaneously. This is impossible. He who places earthly sorrows above the cares and joys of the world to come is not a Muslim."

Who can be called a true Muslim? Can we call a true Muslim a person who chooses earthly joys, knowing that life is short and hoping for God's forgiveness?

"People are brothers. How do you know whether you will live five days or not? All people are each other’s guests; people themselves are guests in this life. It is not good to envy another’s happiness and quarrel because of wealth," ponders Abai.

Abai condemns people who are unable to put two words together meaningfully, devoid of sound reason and education. A Muslim, according to Abai, is one able to think freely, unconstrained by religious orthodoxy, a person who recognizes other religions and considers that the main principle of Islam is the brotherly love of people. His thoughts confirm this.

All people are alike. Life gives to each one of them both joy and grief. Everyone has one life. No one can avoid death. A person should be a Muslim, living their lives believing in Almighty God. But how can this be achieved? There is no answer to this question. A true Muslim will prefer the joys of eternal life to worldly pleasures, otherwise they will not be called a true Muslim. People should understand that they are guests on this earth, that they are mortal, therefore, during their short life they should do good deeds and live in peace and
accord. But seeing that life is different, that people live fast and refuse to lead a righteous life, Abai is indignant. He blames them for their frivolity.

The subject of Abai's pondering contains the topics of world philosophy, but there is no clear answer to these questions. These have been philosophical problems since the earliest of times.

— Word Thirty-Five —

To Call to Account

The one who will receive an accounting from human beings for their actions is the one and only Most High God. The hajjis (i.e. those who have successfully completed the hajj to Mecca), mullahs, sufis, martyrs and zhomarts (lit. 'generous ones') will give an answer for their deeds to God. He will set aside those among them who, during their lifetime, served and did good works only to earn respect and the good things of life. He will separate them from those who desired only to serve and please God.

To those who praised Him out of selfish interest He will say: 'During your earthly life you served me only for the sake of being addressed with deference. But this will no longer be so. To achieve that, you have had to put to use a great many skills. Your happy life has come to an end, and so has your power over people. You will not be honored here, but called to account for all you have done. I granted you life and bestowed wealth upon you, but how did you make use of them? You used everything to benefit yourself; you have deceived people under the guise of concern for the afterworld.'
It is difficult to answer these questions because people need both this world and the next one. A person comes into this world, lives, brings up children and enjoys earthly pleasures. You cannot exist without this world. That is why it is difficult to turn your back on earthly joys. God has created the world so that humankind can continue its existence on this earth. Can we blame a person for their love of earthly pleasures? Are they guilty for not living a worthy life? In reality, they are. They are guilty for having forgotten God and pursued a life of vanity.

God blames the hajjis, mullahs and sufis who, taking God’s word as refuge, made fortunes for themselves. Abai looked at this problem more broadly. Which truth do the people need? In Word Thirty-Eight Abai says that life is truth. If the hajjis, mullahs and sufis had told the people how to live, that would have been real truth. But they, preaching God’s word, yield to temptation themselves. They live in sin and indulge in earthly pleasures.

To those who served Him truly, from the heart, he said: 'By all your life and all your deeds you have endeavored to please me. I am content with you. A place of honor has been made ready for you. Perhaps you will meet friends whom you have helped or those who supported you by their good intentions.'

Who particularly belongs to this group of people is unclear. Obviously they are few in number. There may be religious workers among them. But you will not find those who lived in sin and dissipation among them. Honest and industrious people who do not forget God will be rewarded.

In this Word, Abai expounds upon the religious books he studied. He does not express his attitude toward them, assuming that people may have a different attitude toward what is said. On the one hand, the reader might draw the
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conclusion that religious workers undermine faith in God by evil acts. However, Abai is not against all religious workers because religion cannot exist without them, he is only against those who think only about their own well-being, using God’s word as a smokescreen.

Second, we think the poet is wrong when he sets together the hajjis, mullahs, sufis and zhomarts ('generous ones'). For example, to become a hajji it is generally accepted that you must be wealthy enough; a mullah should, likewise, be educated. The sufis cannot be compared with mullahs. A real sufi is one who denies earthly comforts and lives in monastic style as a hermit, spending all their time with God. The generous are willing to donate their wealth to people and live as God instructed. In the religious books such people are valued higher than hermits and religious devotees. They will live in the Garden of Eden, i.e. Paradise. God is known by His generosity and magnanimity. He is merciful to those who follow His way.

Third, Abai speaks of purity of faith. A true believer is one whose faith is unselfish. There are no specific generalizations or precise conclusions. Abai shares his thoughts. He talks to the reader leaving them to draw their own conclusions about faith and preachers because not all of them are righteous. People know that and God knows that. Everybody will answer to Him on Judgment Day.

— Word Thirty-Six —

"What Exactly Is Shame?"

In the Hadith (i.e. the officially recorded 'extra-canonical' tradition of Muhammed's life and sayings outside the Qur'an),
it is recorded: "He who is without shame is also without faith." Kazakhs have a saying: "He who has shame has iman or faith." Abai tries to define what shame is. We referred to Abai as a hakim, by which we mean one who searches out the reasons for all things, a scholar of special knowledge and insight. When we look at the way in which Abai searches out the cause of shame and offers an analysis of it, we would place Word Thirty-Six, not within the Islamic tradition of narration (i.e. naklia), but in its tradition of research (i.e. gaklia).

Indeed, then, what is shame? Abai defines shame as follows: "There is a shame which arises from ignorance. It is akin to the timidity of a child who is shy in uttering a word or approaching a stranger even if they have done no mischief." People who are guiltless with respect to their own conscience but are ashamed of what they should not be ashamed of feel troubled and make their life complicated. This is a sign of ignorance on their part regarding what true shame is.

It seems to me that the kind of shame which is born out of ignorance is connected with a person's own limited understanding, with the state of their mind and emotions. As Abai says, a person of limited reason and shallow thinking, of restricted emotion and feeling, is not a healthy one. The essential meaning of shame is not to cover the face and get uptight over something which should not be done, it is to find one's own place in the world, living a productive and active life, saying the things you intend to say without being intimidated, leaving behind a trail of deeds which neither you nor your descendents will regret. Actions and behavior such as laziness, reluctance, cowardice, unbridled behavior and irresponsibility are the things which shame born from ignorance is made of.
Therefore, accepting the rule of the Prophet that "where there is no shame there is no faith" and the Kazakh proverb "whoever has shame has faith," it cannot be said that shame is strictly something negative. There is also shame of shame, i.e. the need to be ashamed for feeling such a false sense of shame. The shame born of ignorance which Abai speaks of has nothing to do with faith. On the contrary, the two are mutually set in opposition to one another.

With respect to faith, Abai encouraged an understanding of true shame. According to him, "such shame is of two kinds. One is when you are ashamed not of anything you yourself have done, but upon witnessing the shameful conduct of someone else, a stranger. The reason for this is because you are sympathetic toward the person who has committed the shameful act." The ability to be ashamed of someone else's deeds is a genuine human quality. It means that you love people and have high moral qualities. It is true that any person can commit wrong actions, but the observation of this wrongdoing by others and the shame which they feel should be a warning and a lesson for them in the future.

"The other kind of shame comes from your own wrongdoing before your own conscience, which you may have committed in error or inadvertently."

Abai, defining shame, says that you should forgive a person who repents of his wrongdoing and is ashamed. Only a magnanimous person can do that, one who has experienced such feelings themselves. Abai said he did not see such people around him. People who do not know shame cannot be called true believers. Shame and faith are indivisible in Abai's opinion. Values common to all humankind form the basis of Abai's humanistic poetry.
This Word, unlike others, does not have a specific subject. Word Thirty-Seven consists of twenty-three aphorisms; most of them have become popular expressions and are used in everyday life as proverbs and sayings. For instance: "However good a thought, it is tarnished by passing through human lips," "A father’s child is an enemy to other people. But a child of humankind is your dear brother," "A good person may ask much, but will be content with little; a despicable one will ask much, but will not be satisfied even if they get more than they asked for," "Those who work for their own benefit alone are like animals that graze to fill their stomach; but those who work to fulfill their human duty, the Most High will distinguish by His love," "If you want your labors to be successful, start the job in hand wisely," "High office is like a high cliff; the slow snake will crawl up it and the hawk will swoop down on it," "A common person renowned for their wisdom is greater than a king who has been raised up by good fortune," "A youth who sells their handiwork is worthier than an old man selling his beard," "A beggar with a full belly is the devil incarnate," "A false friend is like a shadow; when the sun shines on you, you can’t get rid of them, but when clouds gather over you, they are nowhere to be seen," "Be frank with those without friends; keep on good terms with those who have many," "Beware of the careless person; be a shield to the destitute," "There is no use of anger without power, love without fidelity and a teacher without pupils."

