WHISPERS OF LOVE

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Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi

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Preface

Rumi's teaching of peace and tolerance has appealed to men and women of all sects and creeds, and continues to draw followers from all parts of the Muslim and non-Muslim world. As both a teacher and a mystic, his doctrine advocates tolerance, reasoning, goodness, charity and awareness through love, looking with the same eye on Muslims, Jews, Christians and others alike. Today, this message of love, peace and friendship finds strong resonation in people's hearts.

Recognised as perhaps the greatest mystical poet of Islam, he communicated something through his writing that has attracted spiritual seekers from almost every religion in the world, for hundreds of years. Although at the time that Rumi emerged as a teacher and spiritual guide, the lands and the people of the East had been scourged and exhausted by the assaults of the Mongols, the Seljuk State was much weakened by incursions and invasions by the Harzemshahs, and inter-communal and inter-religious violence and schism was much rife in the region, Rumi was able to produce an atmosphere of dialogue, compassion and understanding. Today, while Konya, Rumi's adopted homeland and place of rest, is a homogenous Muslim city, in the time of Rumi it was not. The populace comprised members and adherents of various cultures and faiths, respectively. Thus, Konya was a cosmopolitan city then,

just as our global village is today. This is probably why, Rumi's message of acceptance and inclusion that originated in Konya is so relevant for the people of today's world who find themselves so much more effected by and part of the rest of the world.

Rumi's message as embodied in the motions of the Sema is as relevant today as it was in his own time. There are four important meanings hidden within the Sema, which if understood and appreciated, will provide mankind with true and lasting peace. The most significant of these meanings is symbolised in both arms being stretched out to either side with the right palm looking up into the sky and the left towards the ground. This represents the taking from the Creator above and the giving to the created below; from being both a receiver and projector of divine meaning and inspiration. The motion and significance of the dervishes' feet during the Sema is also most meaningful. While one foot of the dervish never leaves the ground, the other is in constant motion to keep the dervish whirling. This symbolises the requirement on a Muslim that while he should be firmly grounded in his religious belief, he should also be concerned with, related to and part of the various communities and people of the world. The message Rumi is giving here is that if you have no doubt in yourself and values, then you should not be afraid of engaging, co-operating, befriending and loving others from different faiths and cultures. In fact, doing so is incumbent upon you. The other two meanings are purity and humility as symbolised in the white robe and tilted head of the dervish, respectively, during the Sema. Put differently, and in summary of all of the meanings, Rumi is telling us that true peace can only be achieved by those who celebrate the diversity of multiculturalism, are humble, pure and open to divine meaning and inspiration.

Rumi's message was to clarify the relation of human beings to our Creator, and our relation to others and our fellow beings. Even in his day, Rumi was sought out by merchants and king, devout worshippers and rebellious seekers, famous scholars and common peasants, men and women. When he passed away in 1273, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Turks and Romans honoured him at his funeral, and men of five faiths followed his bier. That night was named *Shab-i Arus* (The Night of Union with the Divine). Ever since, the Mevlevi dervishes have observed that date as a festival.

Although Rumi, a devout muslim, was known and loved during his lifetime by the Christians in his immediate environment, the West only came to know him many centuries later, in part because the great German poet, Goethe, one of the fathers of the hugely Romantic movement, came to know and be influenced by some of the works of Rumi through the translations of the Austrian historian, Josef von Hammer. Even though most Islamic scholars would argue that von Hammer's translations were for the most part inadequate, nevertheless the power and beauty of Rumi's thought, mysticism and love shone through. By this route, Rumi has long been a strong, albeit indirect, influence on religious, cultural and even political life in Europe and the United States, and provides a real point of unity for East and West. The current truth and great potential of this cultural meeting is best proved by the fact that Rumi has been the best-selling poet in the United States for the last thirteen years.

Rumi's life and works show us that it is not faith, belief and religion which cause hatred, conflict and violence, but the sins of hatred and greed and other symptoms of the unrestrained ego, and he showed us how the true practice of religion, the purification of

the heart, is the remedy for these.

In our days his life and works are a reminder to all that the *Clash of Civilizations* is far from inevitable and they show us how to derive hope, renewal and reconciliation, rather than despair, fear and enmity from our differences. He invites us to call constantly to mind that we are all one; from God we come and to God we will return:

Come, Come whoever you are,
Even if you are a wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving,
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come even if you have broken your vows a thousand times
Come, come, come yet again.

A short outline of Rumi's life

Jelaleddin Rumi was one of the great spiritual masters and poetic geniuses of mankind, and the Mevlevi Sufi order was founded to follow his teachings. He was born in 1207 in Balk in present day Afghanistan to a family of learned theologians. Escaping the Mongol invasion, he and his family travelled extensively in Muslim lands, performed pilgrimage to Mecca and visited Medina; the journey brought the family to Erzincan and then Karaman, where Rumi studied for a short period in the Halaveye School. In 1228, at the invitation of the Sultan of the Seljuks, Alaeddin Keykubad, they settled in Konya, Anatolia, in present day Turkey, then part of the Seljuk Empire. Here Rumi married and lived with his wife, Gevher Hatun and they had two children. He is called 'Rumi', meaning 'Anatolian' because of his life in Anatolia. He also gained the title Mevlana which means 'Our Master' through his life's work there.

Rumi's religious life

When his father Bahauddin Veled passed away in 1231, Rumi succeeded him as professor in religious sciences at the largest theological school in Konya. Only 24 years old, Rumi was already an accomplished scholar in religious and positive sciences. He died on the 17th of December 1273 in Konya, where he had spent most of his adult life and composed all his works, and where his tomb lies today.

