

but not have an opportunity of entering into the desert sea itself—unless I exposed myself to the risk of crossing it in two directions.

The snow soon changed into drizzling rain, and as soon as it became rather thinner I went up to the spring of Mulkabad. A path runs up to the little gully, and in an expansion concealed behind a wall of rock lies this jewel—a sweet spring in the desert. The water trickles out of the ground, and the herdsmen have dugged a basin and strengthened its edge with a breastwork of small stones. In the uppermost and largest basin, which is oval and has a surface of about 85 square feet, the water bubbles up and is reinforced by a small rivulet from a spring situated higher up. The basin is fairly deep, so that the water, when it has stood and cleared, shows a beautiful bluish-green tint. Below this basin are two others, and from the lowest a tiny rivulet descends through a chasm which opens on to the large expansion of the dell. A sill has been formed in the solid rock, over which small threads of water fall with a pleasant splash. Long icicles hang on the upper rim of this tiny cascade. The salt in the water is deposited below in thin white crystals; and on both sides, as well as at the spring itself, a little grass grows. Beside it two long walls are erected, where the herdsmen dwell when they pay the spring a visit. Camel and sheep droppings and shreds from their coats, as well as marks of fire, show this.

But not only shepherds resort to this happy spot where the little spout of water rises into daylight. Wild asses also come here, through the acquired and inherited experience of unnumbered generations familiar with the places where water is to be found, be they ever so well hidden among the hills scattered about at random. The ketkhoda had admonished us to take notice of the wild asses' spoor, if we should be short of water, for if they converged together towards a definite direction, we might be sure that they led to some spring. I had availed myself of this method before, namely, in the year 1901, in the Lop desert, where on two occasions the spoor of wild camels had shown me the position of springs.