Proverbs and sayings make our thoughts and speech more colorful. Using them a person can make their arguments more convincing. Time-tested proverbs acquire a sense of common
truth and become axiomatic. Not everyone can produce such proverbs.

People express their inner thoughts in the form of proverbs. We use those sayings which are simpler in meaning and more readily understood more often than those which are not. Thus, the proverb "There is no use of a teacher without pupils" is widely used among the Kazakhs. But we do not often use the proverb "A beggar with a full belly is the devil incarnate." If a person is satisfied, if they have clothes and shoes to put on, but like to complain about their poverty in order to get something more for themselves, they lack of spiritual principles. They cannot be counted as a servant of God. Such people lived in the time of Abai; there are such people among us these days as well.

"Beware of the careless person," says the poet-sage. And he is right because only a careless person can always be free of trouble and worry. How can they know the price of genuine joy if they have not known sorrow? Joy and sorrow are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other. Abai warns about excessive joy and unbounded sorrow. A person should know how to control these emotions and frames of mind, otherwise they can become crafty designs of the devil.

Abai is an expert on human nature. He writes: "Love without fidelity is of no use." He does not speak of the feeling of love, he ponders over the notion of love. Where there is no fidelity, there is no love. But to know true love, one should have an idea of infidelity. A person has love for God; a girl loves a young man; a child loves his father and mother and so on. Love is born in the heart. Cold rationality and reason kill love. If love were based in reason it would have lost its main feature — fidelity. It is impossible to comprehend human thought. Reason makes a thought ingenuous. Intuition gives
constancy to reason. We believe that reason is constant; reason is boundless. The wise compare it with an ocean. I would compare reason with a river. Static reason cannot be called reason; scholars would call it a 'dogma' or 'doctrine'.

If yesterday's truth appears to be a lie today it is not a real truth. In this case, intuition comes before reason because reason is restricted without intuition. Abai's words "there is no use of love without fidelity" speak of reason based on intuition.

Besides these proverbs and sayings, Abai lays the foundation for certain philosophic terminology. He speaks of the term "multitude," saying "all of the evil in the world is in the multitude, but the most interesting and entertaining things are with the multitude as well." When he speaks of the "multitude," it is in the sense of a "mass" or "throng" or "crowd" of people. "Who poisoned Socrates and crucified Jesus? The masses, the multitude. The multitude is devoid of reason. Seek to direct them onto the path of truth." Abai raises a problem here, one which is important in our day as well. If you thoughtlessly follow the multitude, ultimately it will not result in anything good. The Soviet Empire established its political authority declaring that its policy was the policy of the masses, but its legs were not stable. If reason is God's light, it does not shine on everyone, only those chosen. And God's chosen then brings light to the multitude. This has occurred in all time periods; it is a law of history.

Abai expresses another idea of deep thought: "Until your garden is grown, everyone desires what you desire, and you desire it too; after your garden is grown, you alone desire it." Indeed, while you are working to achieve your success, most people feel for you and are compassionate. But that only continues until you achieve what you wanted. Then their
attitude changes because you have outdone the masses. The one who is dragging behind in the caravan envies you. This is one part of it.

Second, to be envious of a person who is happy and successful is part of human nature. Envy is like black and white, it has its good side and its bad side. The good is that the person upon whom happiness has rested is motivated to take heed to themselves and be responsible for their actions. The bad is that, for the one who is envious, a binding rope, as upon a horse's two front feet, is placed upon the pastures of their mind and a wound is placed upon their soul. That is why if you have achieved something in your life, you must rely mainly upon yourself, on your own reason and will. Your destiny is your own hands and you should keep a firm hold on it.

This is how Abai understands and explains one of the more complicated aspects of human relations.

--- Word Thirty-Eight ---

Life Itself is Truth

The Thirty-Eighth Word is most noted among those Words of Abai which are more difficult to understand. We can say that many thoughts of this Word are expressed in Abai's other Words and poem-songs. For example, his poems "Both God himself and His word are true" and "Saying the word 'God' is easy" are very close to Words Forty-Three and Forty-Five in their content. The poet's discourse about God and humanity expressed in those other Words comes across more accurately and convincingly here in Word Thirty-Eight.

The 'Word' is a special genre. It requires very accurate interpretation. In its form and content, it is close to a
philosophical treatise, which is why Abai places an emphasis upon logic in the foreground of his Words, displacing figurative speech, which is used more often in his songs and poetry.

To comment briefly on this Word, we should first comprehend its main idea: "Life itself is truth. Where there is no life, there is no consciousness." This is a concise, clear idea. The key of all issues is life. Only after we have life is it possible to have a meaningful discussion about other things.

God, human beings — these notions cannot be considered apart from life itself; they are directly connected with it. In general, we can say that the term life expresses the unity and integrity of existence. Since there is life, there is understanding of God and reflection upon humankind, and there is love, which represents the very essence of a human being.

Abai sets forth his ideas regarding prophets, saints and hakim scholars, i.e. those he considers to have special knowledge and insight. His first word on these subjects is dedicated to addressing the essence of the Most High God. "The Most High God himself is the way of truth," he says. The idea of human scholarly-scientific inquiry and the knowledge it brings indicates knowledge and acceptance of the veracity of this truth, a passion for God himself. This is not the knowledge of God. Knowledge which comprehends the wisdom of all things is the knowledge of God. Human scholarly-scientific inquiry and knowledge makes one passionate for knowledge of God. But above all, one should come to love God. Abai counts those who have given themselves to the pursuit of knowledge via human scholarly-scientific inquiry as those who pursue the truth, who pursue the way of God.
We know that knowledge is one of the attributes of the Most High, and love for Him elevates a person. Those who pursue such knowledge for personal gain, for base, selfish aims can never attain the heights of knowledge; they have neither love for God nor love for the true knowledge of life.

"Do you believe that He is great and powerful?," asks Abai. "God is great, and He will not suffer from your lack of faith. Your faith is necessary first of all for your own self. It is you who needs it, not God."

Abai spoke of faith in Word Thirty, that is why there is no need to ponder it here in further detail. Here he reflects on faith (iman) in a bit of a different way. Those who profess Islam should know wherein the truth of iman lies, for faith is not simply blind worship. "Do not despise the foolish idea of whether you are able to be like the Most High, you will not be like him; it is not a matter of being exactly like him, but in following after him." This is a provocative idea which has not, up to this point, been encountered in Abai's Words. Abai said previously that scholarly-scientific inquiry would help us to learn the truth. Here we have the Most High God in place of scholarly-scientific inquiry. "Make it your aim to to be like God," says Abai. "You, О child of humanity, are a servant of God, but if you are truly a Muslim and given over to God, then make it your aim to become like Him."

It is clear that the Islamic religious leaders will not like or accept such a statement. But Abai goes beyond the bounds of Islamic religion on two points. First, in Islam, there is no permission granted for anyone to liken themselves to God. The Prophet, Rasul, is a mediator between God and humankind. If you are going to be like someone, be like the Prophet, not God. This is the traditional teaching of Islam. As for Abai, however, he has not warned anyone regarding the
necessity for such a distinction. According to religion, a human being's freedom is restricted. The activities of people can be carried out only in accordance with the will of God. Abai 'tosses out' this dependence of human beings before the Most High. When he says that a person can strive to become like God, he switches over to a discussion about the limitless opportunities and capabilities of humans.