Although Rumi had already succeeded to his father's position as a teacher, when the great scholar and Sufi Burhaneddin al-Tirmithi arrived in Konya, Rumi studied under him and devoted himself to his service for nine years. This training was focused on divine love, worship, austerity and abstinence, piety, consciousness of God, humility, and tolerance, which are the foundations of Sufism.

Rumi spent his days mostly praying and serving people who came to visit the Sufi centre, preparing food for them, collecting wood for cooking and heating, and cleaning the toilets and bathrooms used by visitors. He thus learned the merit of serving people and believed that serving people meant serving God.

On Burhaneddin's advice Rumi completed his scholarly education in Aleppo, mastering also the classical Islamic sciences, including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), commentary on the Qur'an (*tafsir*), tradition (*hadith*) and epistemology (*usul*). There were thus a number of significant figures in Rumi's spiritual development. Apart from his father and Burhaneddin, he met many great philosophers and scholars of the age including the renowned Ibn Arabi in Aleppo and Damascus, and others in Konya under the patronage of

the Seljuk Court. He thus acquired both the inner and outer sciences within sixteen years.

The most famous and probably the most fruitful relationship in his development was with Shems-i Tebriz, whom he met in Konya at the suggestion of Ruknuddin Zarqubi. Modern historians may argue about who influenced whom in their association but this is a rather unnecessary discussion. What we know is that for a particular period of time, two skilful and acute spirits came together, and by sharing the divine bounties and gifts they received from their Lord, they reached peaks that most would not be able to reach easily on their own. To this day the place where the two first met in Konya is known as Marc'al Bahreyn, the meeting point of the two oceans.

Through their spiritual cooperation, they enlightened those of their own age, and have also influenced all the centuries which followed.

Following the departure of Shams, Rumi continued to compose his works and to develop the principles that would be followed by the order formed and named in his honour after his death. He started to live in seclusion and abstinence practicing ascetics in series of three periods of forty days; eating little, talking little and sleeping little, the essential components of his discipline.

He never elevated himself above others but his writings and example have proven to be a guiding star which reflects the light of the spiritual life of the Prophet of Islam. Thus, he is among the few figures who have exerted great influence over large parts of history and large regions of the world.

Rumi as a Sufi

Rumi's love for Allah was a fiery one, with a constant weeping and longing for God's mysteries. For him, love for anything other than God was not real: '*Wherever I put my head, that is my place of worship. No matter where I am, that is where God is. Vineyards, roses nightingales, the sema and loving... They are all symbols, the reason is always Him.*' Rumi bewailed his separation from Allah, the beloved, as the ney weeps at its separation from the reed bed whence it came and longs for return. He experienced love and passion both through his solitary asceticism and his communal engagement and said: '*The way of God's Messenger is the way of Love. We are the children of Love. Love is our mother.*' It was in his solitariness that he became most open to the truest union with God, and it was in his separation from all things except God that he became like a ball of fire. And while such a sense burning would prove difficult for many to bear, Rumi, considered it an essential part of passion, and not complaining viewed it as a requirement of loyalty. To him, those who profess a love of God must necessarily accompany their statement of 'I love' with a sense of furious burning. This is the price one must willingly pay for being close to God or in union with Him: '*I was raw, I am now cooked and burnt.*' Additionally, for Rumi, one must engage in ascetic behaviour such as moderate eating, drinking, sleeping, and a constant awareness and directedness towards God in one's speech, and one must inevitably experience bewilderment at God's bounties. Rumi could not understand how a lover can sleep in an im-

moderate way, as it takes away from time shared with the Beloved. For him, excessive sleeping was offensive to the Beloved. As God instructed David (peace be upon him) by saying, '*O David, those who include in sleeping without contemplating Me, while they claim passion for Me, are really lying,*' so also Rumi states, '*When the darkness falls, lovers become intense.*' Rumi continually prescribed this in word, and also showed it in his actions.

On a final note, the following warning made by Rumi should be borne in mind when discussing Rumi as a Sufi:

"*As long as I am alive, I am a servant of the Qur'an, and a grain of sand on the path of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. If anyone narrates anything from me but this, I am absolved of those words, and of him.*"

Rumi's literary works

Rumi's poetry and prose writings have a spiritual content that is the universal language of the human soul. They speak of the spiritual journey of man's ascent through the mind and soul to Perfection. His works were recorded, collected and compiled during his lifetime and after his death by his son, his friends and his students, particularly his much-loved disciple Husameddin Chelebi.

The Mesnevi: Soon after his spiritual friend Shems appeared in his life, Rumi started his marvellous work, the Mesnevi, consisting of twenty-five thousand verses. Written in couplets and collected into six large volumes, the Mesnevi expresses Rumi's burning love, refined spirits, fine intelligence and lofty mysticism through the form of linked stories.

Divan-i Kebir: Also known as Divan-i Shems-i Tebriz (The Collected Poems of Shems of Tebriz) because Rumi used his friend's name as his pseudonym, and consisting of over forty thousand couplets, this is a monumental work of divine lyricism. The whole is studied in depth in Muslim countries and selected passages have been widely translated and read throughout the world for centuries.

Fihi ma Fihi: Fihi ma Fihi (It Is What It Is), written in prose, is a collection of discourses and spiritual discussions given at gatherings with his students. Again using stories and examples it covers such topics as the mystical view of life and death, the phrases of intention into the mystical life, the relationship between the master and the initiate, faith, love, conduct, ethics and worship.

