

A Sufi of the Order of the Naqshbandis was asked:

'Your Order's name means, literally, "The Designers". What do you design, and what use is it?'

He said:

'We do a great deal of designing, and it is most useful. Here is a parable of one such form.

'Unjustly imprisoned, a tinsmith was allowed to receive a rug woven by his wife. He prostrated himself upon the rug day after day to say his prayers, and after some time he said to his jailers:

' "I am poor and without hope, and you are wretchedly paid. But I am a tinsmith. Bring me tin and tools and I shall make small artifacts which you can sell in the market, and we shall both benefit."

'The guards agreed to this, and presently the tinsmith and they were both making a profit, from which they bought food and comforts for themselves.

'Then, one day, when the guards went to the cell, the door was open, and he was gone.

'Many years later, when this man's innocence had been established, the man who had imprisoned him asked him how he had escaped, what magic he had used. He said:

' "It's a matter of design, and design within design. My wife is a weaver. She found the man who had made the locks of the cell door, and got the design from him. This she wove into the carpet, at the spot where my head touched in prayer five times a day. I am a metal-worker, and this design looked to me like the inside of a lock. I designed the plan of the artifacts to obtain the materials to make the key - and I escaped."

'That,' said the Naqshbandi Sufi, 'is one of the ways in which man may make his escape from the tyranny of his captivity.'

there is much information hidden within ordinary things. the prayer had a purpose beyond what the jailers could see. it was instructional, instrumental, not the typical "prayer" we know in the west, not a laundry list of wants; book ended with praise and thanks, but a design within a design. a transformative process, for after the man escaped, he no longer needed the rug...

plans within plans, design within design...