It is in this light that Abai reflects upon eight of the attributes of God: Life, Knowledge, Power, Will, Sight, Hearing, Word (or Speech) and Creation. The Creator has endowed human beings with these eight attributes of Himself, though not in the same absolute perfection. They are displayed depending on the person's abilities. Therefore, the idea of likening oneself to God is not a cause for shock or amazement. Once again, in this case, Abai is a reformer.

Are we, then, Muslims if we possess these eight attributes in significant measure within our stature? Of course not, because God has no need of such attributes, it is we who need them; they are necessary for our understanding of who he is. We can never know God completely, but through these eight attributes we know only that he himself has been known. From its very sources the essence of God is perfect, there is not even one among scholars who can make their wisdom attain to His. Abai explains this by saying that: "the Most High is without measure, i.e. infinite, but our wisdom is finite. It is impossible for the finite to know the infinite fully." We say: 'God is one, God exists', but the declaration that God is one is a word spoken on behalf of but one aspect of the concept of God for our scholarly-theological inquiries. Otherwise, the declaration of God's oneness is not worthy of the Most High, that is, it cannot be taken to fully express his nature and being.
To the point: we cannot comprehend God with our own wisdom because our mind and understanding of nature are finite. Finite reason and unbounded truth, these two notions make it impossible to fully perceive God. We should have a clear idea of God in our intellect, otherwise there is no conception of the Most High of which to speak. But since we know God only as He manifests himself to us, none of us can know Him in His completeness. We say: "God exists," but these words are not notions which reveal His essence. We cannot understand their full depth or true meaning.

Similarly, we cannot give preference to any of the eight attributes of God because He manifests them all equally. Besides these attributes, God also has the following names (or attributes): Merciful (Rakhman), Compassionate (Rakhim), Forgiving (Gafur), Loving (Uadud), Protecting (Hafiz), Coverer of Guilt (Sattar), Doer of Good (Rasak), The One Who Prospers (Nafig), Representer, Advocate (Uakil) and, finally, Beneficent, Lowly (Latif).

In knowing God, Abai used two methods: a method of demonstrating truth called naklia, which relies upon previously fixed expressions or declarations that have been passed down from former times, and gaklia, which relies upon human thought, i.e. reason and wisdom. Enumeration of God’s names is naklia. As for gaklia, it is knowledge of God’s power through wisdom and reason. According to Abai himself: "My evidence of gaklia is that the Most High created this world interdependent, so that one thing follows from another, from things other than those created that human wisdom cannot comprehend. He created those things which have a soul, i.e. life, from those which have no soul or life, and, likewise, created those souls endowed with wisdom from those things possessing souls. The beasts are exempt from the
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Last Judgment, while humans are endowed with reason and their dominion is over everything upon the earth. That God has created humankind capable of answering for their deeds on the Day of Judgment bears witness to His justice and love for humankind.

Abai thinks it is fair because God endowed humans with love and dominion over nature. "The Creator put human beings on two legs, He has placed their head high so as to enable him to behold the surrounding world, and not let them crawl on all fours, as the beasts do to get their food. He endowed humans with two arms and two hands in the service of their heads; He gave them a nose to enjoy fragrant scents; He provided them with eyes so as to see and behold, eyelids to protect the eyes, lashes to stop the eyelids from rubbing together, and eyebrows to stop the sweat from trickling down into the eyes from the forehead; the tongue has been given to allow humans to communicate, to understand one another and work together. Does this not testify to God’s love for humankind? But if someone loves you, are you not obliged to reply in kind, that is, to love them in return?"

To the point: what we mean by faith (iman), that is, what we mean by serving or, in common Islamic language, being 'a slave' of God, is to pay one's debt of love. Human beings are indebted to God to love and serve him. Those who do not understand this have no faith and no wisdom. A wise person has faith.

But how should we understand such an idea? There are a lot of people in the world who are endowed with wisdom and yet profess a different religion; they worship another god and proclaim another faith besides Islam. Abai explains this in his own way. He demands something different from Muslims who profess Islam. He explains Muslim faith through the notions of
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love and justice. Where there is violation, there can be no Muslim faith says Abai. In order to demonstrate his proposition, he quotes several verses from the Hadith tradition: "Think of what God has given to us," "If you love God, He also will love you," "Command people to do good deeds, to practice doing good, for God loves those who do good," "Such people have faith in God, they do good deeds, their place will be forever in Paradise." Thus Abai explains that whatever is outside of justice is a departure from the way of God, it is faithlessness. When we come to know God, our eyes are opened to the fact that he is compassionate, just and powerful. Humans possess knowledge, compassion and justice and their three attributes. Those three attributes are discipline, Muslim faith and philanthropic humanitarianism. The combination of these qualities is harmony.

The prophets possess the above qualities and so do the saints, as do the hakim scholars, i.e. those of special knowledge and insight, as well as mature Muslims. Abai considers the acts of the first three. The prophets teach people to be patient and humble and call them to follow God's path. The three qualities mentioned above are intended for service unto the Most High. They were preached by the prophets and brought to light with love by the saints. Yet their love is concerned only about life eternal beyond the grave. They have either forgotten about earthly joys or never paid attention to them. The hakim scholars, however, think of and care about life in this world. They teach people to live to be useful for themselves and others.

Whom should we follow and whom should we obey? Speaking of the qualities listed above, Abai expresses his opinion on this matter. He does not acknowledge the way of asceticism and those who renounce earthly joys. He said: "If
humankind had chosen the path indicated by the saints, the world would have fallen into desolation and decay. Who then would have grazed the livestock? Who would have made clothes and who would have sown wheat? Who would have repulsed the enemies and extracted the riches from the interior of the earth?” Renouncing the good things of this world is not God’s path, says Abai, because they were granted to humankind by the Creator. Therefore, to renounce them means to renounce faith in the justice of God. It is a different matter if we suppress our desires when and where it is necessary. But complete rejection of the pleasures of this world is not the way of believers. It is a sin to escape from life and avoid the good things of this world. Strict abstinence from the good things of this world is not the way of Muslims. God gave people animals to satisfy their needs, to breed them and take care of them; to make some good of it is an act approved of God. If there is no thought of living in this world, the people and nation would have been cut off from their nationhood and become an easy prey for unbelievers, the world would have fallen into complete desolation. For this reason, Abai declares: "Life itself is truth."

Abai notes that not all of the saints abandoned the world in the same way. He offers some examples for that from the world of Islam. But, in preference to the prophets and saints, Abai’s passion remains fixed upon the hakim scholars, those of special knowledge and insight: "Had there been no such people, the whole world would have gone to rack and ruin. Their activities are directed towards well-being in this life for, as it is said, earthly life is a field tilled for the life after."

To profess that the hakim scholars are superior to the prophets and saints is counted as a departure from religion. Such a view of things does not stand in agreement with the
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tenet of Islam which declares: "God is one, the Prophet is (the bearer of) truth." It is possible that the religion of the scholars be multiple and various. Such an idea leaves one bewildered. Can the scholars be of one faith, one religion?

To the point: If we recognize Abai as a scholar, then doubt can be cast upon his Muslim faith in the traditional sense of that term. He counted himself a Muslim. He gave several proofs for that fact. First, in Word Thirteen, we noted that there was something said regarding conscious faith (yakini iman) and blind faith (taklidi iman). Blind faith is when people come to faith listening to those who simply tell them God's word. Scholars, on the other hand, try to understand the meaning of God's word and explain to people their understanding of it. We call it conscious faith (yakini iman).

Thus, to comprehend the meaning of God's word, to understand how to protect and strengthen one's faith in Him, is yakini iman (conscious faith). According to Abai the notions "(standard) scholar" and "hakim scholar" have different meanings. Not every standard scholar is a hakim scholar, but every hakim scholar is a standard scholar. A standard scholar is a person who possesses the knowledge which was gained before him through careful study. The teaching of the standard scholar is naklia. A standard scholar gains knowledge of the world, he familiarizes himself with it and teaches within that domain. Only those, however, who look for the cause of all phenomena and objects are worthy of the title hakim. This is what differentiates a hakim scholar from a standard scholar, saint and prophet. Abai spoke in different terms regarding the hakim scholar. God has not created anything in the world without reason. Therefore, Abai says: "The title hakim is given to those who search for the cause of all phenomena." This is the difference between the hakim scholar and the standard
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scholar as well as the hakim and the prophets and saints. The hakim cannot comprehend the truth in its entirety, however, because such knowledge belongs to God alone, it is his secret.