Rumi's place in the Islamic tradition

Rumi was not, and is not, the only hero of love. He was and is one of the great representatives of the school of love in the Islamic tradition which we call Sufism based on the life and practices of Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), which we call Sufism. This tradition, which includes names like Hasan Basri, Ibrahim Ethem, and Bishr-i Khafi in the Arabian Peninsula in the second century of Islam, grew rapidly with Ahmed Yasawi and Yunus Emre in Central Asia and Anatolia during the rule of both the Seljuks and Ottomans.

In recent times this understanding of Islam has been represented by the likes of Mevlana Halid-i Bagdadi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Muhammed Lutfi Efendi and recently Fethullah Gülen. Rumi was one of the important rings in that golden chain of Islamic tradition, and was deeply affected by and benefited from the wealth and experiences of those Sufis and scholars preceding him, as well as influencing those to come.

A short outline of Sufism and Dervishes

The highest aim of creation and its most sublime result is belief in God. The most exalted rank of humanity is knowledge of God. The most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for *jinn* and humanity is love of God contained within the knowledge of God; the purest joy for the human spirit and the purest delight for the human heart is spiritual ecstasy contained within the love of God. Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and unclouded pleasure are contained within the knowledge and love of God. Sufism is the school by which people seek to realize this highest aim of creation.

The origin and roots of Sufism lie in the life and practices of the Prophet of Islam and the Qur'an. Sufism espouses a well-founded and thoroughgoing interpretation of Islam, which focuses on love, tolerance, worship of God, community development, and personal development through self-discipline and responsibility. A Sufi's way of life is to love and be of service to people, deserting the ego or false self and all illusion so that one can reach maturity and perfection, and finally reach Allah, the True, the Real.

The Mevlevi Order is one branch of the vast Sufi tradition of Islam. The universal values of love and service shared by all Sufis are very much relevant to the social and political realities of today, and this ritual, which is only performed by the Mevlevi Order, has come to symbolise these values in the hearts and minds of millions throughout the world.

Thus, Sufism represents the spirit of Islam and the various Sufi orders represent the methodolical attempt to establish that spirit in the personal and communal life of people.

The Origin of Sema

It is narrated that one day Rumi was passing in front of his friend's jewellery shop. The workmen in the shop were shaping gold by hammering it in a certain rhythm. Having heard this rhythmic sound, Rumi raised his hands towards the sky and started to whirl in a state of awe. Inspired by this rhythm and full of love and awe of God, Rumi started performing the Sema, overflowing with emotions.

It is believed that Rumi heard the word Allah (God) in this rhythmic sound, and that this had inspired him; the bodily manifestation of which was his whirling.

The Meaning of Sema

The Sema, the ritual of whirling by dervishes called *semazens*, is a ceremony that began with the inspiration of Rumi although it only reached its current form in the 15th century.

The *semazen* whirls out of love in order to participate in what he perceives as the shared revolution of all existence. It is scientifically recognized that the fundamental condition of our existence is motion and revolution. There is no being or object which does not revolve, because all beings are comprised of revolving electrons, protons, and neutrons in atoms. Everything revolves, and the human being lives by means of the revolution of these particles, by the revolution of the blood in his body, and by the revolution of the stages of his life, by his coming from the earth and his returning to it. Thus, the Sema, is an attempt to become a part of the whole, a note within the universal symphony.

Literally, Sema means to hear; to listen. It is the whirling out of bliss whilst listening to the meaning of the Qur'an. The Sema ceremony represents the human being's spiritual journey, an ascent by means of intelligence and love. Turning towards the truth, the *semazen* grows through love, transcends the ego, and meets the truth. Then he returns from this spiritual journey as one who has reached maturity and completion, able to love and serve the whole of creation and all creatures without discriminating in regard to belief, class, or race.

The purpose of the Sema is to make the spiritual journey towards God and become a Perfect-Person (*Insan-i Kamil*). Whirling fuses

with the rhythm of the drumbeat and the dervish's heart melts with every turn to the name of Allah (God) until it reaches a level of transparency. Having shed its weight, the heart traverses towards the heavens and becomes like a feather in the wind, in complete submission to the will of the Compassionate. The Sema opens a window to the heart through which Divine favour and love enters and transforms the heart of the *semazen* into a state of maturity.

In short, the Sema symbolizes the creation of the universe, the resurrection of man, Divine love and the effort of the soul to reach the level of becoming a Perfect-Person, through realizing one's servanthood to Allah.

Contrary to popular belief, the *semazen*'s goal is not to lose consciousness or to fall into a state of ecstasy. Instead, by revolving in harmony with all things in nature, with the smallest cells and with the stars in the firmament, the *semazen* testifies to the existence and the majesty of the Creator, thinks of Him, gives thanks to Him, and prays to Him. In so doing, the *semazen* confirms the words of the Qur'an (64:1): "*Whatever is in the skies or on earth invokes God.*"

The pivot around which the *semazen* rotates is his spiritual heart (*qalb*), as the heart of a true believer is the throne of God. This is allegorical to the pilgrims who circumambulate around the Kaaba (sacred cubic structure in Mecca and direction in which Muslims turn in prayer). At the prescribed pilgrimage (*Hajj*), the pilgrim cleanses his sins as he circumambulates around the Kaaba. During the Sema, the *semazen* cleanses his soul by whirling around his heart. It is as though the motion of circumambulation and whirling creates a force which dispels everything that is not part of the actual whole. For the *semazen* this means dispelling everything other than God from the heart.