So then, Abai’s statement that he is a true Muslim should be considered in a different way. Abai’s definition of a true Muslim is contrary to the definition given by orthodox religion. Because a genuine search for the truth carries one beyond, that is, outside the bounds of simple faith. Simple faith in the omnipotence of God is preached in traditional religion, so there is no need to look for the first reason of the phenomena. Abai, on the contrary, looks for the reason of coming to faith.

Second, Abai defines a true Muslim as follows: "Their reason leads to a true and conscious faith; their righteousness is to perform good deeds for other people." Abai calls such people hakims. They are true Muslims. What faith do they have? What religion do they profess? These questions have not been given answers until now. Everyone who professes his faith has drawbacks. It brings dissatisfaction, whether hidden or open. Where is the religion that gives only joy? Abai thought that religion needed to be reformed because he himself was a hakim looking for the reason or cause of things. He took nothing on simple faith, but sought to understand the causality of various phenomena and then, only after proving a truth, started believing it.

But Abai has never completely denied the prophets and saints. The saints, mediators between God and humankind, fight for the purity of body and soul. They play a special role in religion. In Abai’s understanding: "earthly joys give light to reason." Be this as it may, it is not surprising if the attractions of the world lead a person astray. Abai warns of the desire to distinguish oneself and raise oneself above others because that
spoils human nature and causes excessive bragging, jealousy and envy. It is good, of course, to strive to achieve something; it is a good quality. But if it leads a person to openly brag about themselves, it is sheer ignorance and foolishness.

Abai also raises moral problems, a kind of 'code of honor'. He gives expression to this in the form of naklia, that is, he relies on knowledge which has been attained beforehand by others. He speaks of three vices that spoil a person: ignorance, sloth and wickedness. "Sloth is the worst enemy of humankind. Mediocrity, lack of will power, shamelessness and poverty are born of laziness."

In conclusion, Abai speaks of worship. In doing so, there is no gaklia, that is, no real effort to get to the root of the matter, only naklia (see Word Seventeen on naklia and gaklia). Abai himself senses this and ends saying: "Enough then, we can be satisfied with what we have said here."

— Word Thirty-Nine —

Two Merits of Our Forefathers

This Word contains deep thoughts about the national character of the Kazakhs. Abai, comparing the character of his forefathers with his contemporaries, confesses that his own kinspeople are more advanced than their forefathers, but says they lack two characteristics, or merits, which their forefathers possessed. And because of the lack of these two merits, the integrity of the Kazakh community is unable to advance any further. We are departing farther and farther from the foundations of nationhood and have begun being given over to inhumane ways.
What kind of characteristics, or merits, were they? One of them is that in earlier times there were once people known as national and group (or community) leaders. They set in order and oversaw all the affairs among the people and nation. The people trusted in their national leaders and tended to their own business. The proverb would be quoted: "When everyone is his own judge, people cannot live together in a spacious mountain; when a community has a chief, no one will get scorched in a flaming fire.” Likewise, the people would declare to their rulers 'we have given you two bridle reins and one tethering rein for the horses’. Once these words had been spoken, the national leaders and community leaders never decreased in stature, but were held in respect by the nation from that time forward.

In addressing this matter, Abai suddenly exposes the roots of a major problem. It concerns the social structure of the Kazakh ayl, i.e. the community grouping into which Kazakhs were arranged. The Kazakh ayl consisted of blood relatives, therefore, if the ayl (or community) leader was not out of his mind, he was certain to repent whenever he failed to take the well-being of the community to heart. If he failed to be integral in his dealings, there was no easy or quick way out, sooner or later he would have to face his own kinspeople and answer to them.

But why did the Kazakhs find themselves cut off from these two merits in Abai’s day? Because now on the Kazakh land the authority of national affairs was no longer in the hands of the Kazakh national leaders, it was in the hands of the orchestrator who was proposed and elected by those over them through the participation of Russian officials, and the trial and punishment of people, along with other civic affairs, was subjected to the will of the Russian officials. Since they were no longer a nation
who ruled over themselves, inhumane ways began to infiltrate the Kazakhs. The community of people who were able to comprehend 'the Word', those who were able to reflect upon 'the Word' decreased. In place of the national leaders and community leaders those eager for their own gain, cunning and crooked ones sprang up in clusters like mushrooms after the rain. The character of the people broke to pieces.

For this reason, the word known as 'honor' (or 'dignity') which was associated with the Kazakh ancestors fell to the ground and lost its meaning. This is the second characteristic, or merit, which has fallen into decay in the present time. But when the names of the ancestors are called upon, says Abai, the Kazakhs do not quarrel with their kin or remember offenses, but give themselves for the sake of their people.
is honor and dignity. For this reason the people say: "Even if there is a dispute among brothers, they will not forsake one another."

The poet grieves that these two merits have started falling into decay among his contemporaries. You can only be amazed at this reflection of Abai, the wise one, for it is a window on the Kazakh world of that time. It was a time when, in an age precisely as the present, unavering and unchanged, these merits did not exist, so that the act of calling them to mind itself was an item of news, like something previously unheard, as in the present day. Most of those who are national leaders and community leaders today, as in Abai's day, are officials determined and elected from above. Those coming forth by virtue of their own wisdom in support of the cause of the people are but few. There is hardly any honor or dignity to be found, we have been cut off from it: "The friendship of those in the present time is not sincere, it is deceptive, their status as enemies is not merely an annoyance, it is that of those unable to sit in either rivalry or peace," says Abai.

— Word Forty —

Questions

"Who will answer my questions?," says Abai. He then proceeds to ask twenty-one questions. Not taking time to list each one of these questions, I have rather pondered why Abai chose this way of addressing his readers. Asking questions and answering them is one of the ways of ascertaining the truth. Abai poses questions, but he does not answer them. That is a traditional method of getting to the root of the matter because
sometimes the content of the question is more important than the answer to it. We can consider here some of the examples.

First, a person who tries to learn what they do not know asks questions. A child starts coming to know the world by asking questions and getting answers to them. A question gives rise to truth; that means that a person asking questions understands the thought-provoking nature of life. Second, a question is given as a test. In this case, a person who asks a question knows the answer. This technique is used in education. A teacher asks a pupil; a parent asks their child questions. Third, there are questions that assume a great many answers.

Abai asks questions which do not require clear-cut answers, but rather cause discussion, meditation and healthy forms of debate. It is important to be able to demonstrate what you are saying, to convince others that you are correct in what you say. The Kazakhs say: "Only a dishonest person can dispute a great word." A great word, in this case, is the convincing argument in the dispute when the truth can be proven.

Very often the answers to the questions can be very short, consisting of one or two words. The Kazakhs have questions intended for one-word answers. People have given preference to brevity. They think it is more accurate and colorful.

Abai’s questions could be answered in accordance with the present time and situation, but in general it is impossible to give irrefragable answers to them.

There is a Kazakh word surak (i.e. ‘question’) and a word ‘surau’ (i.e. 'to call to account'). A person asks questions, but God calls to account. The first condition of understanding life is to know how to ask questions. When God calls a person to account, his task is to determine that person's humaneness.
Watching people’s vices, exposing their sins and drawbacks and revealing discrepancies between their ideals and actions, Abai asks questions.

The importance of these questions is in the ability to answer them by thinking deeply and developing forcible arguments.

--- Word Forty-One ---

Power and Wealth

According to Abai, a person who is concerned about the future of the Kazakhs must possess two advantages. Without these advantages it is impossible to persuade a Kazakh that there are more useful things in life than their daily concerns, to convince them of something unless you frighten or bribe them.

First of all, that person must wield great power and immense influence that would enable them to inspire fear in adults to release their children to go to school. Second, they must possess enormous riches, so as to bribe parents into sending their children to school. Yet no one has sufficient power and no one has enough wealth to win the parents, therefore their children remain ignorant, regrets Abai. "The ignorance inherited from their forefathers and imbibed with their mother’s milk has reached their marrow and killed all humanity in them," said Abai in bitter despair, realizing the hopelessness of the situation. And we understand his bitterness and sad thoughts. Having lost their independence and former greatness, and having no ruler who would be concerned about their future, the Kazakh people were doomed to stay ignorant.

To become enlightened, first of all, means to become free. The growth of social contradictions marks the start of a
people's struggle for independence. But Abai does not raise such problems in this Word.

— Word Forty-Two —

Laziness and the Lack of Work

"One of the causes of the Kazakh's inclination to vice is indolence," says Abai. He often wrote about it in his poems. If a Kazakh worked the land or engaged in commerce would they live an idle life? No, they would not have free time. But they neither work the land nor engage in commerce. "Instead, convinced that a rich person possesses wealth while the soul belongs to God, they ride from auyl to auyl, that is, from community settlement to community settlement hoping to eat and drink and enjoy themselves at someone's wedding; they drift about and do nothing." Abai thus blames the Kazakhs for idleness.

If we consider the reasons of their indolence we face a big problem. The Kazakh society in Abai's times was in a state of confusion. First, having become a Russian colony and lost its sovereignty, the Kazakhs did not need to defend their land. They led a peaceful life. But if in previous times daily laborers, women and children were engaged in cattle breeding, now the former warriors-defenders also became the masters in their households and had to do the same. A lot of free hands appeared. The young people had nothing to do in the community settlement. The elder people tended a herd; they were not accustomed to work the land; they did not know commerce and they were not experienced in it. Indeed, there were people who tried to work the land and learn commerce, but they were few. That is why "they leave their livestock to
the care of their neighbors asking them to keep an eye on them. They are unable to overcome the temptation of taking part in secret plots, gossip and petty squabbles. They will engage in all kinds of nasty intrigues and dirty tricks. They give themselves up to idle chatter, scrounging and roaming around." It became their habit because bad habits quickly spread among the multitude. You cannot but believe the truth of Abai’s words.

"Today people do not value high intelligence, a good reputation or wealth; the ability to scribble complaints and the cunning to twist somebody round one’s little finger — this is what is respected." According to Abai’s caustic remark such a scoundrel can easily ingratiate themselves with the simple-hearted rich person by a bit of sweet talk: "'You just say the word, and I’ll go through the fire for you!’ And then, sometime later, without lifting a finger, they will be well fed and clothed and enjoy general respect. The rich person does not attach importance to what is going on under their nose, fully confiding in the scoundrel, because they seek to gain insight from them, to keep themselves informed. They want to be aware of everything, to know the prices at the market, etc. And when the scoundrel bows and scrapes for fear of losing the rich person’s confidence, the rich person takes on face value whatever they say, because they have become accustomed to gaining insight from them on whatever occasion they may have need."

Although aware of such circumstances, the authorities were not in a hurry to change anything. To the contrary, it suited them well. It was easy to manage people who wallowed in squabbles, enmity and complaints. This is a favorite method of imperializers and colonizers. Knowing that, scoundrels and rogues feel freedom to support the flame of enmity and incite
people against each other. Parties at enmity seek justice from a tsar; they scribble complaints to the officials. This was the worst trait of the Kazakhs; it was soaked into their heart and soul.

It should be noted that there are two aspects of idleness. First, when the number of people exceeds the volume of existing work. That happens even to more developed countries; this is a law of nature. Second, when there is no steady work. Abai speaks of two aspects of idleness, but he speaks in more detail about the second one.

— Word Forty-Three —

**On Soul and Body**

Human beings are endowed by nature with a body and a soul. That, of course, has been known since well before the time of Abai. The poet says one should know which of their properties are innate and which are acquired by toil. The need for food, drink and sleep is natural, instinctive. The desire to see and learn something comes from a natural instinct as well. Intelligence and learning are gained through work. The sensations received by the five organs of the senses are ordered in the human mind according to a definite pattern and produce a certain imagery.

Mental aptitudes occupy a special place. Abai calls them the vigor of the human soul. At first these shoots are very frail. People must cultivate and amplify these aptitudes, for without due care and attention, they wither and become useless or die. But the Kazakh has a ready excuse for this: "What can I do if God has not given me brains?" or "God has not made us equal, you and me." That is how they try to justify themselves. Such
people want to justify their ignorance and passiveness. They try to shift the blame for their idleness onto God. But such only reveals the weakness of their heart and spirit. People should satisfy not only their biological needs but also think of their spiritual health, that is, develop their memory and strengthen their mind.

Abai says the power of the human soul possesses three special properties which must be treasured and cherished, for without them a person becomes an animal. Regarding the first one, he seems to have read literature about it in Russian, which would explain why he calls it a ‘driving element’, i.e. a force which helps us not only comprehend what is seen and heard, but also to vividly perceive cause and effect. Second is ‘the attractive force of the like’, because when learning something new, people often begin to compare it to other similar things. The third property is called ‘sensibility of heart’. You should manage to keep your heart from four vices: conceit, covetousness, frivolity and carelessness. The impressions that you receive of this world will be clearly reflected in the mirror-like chastity of your heart. These impressions will be long remembered. But if you do not preserve the purity of your heart, the mirror of your soul will grow dim, and everything will be blurred and distorted in it. All of these ideals are related to psychology, so we can say that Abai was familiar with psychological works.

Pondering the power of the human soul, Abai thinks that everything gained by work, all that lies outside you, should be called wealth. Unless you know all the problems and details of managing a household, you will find it hard to keep your goods. Wealth is an external sign. That is why people say: "Riches are a calamity waiting to happen." But it is equally hard to keep the spiritual wealth that you have gained —
intelligence and learning, which, incidentally, may cause considerable harm as well. Unaware of that, you may easily forfeit what has been acquired. Abai also warns of excessive enthusiasm for scholarly-scientific inquiry. There should be a measure to everything. All that is excessive is evil. The wise men of old used to say: "In what we seek too persistently we find evil." To have a sense of measure is to avoid such evils as lust for power, anger, etc.

Reason distinguishes that which is beneficial from that which is harmful; yet even the force of reason cannot vanquish evil. Only those who unite in themselves the force of reason and the force of will can succeed at that. Those who possess these two qualities have spiritual and physical power, says Abai.

— Word Forty-Four —

**Berikeldi!**

**On Admiration and Approval**

In Word Thirty-Two Abai noted the requisites for learning. In the same Word, he spoke about idleness, inactivity and passivity with respect to learning. Learning has various forms and they are not always profitable in relation to one another. According to the poet's explanation: "Whether a person is learned or unlearned, nonetheless it does not render unnecessary the need for praise, approval or acceptance, which is indicated in Kazakh by the expression berikeldi, meaning literally "you've come toward or near me," which is to say '(I think) you've done well'. Whether merited or not, a person will always search for encouragement through someone who will say to them 'berikeldi'. Regardless of which path in life one
takes or where one chooses to go about their lives, they will be companions or partners with others on the same path, with those dwelling in the same place. They are not interested in hearing berikeldi from those on a different road in life. If someone says berikeldi to me, it those who are with me as companions or partners who say it.

What, then, is the meaning of the world berikeldi? Abai has used it as a distinct term. Berikeldi is essentially praise. Abai spoke of praise in Word Twenty-One. There he laid bare two types of praise. They are 'greatness' and 'arrogant pride'. If a person does something genuinely good and desires to hear some sort of praise or words of approval for it, then you cannot really blame them; what they have done is praiseworthy. If, on the other hand, a person sits around waiting for praise, but does not know what he should be praised for, then this is called arrogant pride. Abai considers commendation (barekeldi) in the light of the deeds which people do. People are valued by their actions. If they are respected and honored among the company they keep; then this is the highest recognition of their merits. And it is this value of which Abai spoke. Thus, praise and approval from the people who walk alongside you in life indicate the recognition of your professional and human qualities. The praise coming from the flatterer or fawning subordinate, i.e. 'brown-noser' or 'bootlicker', will do nothing but harm.