Symbolism in Sema

In the symbolism of the Sema, the *semazen*'s long woollen hat (*sikke*) represents the tomb of the dervish; his wide, white skirt (*tennure*) represents his shroud and his black cloak represents both his grave and his physical existence. The platform of the Sema (*semahane*) represents the universe; the right side of the dervish represents the seen world of matter while the left represents the unseen world of meaning.

The *semahane* is also the place where the dervish struggles to overcome his ego. The beating of drums and playing of serene music during the Sema is a means of encouragement to the *semazen* engaged in this struggle.

Before entering the Sema platform, the *semazens* wash their hands, arms, face and feet (*wudu*). The coming into contact with water symbolizes the coming to life. While the washing of oneself is bodily purification, the purification of the soul takes on the abandonment of four things for the *semazen*: abandonment of this world, abandonment of any expectations from the next, abandonment of the ego and abandonment of the thought of what one has abandoned.

The Sema begins with the singing of the *Naat-i Sherif*. This is a eulogy to the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), who represents love and was written by Rumi himself with music composed by Hahurizade Mustafa Efendi. This *Naat* is sung by the *Naathan* without any musical instrument in a standing position.

The eulogy is followed by drumbeat (on the *kudum* instrument)

symbolizing the Divine Command: "BE!" (*Kun*).

The *Naat* is followed by a *Taksim*, an improvisation on the reed flute (the *ney*). This expresses the Divine breath, which gives life to everything and perfects them.

The *ney*, in the Sema, also symbolizes the strife of a person in becoming a Perfect-Person (Insan-i Kamil). The ney begins its arduous journey from being a mere stick to becoming a wondrous instrument by first being taken from its reed bed, just as man begins his lifelong journey from being delivered from the world of spirits to the world of existence. Then the ney, symbolizing the removal of all worldly attachment within man, is hollowed out. Then, holes are pierced into the ney in order for it to produce the varying sounds of its Master. Then, the ney is burnt in an oven, just as man on the journey towards Perfection (*Kemal*) is burnt with Divine love until both the ney and man transform; until they are no longer themselves but only the totally submitted instrument of their Master, producing only His sound unaltered and without the least distortion. The Holy Qur'an makes reference to this state in the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), the epitome of the level of Perfect-Person, in the following verses: *Nor doth he (Prophet Muhammed) speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired.* (Qur'an 53:3-4)

Following the improvisation on the reed flute, the *semazens* begin to enter the Sema platform from right to left symbolizing man's birth from the world of spirit to the world of existence in a circular procession that consists of three turns around the centre of the platform. This procession is known as the *Sultan Walad Walk*, after Sultan Walad the son of Rumi. The greetings of the dervishes during the procession represent the salutation of soul to soul concealed by shapes and bodies.

A virtual line that stretches between the entrance point and the red fleece divides the Sema platform into two. This sacred line is called *Hatt al-Istiwa* and it is never stepped on save by the Sheikh.

The red fleece (*post*) spread on the Sema platform is the mark

of unity and the station of Rumi. The fleece has been used since antiquity. Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) sat and prayed on the fleece of the ram he slaughtered sent to him by God in substitute for his son Ishmael. Prophet Ishmael (peace be upon him) also used this fleece to sit on. Later, Sufi orders adopted the fleece to symbolize the level of spirituality and mark the Sheik's space. The red colour of the fleece symbolizes the red horizon at sunset when Rumi passed away.

During the circular procession, the *semazens* greet each other three times. This visual greeting symbolizes the salutation of the spirits. The semazens come from the right side of the platform up to the red fleece, without stepping on the *Hatt al-Istiwa* and without turning their backs to the red fleece they step to the other side, and face the *semazen* behind them. The two *semazens* face each other, bow and greet each other at the same time; this is called *Muqabala*.

At the end of the third procession, after the Sheikh sits down on the red fleece, the *Sultan Walad Walk*, which symbolizes the reaching of the Truth (God), comes to an end.

Following this, standing and leaning into one another, the *semazens*, after a short *ney* improvisation, straighten their long woollen hats (*sikkes*) and take off their black cloaks. They then become separated from this world, symbolized by their pure white gowns, and become spiritual, opening their eyes to the truth. By placing their left hand on their right shoulder and their right hand on their left shoulder they symbolize the number one, which reflects and witnesses the unity of God.

After kissing the Sheikh's hand and attaining permission to proceed, the *semazens* start the Sema. Their orderliness is regulated by the *semazen* known as the *Semazenbasi* (head-semazen).

The Sema consists of four *selams* (greetings). The greetings of the *semazen* during the procession represent the three stages of knowledge: *ilm-al yaqin* (received knowledge, gained from others or through study), *ayn-al yaqin* (knowing by seeing or observing

for oneself) and *haqq-al yaqin* (knowledge gained through direct experience, gnosis).

At the beginning, during and close of each *selam*, the *semazen* testifies to God's existence, unity, majesty and power.

The *First Selam* represents the human being's birth to truth through feeling and mind. It represents his complete acceptance of his condition as a creature created by God.

The *Second Selam* expresses the rapture of the human being witnessing the splendour of creation in the face of God's greatness and omnipotence.

The *Third Selam* is the rapture of dissolving into love and sacrifice of the mind to love. It is complete submission, unity, and the annihilation of self in the Beloved. This is the state that is known as *fana fillah* in Islam. The next stage in Islamic belief is the state of servanthood represented by the Prophet, who is called God's servant foremost and subsequently His 'Messenger.'

In the *Fourth Selam*, just as the Prophet ascends to the spiritual Throne of Allah and then returns to his task on earth, the whirling dervish, after the ascent of his spiritual journey, returns to his foremost task, namely servanthood.

He is a servant of God, of His Books, of His Prophets, of His whole Creation.

This is followed by a recitation of the *Sura Mariam* (Chapter of Mary) from the Qur'an on the miracle of Jesus (peace be upon him) and his mission.

What is Sufism?

by M. Fethullah Gulen *

An extract from ***Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism***

**** M. Fethullah Gulen***

An intellectual with a distinctive spiritual charisma, a prolific writer and poet, Fethullah Gulen has been an extremely effective and popular scholar of Islam in our modern age.

His message of dialogue and compassion spans the globe and includes people from many different walks of life.

Gulen has spent his career impressing on people that true religion preaches love, tolerance, compassion, hardwork, peace and many other values that lead a person to virtue and perfection.

Sufism has been defined in many ways. Some see it as God's annihilating the individual's ego, will, and self-centeredness and then reviving him or her spiritually with the lights of His Essence. Such a transformation results in God's directing the individual's will in accordance with His Will. Others view it as a continuous striving to cleanse one's self of all that is bad or evil in order to acquire virtue.

Junayd al-Baghdadi, a famous Sufi master, defines Sufism as a method of recollecting "self-annihilation in God" and "permanence or subsistence with God." Shibli summarizes it as always being together with God or in His presence, so that no worldly or otherworldly aim is even entertained. Abu Muhammad Jarir describes it as resisting the temptations of the carnal self and bad qualities, and acquiring laudable moral qualities.

There are some who describe Sufism as seeing behind the "outer" or surface appearance of things and events and interpreting whatever happens in the world in relation to God. This means that a person regards every act of God as a window to "see" Him, lives his life as a continuous effort to view or "see" Him with a profound, spiritual "seeing" indescribable in physical terms, and with a profound awareness of being continually overseen by Him.

All of these definitions can be summarized as follows: Sufism is the path followed by an individual who, having been able to free himself or herself from human vices and weaknesses in order to acquire angelic qualities and conduct pleasing to God, lives in accordance with the requirements of God's knowledge and love, and in the resulting spiritual delight that ensues.

Sufism is based on observing even the most "trivial" rules of the Shari'a in order to penetrate their inner meaning. An initiate or traveller on the path (*salik*) never separates the outer observance of the Shari'a from its inner dimension, and therefore observes all of the requirements of both the outer and the inner dimensions of Islam. Through such observance, he or she travels toward the goal in utmost humility and submission.

Sufism, being a demanding path leading to knowledge of God, has no room for negligence or frivolity. It requires the initiate to

strive continuously, like a honeybee flying from the hive to flowers and from flowers to the hive, to acquire this knowledge. The initiate should purify his or her heart from all other attachments; resist all carnal inclinations, desires, and appetites; and live in a manner reflecting the knowledge with which God has revived and illumined his or her heart, always ready to receive divine blessing and inspiration, as well as in strict observance of the Prophet Muhammad's example. Convinced that attachment and adherence to God is the greatest merit and honour, the initiate should renounce his or her own desires for the demands of God, the Truth.

After these [preliminary] definitions, we should discuss the aim, benefits, and principles of Sufism.

Sufism requires the strict observance of all religious obligations, an austere lifestyle, and the renunciation of carnal desires. Through this method of spiritual self-discipline, the individual's heart is purified and his or her senses and faculties are employed in the way of God, which means that the traveller can now begin to live on a spiritual level.

Sufism also enables individuals, through the constant worship of God, to deepen their awareness of themselves as devotees of God. Through the renunciation of this transient, material world, as well as the desires and emotions it engenders, they awaken to the reality of the other world, which is turned toward God's Divine Beautiful Names. Sufism allows individuals to develop the moral dimension of one's existence, and enables the acquisition of a strong, heartfelt, and personally experienced conviction of the articles of faith that before had only been accepted superficially.

The principles of Sufism may be listed as follows:

• Reaching true belief in God's Divine Oneness and living in accordance with its demands.

• Heeding the Divine Speech (the Qur'an), discerning and then obeying the commands of the Divine Power and Will as they relate to the universe (the laws of creation and life).

• Overflowing with Divine Love and getting along with all other beings in the realization (originating from Divine Love) that the

universe is a cradle of brotherhood.

• Giving preference or precedence to the well-being and happiness of others.

• Acting in accord with the demands of the Divine Will not with the demands of our own will and living in a manner that reflects our self-annihilation in God and subsistence with Him.

• Being open to love, spiritual yearning, delight, and ecstasy.

• Being able to discern what is in hearts or minds through facial expressions and the inner, Divine mysteries and meanings of surface events.

• Visiting spiritual places and associating with people who encourage the avoidance of sin and striving in the way of God.

• Being content with permitted pleasures, and not taking even a single step toward that which is not permitted.

• Struggling continuously against worldly ambitions and illusions, which lead us to believe that this world is eternal.

• Never forgetting that salvation is possible only through certainty or conviction of the truth of religious beliefs and conduct, sincerity or purity of intention, and the sole desire to please God.

Two other elements may be added: acquiring knowledge and understanding of the religious and gnostic sciences, and following a perfected, spiritual master's guidance. Both of these are of considerable significance in the Naqshbandiyah Sufi order.

It may be useful to discuss Sufism according to the following basic concepts, which often form the core of books written on good morals, manners, and asceticism, and which are viewed as the sites of the "Muhammadan Truth" in one's heart. They can also be considered lights by which to know and follow the spiritual path leading to God.