According to Abai, the majority of people in the world desire to possess power or wealth at any cost. But we cannot say their intentions are good because good intentions are born out of a pure soul. When Abai speaks of the purity of the soul, he means not only the thirst for knowledge, but also our common human qualities. A person of high moral standards strives for things of pure and noble aim. To praise such people
for purity of thought is not flattery and servility, but a fair appraisal; praising the worthy is an expression of our admiration and approval – berikeldi!

— Word Forty-Five —

A Sense of Justice and Love

Abai interprets the notion of 'God' very broadly. Abai says that, although people have, for thousands of years, come along believing in various religions, all of them have known the one 'Great God' and rendered him service (or worship). For that reason, all the various religions are merely ways and means of finding the one 'Great God'. But for all religions, the issue which they all must face is Justice and Love.

Natural beauty in Kazakhstan, in the Alatau Mountains above Big Almaty Lake.
Photo © Yumiko Weller
The true way of God is recognition of the one 'Great God', i.e. monotheism. For that, we should not just acknowledge the Creator, we must be a lover and passionate desirer of him, we must yearn for and sense his wisdom and knowledge.

What is of highest value in life is not the kind of riches or power which places one person above another, but a sense of God's wisdom. God's wisdom is justice and love. Without a sense of such qualities, there is no life. If one possesses a sense of these attributes in fuller measure, then they will be learned and wise. Knowledge and learning cannot issue forth from the human soul. Knowledge and learning come about by having a sense of the world beyond and then observing with the eyes and perceiving through reason the things of this world. This kind of philosophy is sometimes considered a type of 'pantheism' in the West, but the 'pantheism' of Abai has its own special character. In this case, the concept of God is taken as a quality, with his wisdom being the precept of humaneness, while the one in the world who senses him explicitly, who is familiar with him and acts on his behalf is a human being. When put this way, the issue is not about God, but about the nature of human beings. It is not a person's servanthood to God, but the wisdom of God which has been given to human beings – this is what is taken as the foundation of things in Abai's worldview. With respect to human beings, they must sense God's wisdom, this will free them from their servitude to God. To sense God's wisdom is to walk in the way of God. And for that, the senses necessary for people are justice and love. These are the primary precepts of humanism or humaneness, i.e. of being human.

With these thoughts, Abai has transcended the bounds of one religion, of one religious worldview and entered upon a system of thought which is fit for humanity. When Abai says "Love all humanity, calling them your brothers and sisters," it reveals the loftiness of the thoughts he speaks.
Obviously I have followed the literal rendering of the original title into English, but have adapted it to communicate to the English-speaking Western academic audience. Also, regarding transliteration of Kazakh, permit me to quote here from endnote 5 in Weller (2006:215-6), *Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood*, because I am following again "the 'Weller Arbitrary System' and not any standardized system. Our reasons for this are simple: no single world standard has yet been developed. Anyone who knows Kazakh well enough to read and understand it should be able figure out the actual words lying behind the transliterations in 98% of the cases and will also know how they should be pronounced and who or what they are referring to historically, etc. If they do not and are really in need of knowing a term here or there or clarifying a source, they can drop us an email [ca-nationhood@ara-cahcr.com] or do their own homework. Those who do not know the language will not need to concern themselves with the whole problem anyway. And beginning or intermediate students should not expect this kind of book to help them struggle through their own problems of limited grammatical knowledge; other works are designed for that, including our own 450 pp book entitled *Казах тилини грамматикасын иңерге / Using Kazakh Grammar*. Unfortunately, variants of Kazakh and Central Asian terms in English are numerous across the scholarly world; we will try not to increase them and will likewise strive for consistency of transliteration within this work."

Note that this process has not yet been completed for the First Print Release (Inhouse), April 2007. Some of the quotes of Abai's material used in the First Print release are taken from D. Aitkyn's English translation in Seisenbai 1995.

Proof of this is to be found e.g. in comparing the English translation of Yesenberlin (1999), *The Nomads* (translated by Oleg Chorakaev; Almaty: The Ilias Yesenberlin Foundation) Book 1, Part 2:1, pp. 103-105, which is based upon the Russian translation, with the original Kazakh (Есенберлин, 1999, *Көшпеншлер*). The deviations between and the respective impressions as well as information received from the English and Russian versus the Kazakh are quite different. See also endnotes 10, 11, 37 and 38.

We should also take care to distinguish the present English translation's use of two versions of the same work from the problems encountered in the science of textual criticism when multiple manuscripts, including translations, of classical and other historical writings are involved, such as those of Homer, Herodotus, Plato, the Judeo-Christian scriptures, the writings of Al-Farabi, Zhusip
Balasaguni (i.e. Yusuf Khass Hajib), etc. The essential difference should be clear to the thoughtful and informed reader.

Note that equally on both sides of the fence attempts have been made by some Muslims (and others) to try to force the transliteration and use of particular religious terms which occur in their 'sacred vocabulary', as for example 'Allah', in other languages and, in like manner, attempts have been made by some English-speaking Christians to try to forbid the use of particular terms which occur in their 'sacred vocabulary', such as 'God', to be used by other religious groups, including Muslims. Both of these approaches only breed greater (potential for) religious conflict and alienation. This problem has been noted, for example, in connection with ongoing conflict between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. While important distinctions between the world's various religious traditions most certainly do exist, the idea that we cannot and/or should not share certain vocabulary is extreme (cf. 'extremism'). I am in essential agreement with S.H. Nasr (2003:4), Islam: Religion, History and Civilization, on this point, who notes that: "Arab Christians and Arabized Jews in fact refer to God as Allah, as do Muslims. The Arabic word 'Allah' is therefore translatable as God, provided this term is understood to include the Godhead and not identified solely with Christian trinitarian doctrines." The same basic argument for 'non-exclusivism' could be applied, both historically and presently, to the use of the term 'Allah' in Arabic and even other languages around the world, such as Kazakh, where the Arabic term has been absorbed into the local-national vocabulary.

Ж. Касымбаев, "Кенесары Касымулы бастаган казак халыкынын үл-азаттык козгалысы" ["The National Liberation Movement of the Kazakh People Commenced by Kenesari Kasimuhli"]. In Э. Нысанбаев, бас редактор. 2002:302.

Alexander II's reforms have been compared by some with those witnessed during the much later Gorbachev years under the Soviets (see e.g. David MacKenzie and Michael W. Curran, 1999, A History of Russia, the Soviet Union, and Beyond, 5th Edition, p 299ff).


In M.K. Kozibaev, ed., 1998:81, History of Kazakhstan: Essays. К. Аманжолов, 1999:5, Тұрғы халықтарының тарихы [A History of the Turkic Peoples]. 3-том, makes ref. to Peter the First's passing visit through Astrakhan and his declaration there regarding Central Asia being "the key and gate to the lands of peoples of the whole of Asia," giving "Казахско-русские отношения в XVI-XVIII веках. т.1:
Алма-ата: Наука, 1961, стр. 31" as a reference. Along with Yerofeeva, for a good general overview of "The Russian Conquest and Rule of Central Asia," see Ch. 15 by that title in Svat Soucek, 2000, A History of Inner Asia. See also chapter three, "Russian Conquest and Administration of the Kazak Steppe," in Steven Sabol, 2003, Russian Colonization of Central Asia and the Genesis of Kazak National Conscious, pp 25-52. Sabol, in another later chapter, briefly treats Abai in the context of his times in relation to other Alash movement figures on pp 62-64. Note, by the way, that I have slightly corrected some of the English grammar from the original quotation of Yerofeeva in the main text.