The first and foremost of these concepts is wakefulness (*yaqaza*), which is alluded to in the Prophetic saying (*hadith*): My eyes sleep but my heart does not, and in the saying of Ali, the fourth Caliph: "*Men are asleep. They wake up when they die*".

The Origin of Sufism

by M. Fethullah Gulen

An extract from ***Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism***

As the history of Islamic religious sciences tells us, religious commandments were not written down during the early days of Islam; rather, the practice and oral circulation of commandments related to belief, worship, and daily life allowed the people to memorize them.

Thus it was easy to compile them in books later on, for what had been memorized and practiced was simply written down. In addition, since religious commandments were the vital issues in a Muslim's individual and collective life, scholars gave priority to them and compiled books on them. Legal scholars collected and codified books on Islamic law and its rules and principles pertaining to all fields of life. Traditionists established the Prophetic traditions (*hadiths*) and way of life (*Sunna*), and preserved them in books. Theologians dealt with issues concerning Muslim belief. Interpreters of the Qur'an dedicated themselves to studying its meaning, including issues that would later be called "Qur'anic sciences," such as *naskh* (abrogation of a law), *inzal* (God's sending down the entire Qur'an at one time), *tanzil* (God's sending down the Qur'an in parts on different occasions), *qira'at* (Qur'anic recitation), *ta'wil* (exegesis), and others.

Thanks to these efforts that remain universally appreciated in the Muslim world, the truths and principles of Islam were established in such a way that their authenticity cannot be doubted.

While some scholars were engaged in these "outer" activities,

Sufi masters were mostly concentrating on the Muhammadan Truth's pure spiritual dimension. They sought to reveal the essence of humanity's being, the real nature of existence, and the inner dynamics of humanity and the cosmos by calling attention to the reality of that which lies beneath and beyond their outer dimension. Adding to Qur'anic commentaries, narrations of Traditionists, and deductions of legal scholars, Sufi masters developed their ways through asceticism, spirituality, and self-purification in short, their practice and experience of religion.

Thus the Islamic spiritual life based on asceticism, regular worship, abstention from all major and minor sins, sincerity and purity of intention, love and yearning, and the individual's admission of his or her essential impotence and destitution became the subject matter of Sufism, a new science possessing its own method, principles, rules, and terms. Even if various differences gradually emerged among the orders that were established later, it can be said that the basic core of this science has always been the essence of the Muhammadan Truth.

The two aspects of the same truth the commandments of the Shari'a and Sufism have sometimes been presented as mutually exclusive. This is quite unfortunate, as Sufism is nothing more than the spirit of the Shari'a, which is made up of austerity, self-control and criticism, and the continuous struggle to resist the temptations of Satan and the carnal, evil-commanding self in order to fulfil religious obligations. While adhering to the former has been regarded as exotericism (self-restriction to Islam's outer dimension), following the latter has been seen as pure esotericism. Although this discrimination arises partly from assertions that the commandments of the Shari'a are represented by legal scholars or *muftis*, and the other by Sufis, it should be viewed as the result of the natural, human tendency of assigning priority to that way which is most suitable for the individual practitioner.

Many legal scholars, Traditionists, and interpreters of the Qur'an produced important books based on the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The Sufis, following methods dating back to the time of the Prophet and his Companions, also compiled books on austerity and spiritual struggle against carnal desires and temptations, as well as states and stations of the spirit. They also recorded their own spiritual experiences, love, ardour, and rapture. The goal of such literature was to attract the attention of those whom they regarded as restricting their practice and reflection to the "outer" dimension of religion, and directing it to the "inner" dimension of religious life.

Both Sufis and scholars sought to reach God by observing the Divine obligations and prohibitions. Nevertheless, some extremist attitudes occasionally observed on both sides caused disagreements. Actually there was no substantial disagreement, and it should not have been viewed as a disagreement, for it only involved dealing with different aspects and elements of religion under different titles. The tendency of specialists in jurisprudence to concern themselves with the rules of worship and daily life and how to regulate and discipline individual and social life, and that of Sufis to provide a way to live at a high level of spirituality through self-purification and spiritual training, cannot be considered a disagreement.

In fact, Sufism and jurisprudence are like the two schools of a university that seeks to teach its students the two dimensions of the Shari'a so that they can practice it in their daily lives. One school cannot survive without the other, for while one teaches how to pray, be ritually pure, fast, give charity, and how to regulate all aspects of daily life, the other concentrates on what these and other actions really mean, how to make worship an inseparable part of one's existence, and how to elevate each individual to the rank of a universal, perfect being (*al-insan al-kamil*) a true human being. That is why neither discipline can be neglected.

Although some self-proclaimed Sufis have labelled religious scholars "scholars of ceremonies" and "exoterists," real, perfected Sufis have always depended on the basic principles of the Shari'a

and have based their thoughts on the Qur'an and the Sunna. They have derived their methods from these basic sources of Islam. Al-Wasaya wa al-Ri'aya (The Advices and Observation of Rules) by al-Muhasibi, Al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Sufi (A Description of the Way of the People of Sufism) by Kalabazi, Al-Luma' (The Gleams) by al-Tusi, Qut al-Qulub (The Food of Hearts) by Abu Talib al-Makki, and Al-Risala al-Qushayri (The Treatise) by al-Qushayri are among the precious sources that discuss Sufism according to the Qur'an and the Sunna. Some of these sources concentrate on self-control and self-purification, while others elaborate upon various topics of concern to Sufis.

After these great compilers came Hujjat al-Islam Imam al-Ghazzali, author of Ihya' al-'Ulum al-Din (Reviving the Religious Sciences), his most celebrated work. He reviewed all of Sufism's terms, principles, and rules, and, establishing those agreed upon by all Sufi masters and criticizing others, united the outer (Shari'a and jurisprudence) and inner (Sufi) dimensions of Islam. Sufi masters who came after him presented Sufism as one of the religious sciences or a dimension thereof, promoting unity or agreement among themselves and the so-called "scholars of ceremonies." In addition, the Sufi masters made several Sufi subjects, such as the states of the spirit, certainty or conviction, sincerity and morality, part of the curriculum of madrassas (institutes for the study of religious sciences).

Although Sufism mostly concentrates on the individual's inner world and deals with the meaning and effect of religious commandments on one's spirit and heart and is therefore abstract, it does not contradict any of the Islamic ways based on the Qur'an and the Sunna. In fact, as is the case with other religious sciences, its source is the Qur'an and the Sunna, as well as the conclusions drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna via *ijtihad* (deduction) by the purified scholars of the early period of Islam. It dwells on knowledge, knowledge of God, certainty, sincerity, perfect goodness, and other similar, fundamental virtues.

Defining Sufism as the "science of esoteric truths or mysteries," or the "science of humanity's spiritual states and stations," or the "science of initiation" does not mean that it is completely different from other religious sciences. Such definitions have resulted from the Shari'a-rooted experiences of various individuals, all of whom have had different temperaments and dispositions, and who lived at different times.

It is a distortion to present the viewpoints of Sufis and the thoughts and conclusions of Shari'a scholars as essentially different from each other. Although some Sufis were fanatic adherents of their own ways, and some religious scholars (i.e., legal scholars, Traditionists, and interpreters of the Qur'an) did restrict themselves to the outer dimension of religion, those who follow and represent the middle, straight path have always formed the majority. Therefore it is wrong to conclude that there is a serious disagreement (which most likely began with some unbecoming thoughts and words uttered by some legal scholars and Sufis against each other) between the two groups.

When compared with those who spoke for tolerance and consensus, those who have started or participated in such conflicts are very few indeed. This is natural, for both groups have always depended on the Qur'an and the Sunna, the two main sources of Islam.

In addition, the priorities of Sufism have never been different from those of jurisprudence. Both disciplines stress the importance of belief and of engaging in good deeds and good conduct. The only difference is that Sufis emphasize self-purification, deepening the meaning of good deeds and multiplying them, and attaining higher standards of good morals so that one's conscience can awaken to the knowledge of God and thus embark upon a path leading to the required sincerity in living Islam and obtaining God's pleasure.

By means of these virtues, men and women can acquire another nature, "another heart" (a spiritual intellect within the heart), a

deeper knowledge of God, and another "tongue" with which to mention God. All of these will help them to observe the Shari'a commandments based on a deeper awareness of, and with a disposition for, devotion to God.

An individual practitioner of Sufism can use it to deepen his or her spirituality. Through the struggle with one's self, solitude or retreat, invocation, self-control and self-criticism, the veils covering the inner dimension of existence are torn apart, enabling the individual to acquire a strong conviction of the truth of all of Islam's major and minor principles.

Poems and Stories from Mesnevi of Rumi

Whispers of Love

Lover whispers to my ear,
"Better to be a prey than a hunter.
Make yourself My fool!
Stop trying to be the sun and become a speck!
Dwell at My door and be homeless.
Don't pretend to be a candle, be a moth,
so you may taste the savor of Life
and know the power hidden in serving."

The Spirit

The spirit is like an ant, and the body like a grain of wheat
which the ant carries to and fro continually.
The ant knows that the grains of which it has taken charge
will change and become assimilated.
One ant picks up a grain of barley on the road;
another ant picks up a grain of wheat and runs away.
The barley doesn't hurry to the wheat,
but the ant comes to the ant, yes it does.
The going of the barley to the wheat is merely consequential:
it's the ant that returns to its own kind.
Don't say, "Why did the wheat go to the barley?"
Fix your eye on the holder, not on that which is held.
As when a black ant moves along on a black felt cloth:
the ant is hidden from view; only the grain is visible on its way.
But Reason says: "Look well to your eye:
when does a grain ever move along without a carrier?"

What is permanent and what is not

Wealth has no permanence: it comes in the morning,
and at night it is scattered to the winds.
Physical beauty too has no importance,
for a rosy face is made pale by the scratch of a single thorn.
Noble birth also is of small account,
for many become fools of money and horses.
Many a nobleman's son has disgraced his father by his wicked deeds.
Don't court a person full of talent either,
even if he seems exquisite in that respect:
take warning from the example of Devil.
Devil had knowledge, but since his love was not pure,
he saw in Adam nothing but a figure of clay.

The Lament of the reed-flute

Listen to this reed, how it makes complaint, telling a tale of separation: 'Ever since I was cut off from my reed-bed, men and women all have lamented my bewailing. I want a breast torn asunder by severance, that I may fully declare the agony of yearning. Every one who is sundered far from his origin longs to recapture the time when he was united with it. In every company I have poured forth my lament, I have consorted alike with the miserable and the happy: each became my friend out of his own surmise, none sought to discover the secret in my heart. My secret indeed is not remote from my lament, but eye and ear lack the light to perceive it. Body is not veiled from soul, nor soul from body, yet to no many is leave given to see the soul.'