11 P. Сейсенбаев, редактор, 1995:134-35, Абай: Крассвз [Abai: Book of Words] (English version, Seisenbaev, 1995:146-7). The English here is a direct translation from the original Kazakh. It differs significantly from D. Aitkyn's translation in the 1995 English version of Abai: Book of Words because his translation was based on the Russian translation, which itself already has problems. Whether, then, the problem lies in Aitkyn's English or the Russian which he based it on is difficult to say. ...Concerning Aitkyn's translation here, it reads: "One should learn to read and write Russian. The Russian language is a key to spiritual riches and knowledge, the arts and many other treasures. If we wish to avoid the vices of the Russians while adopting their achievements, we should learn their language and study their scholarship and science, for it was by learning foreign tongues and assimilating world culture that the Russians have become what they are. Russian opens our eyes to the world. By studying the language and culture of other nations, a person becomes their equal and will not need to make humble requests. Enlightenment is useful for religion as well. ...Russian learning and culture are a key to the world heritage. He who owns this key will acquire the rest without too much effort." Aitkyn's latter phrase "acquire the rest without too much effort" might capture the sense of Abai's "dunie arzanirak tusedi," but it not only somewhat eclipses the direct one-for-one connection intentionally made by Abai of the entire "world" ('dunie') with "the world's keys," it also misses the connection with the larger context in which Abai is urging his Kazakh people to "Fear God, be ashamed of [your] sinful human nature [lit. 'pendeden oyal']; if you want your child to be a child, educate him, do not spare your livestock!", i.e. 'do not be selfishly concerned for the expense!' In direct connection with this larger context, we have rendered Aitkyn's "achievements" as more literally "profits" (or perhaps "benefits", Kzk. 'paidasi'; 'achievements' is typically 'zhetistiktter' or perhaps
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'tabistar'); Abai again seems to be intentionally playing off the whole problem of 'expense' in education. Thirdly, a clear difference is seen in Aitkyn's "make humble requests" and our "plead [for help] and be debased [with] exceeding shame." Whether due to Russian and/or Euro-American aversion to it it is not clear, but his rendering certainly does not capture the strong sense of 'honor versus shame' which is common in Kazakh society and is surely operating here in Abai's 'Word'. A less important note would be that we have followed Aitkyn in rendering the term "enlightened," which is literally "opened" ('ashilu') on the first occasion, but not the second when it is 'bilgendik' ('Knowledge'). Other variations in Aitkyn which depart just a bit too far from the original at times can also be seen by simple comparison..." (Quote from Abai in main text and above endnote are from taken Weller 2006:200, 236-7).

12 Сейсенбаев, Роллан, редактор, 1995:185-86, Абай: Кррасез [Abai: Book of Words]. (The translation is my own, directly from the original Kazakh...) (Quote from Abai in main text and endnote are from taken Weller 2006:200-1, 237).


14 See e.g. Shirin Akiner, 1995, The Formation of Kazakh Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State (Brookings Institution Press). First, with respect to 'tribal divisiveness and disunity' among the 'pre-modern' Kazakh 'nation', note that in Dr. Yesim's asking "[w]hat kind of unity can there be among a people who have fallen into subjection to another power and who, as a nation, no longer rule themselves?" he implies that a healthy, substantial measure of unity existed in the Kazakh 'nation' prior to the coming of the Russians, i.e. in the 'pre-modern' national era. Note that the Kazakhs historically were grouped (as opposed to 'divided', the 'divisive', i.e. 'disunified', sense of which Western writers tend to emphasize for their own cultural and/or socio-political purposes and agendas) into three zhuz, with the term zhuz often being translated rather precariously as 'tribe' or 'horde' in English works. Such translations offer some limited help in moving toward a better understanding of Kazakh society and its structure and organization into three traditional zhuz, but they are loaded with Western cultural ideas and values closely connected with ideas of 'primitive', 'barbarian', etc, which themselves are too closely associated with European interpretations of African, American Indian and Australasian 'primitive tribal peoples'. These views were and even still are based upon 18th-19th century Western anthropological and philosophical approaches (cf. e.g. Hegel's idea of 'progress' in relation to 'historyless, cultureless peoples', especially as employed by Lenin,
Stalin (and company) which interpreted the historical development of human society and culture in a linear 'progressive' fashion, seeing it 'advance' from 'primitive' stages into more 'developed' stages with the Western peoples and nations, of course, representing the more 'advanced' people of the earth and the Asian, African and other peoples being consigned to represent the world of 'primitive tribal and barbarian' peoples. Such views, in modified modernist form, continue to undergird Western approaches to Central Asia and beyond. See Weller, 2006, *Rethinking Kazakh and Central Asian Nationhood: A Challenge to Prevailing Western Views*, chs 3-5 and 7; see also A. Abdakimuhli (Әбдәкимұлы, 1997:94), who notes: "One unfortunate thing is that a good number of present-day historians are still unable to rid themselves of the falsely convincing opinions which have been soaked into their heads through the writings of the middle centuries, particularly the chronicles of Ancient Russia. According to them, nomads do not adhere to the religion of Christianity, and so [you] cannot even place them on a level with human beings. They are even ascribed as being the offspring of demons and devils who suddenly came forth from hell on the day humanity came into being." Cf. M. Khodarkovsky, "'Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects': Constructing Non-Christian Identity in Early Modern Russia," S. Layton, "Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery," A.L. Jersild, "From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire" and B. Grant, "Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia," all four of which are contained in Brower and Lazzerrini (1997:9-26, 80-100, 101-114 and 292-310 respectively), *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*.


16 *Abai: Book of Words*, 1995 (Lublyana, Slovenia: Tiskarna Ludsko Pravitsa), pp 16 and 6 respectively. Note that the two parts of the quote at the beginning and the end respectively actually form one text on p 16. I have slightly altered the original order here to bring two separate quotes together for use in my own new context.


19 Words Thirty-Eight and Thirty-Four respectively.
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20 From 'Word Thirty-Eight'. Interestingly, A. Kasabek (Касабек, 2002:230) suggests that: "With respect to the issue of worldview, Abai, like I. Altinsarin, was closer to Deism." While I myself would not use the term 'Deism' to describe Abai's worldview, Kasabek's reason for making such a statement is understandable and seems to be aiming at the sense indicated in the main text. Namely, as Dr. Yesim emphasizes, Abai was an avid proponent of the idea that religion had everything to do with and, indeed, could only be useful if it remained connected with daily life in the real world. He believed in taking full responsibility for our own actions and their outcome. You might say he believed wholeheartedly in the English adage: 'Do not be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good'. Applying the term 'deism' to this sense might, however, lead to quite a different understanding of things. It should be noted in that regard that Kasabek does not say Abai was a 'deist'; only that he was 'closer to deism'.

21 Old Chagatay was a precursor to modern Uzbek, the language of the great medieval Naqshbandian Sufi writer Ali Shar Nawai, 1441-1501.


25 As beautiful as the words themselves are in their original poetic flow and rhythm in Kazakh, the music and its mood, so somber and moving in tone, also does much to give the song its wide appeal. Lyrical poetry is very hard to capture in translation, especially when the musical score is lacking, and I have made no real effort here to try and make my translation follow the original music. That would be quite another task.

26 From 'Word Thirty-Eight' and 'Word One' respectively.

27 To avoid any misunderstandings here, the translator's own personal faith commitment and perspective is based in the Christian tradition broadly and ecumenically interpreted, with the concept of the latter statement in the main text being drawn from the 'Inzhil', i.e. the New Testament writings, 'The Gospel of Luke' (chapter 2, verse 14). Apart from that, while not necessarily its primary aim or purpose, the current book promotes, as part of its overall
integral message, devotion to the one Creator of humankind and peace on earth to those of good will via the Islamic tradition. While it is not the translator's or ARA's intention to participate in religious proselytization on behalf of Islam or any other faith tradition, it is most certainly the privilege of the translator and ARA to participate in genuine, stimulating and even edifying interreligious and intercultural dialogue by helping make important historical and contemporary sources of Central Asian (as well as East and West Asian) scholarship available to the English-speaking world.

8 'Centuries-long trot' employs a clear Eurasian nomadic perspective on the movement and flow of history, one thoroughly embedded within and saturated with at least 3000 successive years of the greatest nomadic empires and civilizations known in human history, including the Scythia-Saka, the Huns, the Turks, the Kipchak and, of course, the Kazakhs, Kirgiz and others. Even after intentional socio-political efforts to 'wean' the Kazakhs away from their nomadic lifestyle, including Stalin's "collectivization" campaign in the early 1930s, strong vestiges of Kazakh semi-nomadic life remain clearly visible at the dawn of the 21st century in Kazakhstan.

29 The endings *uhli* (улы) and *ev/ov* which appear on the end of Kazakh names are Kazakh and Russian forms respectively, both meaning essentially 'son of' and typically appended to the end of Kazakh names in this fashion. As indicated by the Russian form, this ending was most commonly appended to the end of the family name, a tradition which seems to have come to the Kazakhs via Russian influence. More traditionally and historically, the Kazakhs, like many Middle Easterners (cf. *ibn*) and many others, used their father's names as the 'family' name, meaning that the 'family' name would change with each new generation. In cases where two or more people might wind up with the same name and it became necessary to clarify exactly who was who, they would simply repeat the custom back another generation with respect to the grandfather, the greatgrandfather, and so on. This custom was connected with the tradition of *zheti ata*, i.e. 'seven (fore)fathers', which each Kazakh was expected to know and be able to recite in various social situations when required, including marriage. There has been a trend toward revival of this custom using the father's name in the post-Soviet era. Thus, one encounters Kazakhs who use their father's name along with the ending *uhli* ('son of') or *kizi* (кызы, 'daughter of') as their middle name, so to speak, while retaining the Russian-style family name. Others simply replace the Russian ending with the Kazakh ending on their Russian-style family name. As for my choice of usage here, why I have replaced the Russian endings with Kazakh ones in most cases, yet retained the Russian endings in some cases is not entirely an arbitrary matter. Generally, I
have tried to follow the Kazakh trend in restoring the Kazakh forms of names in cases of historical personages. Based on my own admittedly limited knowledge, Magzhan Zhumabaev's family name has typically been left in its Russian form in Kazakh. The same would go for Mukhtar Auezov's name which appears in the following paragraph (above in the main text). There is, however, Kazakh precedence for restoration of the family names of the other figures, and that again is what I have tried, however inadequately or arbitrarily, to follow. One might argue that the Russian forms were actually used in the Kazakh edition of Dr. Yesim's book, that is true. But it was written in 1994 and the reader can rest assured that Dr. Yesim has no qualms with a move toward restoring the Kazakh forms of Kazakh names.

30 An English translation has been published as: Mukhtar Auezov. 1975. Abai: A novel. 2 vols. New York: Progress Publishers. (There is also an abridged version in one volume available.)

31 This statement should be understood within the larger context of Abai's life, namely that, as mentioned in the Preface, he did not 'eschew the affairs of government and state' in his earlier years, but served as an administrative government official between 1875-78, i.e. ages 30-34. The entire first 'Word' is describing Abai in his later years.

32 Compare-contrast Abai's thoughts here on education with those near the end of Word Five as well as with the whole of Word Twenty-Five and Word Forty-Three.

33 See Word Twenty-Five where, in Abai's view, "learning Russian language and culture are keys to a world heritage."

34 The dates given here for the reign of the various khans are based upon Койгедиев, М., К. Алыпов. "Қазақстан, тарихы" [Kazakstan, Its History]." In Б. Аяган, бас редактор. 2003. Қазақстан улттық энциклопедиясы [Kazakh national encyclopedia]. 5-том (Көкшетау-Кожа), р 278-300.


36 The author has chosen, in his commentary, to focus on Abai's reflections on death which are intimately tied to his being a Kazakh and loving his people. The title of this Word, based on the author's commentary would almost seem better rendered as something like 'A Kazakh View of Life and Death'. But the title 'This is Who I Am, I Am a Kazakh' is true to Abai's original Word.

37 The original title of this 'Word' was: "The good of a child is your desire and good pleasure, the bad is your grief and sorrow." It was quoted from Abai, as
given in the main text below. The Kazakh is much more concise and easily avails itself for use as a short title; the English rendering simply does not.

38 In further illustration of my point in the Preface regarding translations of Kazakh works into English via Russian, D. Aitkyn's translation of this passage from Abai Russian reads: "Leaving an heir, what does it mean? Are you afraid there will be no one to look after your property? What kind of treasures have you gained to regret so much? A good child is a joy, but a bad one is a burden. Who knows what kind of a child God will bestow upon you? Why do you ask to shift your sufferings and dreams that have not been realized onto the weak shoulders of your child? Will he or she be able to bear such a load?"

39 This 'Word' should be understood within its Islamic context as elucidated by S.H. Nasr (2003:87-8), who notes that: "To understand ...the Islamic tradition better, we turn to the terms islam, imam, and ihsan, all of which are used in the text of the Quran and the Hadith. The first means "surrender," the second, "faith," and the third, "virtue" or "beauty."

40 See endnote 10 above regarding the Kazakh term zhuz and the Kazakh people's historic grouping into three zhuz.

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English Sources:


Auezov, Mukhtar. 1975. Abai: A Novel. 2 vols. New York: Progress Publishers. (An abridged version is available in one volume. An English version was published in Moscow in 1960; whether the 1975 U.S. version is a reprint of that or not is unknown.)


Grant, B. "Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia." (In Brower and Lazzerini, eds., 1997:292-310; see biblio info above.)


Khodarkovsky, M. "'Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects': Constructing Non-Christian Identity in Early Modern Russia." (In Brower and Lazzerini, eds., 1997:9-26; see biblio info above.)

Layton, S. "Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery." (In Brower and Lazzerini, eds., 1997:80-100; see biblio info above.)


Appendix One:
Select List of Publications by/about Abai Kunanbaiuli

(As listed in chronological order by Акметов, А., Э. Нысанбаев, Т. Шанбай, "Абай." In А. Нысанбаев, бас редактор. 2000. Туркстан халықаралық энциклопедия [Turkistan International Encyclopedia], p 13)


Abai termesi [Songs of Abai]. 1916. Orinbor, Russia.


Abai Kunanbaiuhlining tangdamali ulengderi [Select Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. 1922. Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlil: Tolik zhinagi [Abai Kunanbaiuhlil: The Complete Collection]. 1933, Kizilorda, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining tangdamali ulengderi [Select Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. 1934, 1936 and 1939. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining shigarmalari [The Writings of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. Vol 1. 1939. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining shigarmalari [The Writings of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. Vol 2. 1940. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining tangdamali ulengderi [Select Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. 1943, 1944. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining shigarmalarining bir tomdik zhinagi [The One-Volume Collection of the Writings of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. 1945. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining tangdamali ulengderi [Select Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhlil]. 1946. Almaty, KZ.

Abai Kunanbaiuhlining tangdamali ulengderi [Select Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhli]. 1952. Almaty, KZ.


Abai Kunanbaiuhlining anderi [Songs of Abai Kunanbaiuhli]. 1954. Almaty, KZ.


Abai Kunanbaiuhlining shigarmalarining tolik zhinagi [The Complete Collection of the Writings of Abai Kunanbaiuhli]. 1957. Almaty, KZ.

Zhirenshin, A., ed. 1961. Abai Kunanbaev: shigarmalarining bir tomdik tolik zhinagi [The Complete One-Volume Collection of His Writings]. Almaty, KZ: Kazakting Memlekettik Korkem Adebiet Baspasi. (Note: This edition alone contains fuller bibliographic info than provided in Akhmetov, Nisanbaev and Shanbai because it was made available via a retired Kazakh scholar in Almaty. It was said by her to be the standard critical edition, though I would suspect that the later 1977, 1986 and 1995 editions have since superceded it; cf. note on the article by Beisenbai below.)


Select List of Publications by/about Abai Kunanbaevli

Other works:

Auezov, Mukhtar. *The Way of Abai*. (See biblio info in main 'Bibliography' above)


Seisenbaev, Rollan (See biblio info in main 'Bibliography' above)

Yesim, Garifolla. (See 'Bibliography' above as well as select list of author's publications below for several important works on Abai, including *Hakim Abai*)
Appendix Two:

Select List of Publications by Garifolla Yesim

*G. Yesim has published over 300 books, articles, essays, etc, including the following select list given in chronological order:


**2003. *Proshloe v nastoyashchem [*]*. Almaty, KZ.


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