This cry of the reed is fire, it is not wind; whoever possesses not this fire, let him be naught! It is the surge of love that bubbles in the wine. The reed is the true companion of everyone parted from a fried: its melodies have rent the veils shrouding our hearts. Whoever saw poison and antidote in one the like of the reed? Whoever saw sympathiser and yearner in one the like of the reed? The reed tells the history of the blood-bespattered way, it tells the stories of Majnun's hopeless passion. Only the senseless is intimate with the mysteries of this Sense; only the heedful ear can buy what the tongue retails. Untimely the days have grown in our tribulation; burning sorrows have travelled along with all our days; yet if our days have all departed, bid them be gone - it matters not; only do Thou abide, O Thou incomparably holy! Whoever is not a fish is soon satiated with His water; he who lacks his daily bread, for him the day is very long. None that is inexperienced comprehends the state of the ripe, wherefore my words must be short; and now, farewell!

The mouse and the camel,
a warning against spiritual pride

A little mouse once caught in its paws a camel's head-rope and in a spirit of emulation went off with it. Because of the nimbleness with which the camel set off along with him the mouse was duped into thinking himself a champion. The flash of his thought struck the camel.

'Go on, enjoy yourself,' he grunted. 'I will show you!'

Presently the mouse came to the margin of a great river, such as would have cast down any lion or wolf. There the mouse halted, struck all of a heap.

'Comrade over mountain and plain,' said the camel, 'why this standing still? Why are you dismayed? Step on like a man! Into the river with you! You are my guide and leader; do not halt half-way, paralysed!'

'But this a vast and deep river,' said the mouse. 'I am afraid of being drowned, comrade.'

'Let me see how deep the water is,' said the camel, and quickly set foot in it.

The water only comes up to my knee,' he went on, 'Blind mouse, why were you dismayed? Why did you lose your head?'

'To you it is an ant, but to me it is a dragon,' said the mouse. 'There are great differences between one knee and another. If it only reaches your knee, clever camel, it passes a hundred cubits over my head.'

'Be not so arrogant another time,' said the camel, 'lest you are consumed body and soul by the sparks of my wrath. Emulate mice like yourself; a mouse has no business to hobnob with camels.'

'I repent,' said the mouse. 'For God's sake get me across this deadly water!'

'Listen,' said the camel, taking compassion on the mouse. 'Jump up and sit on my hump. This passage has been entrusted to me; I would take across hundreds of thousands like you.'

Since you are not the ruler, be a simple subject; since you are not captain, do not steer the ship.

The blind beggar, on the power of compassion

There was once a blind man who all the time cried, 'Have pity! I am doubly blind, people of this passing time. Attend therefore, and show me double compassion, for I have two blindnessess, and exist between them.'

'We see your one blindness well enough,' remarked someone.

'What may the other blindness be? Pray explain.'

'I have an ugly voice an unpleasing tone,' he replied. 'An ugly voice, and blindness – there you have the double. My ugly cry makes people annoyed, so that their affection is diminished by my cry. Wherever my ugly voice betakes itself, it becomes the source of anger, annoyance and hatred. Have double compassion upon my double blindness, make room in you hearts for one who id denied all room.'

The ugliness of his voice was lessened by this lament, so that the people with one heart took compassion upon him. By telling his secret, his voice was made beautifully the sweet accents of the voice of his hart. But the man whose heart's voice is also evil, that triple blindness dooms him to everlasting exile.

Yet it may be that the bountiful ones who give without cause will lay a hand upon his hideous head. Since the beggar's voice became sweet and plaintive, the hearts of the stony-hearted became soft as wax.

The Elephant in the dark,
on the reconciliation of contrarieties

Some Hindus had brought an elephant for exhibition and placed it in a dark house. Crowds of people were going into that dark place to see the beat. Finding that ocular inspection was impossible, each visitor felt it with his palm in the darkness.

The palm of one fell on the trunk.

'This creature is like a water-spout,' he said.

The hand of another lighted on the elephant's ear. To him the beat was evidently like a fan.

Another rubbed against its leg.

'I found the elephant's shape is like a pillar,' he said.

Another laid his hand on its back.

'Certainly this elephant was like a throne,' he said.

The sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand. The palm has not the means of covering the whole of the best.

The eye of the Sea is one thing and the foam another. Let the foam go, and gaze with the eye of the Sea. Day and night foam-flecks are flung from the sea: of amazing! You behold the foam but not the Sea. We are like boats dashing together; our eyes are darkened, yet we are in clear water.

Poems on Rumi

by Prof. Annemarie Schimmel *

*** Annemarie Schimmel, (1922-2003)**
One of the leading experts on Islamic literature and mysticism (Sufism) in the world. She wrote more than 80 books and essays, and lectured at universities and conferences around the world. The German scholar was seen as a bridge-builder with the Islamic world. Being an admirer of Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi, Schimmel's works on Islamic mysticism are popular in the West. Died in 25th of January 2003, at her 80.

I Know

I know
There are no birch trees in Konya
They grow further north
under the silvery sky
mirrored in brownish brooks
in the Sarmathian steppe
or in upstate New York...
But I know
that Mevlana said:
Under the shade of your tresses
so lovely and so cool
my heart slept full of peace like
the dust beneath a tree...
Dust out of which
grass will grow
to praise your mildness
heather will grow
to sing your beauty
(taking its hue from my hood-stained tears)
dust which one day
will be covered by gold
when you, dervish-birch,
will shed your leaves
to attain perfect peace,
poverty, purity, love
Only your naked limbs stand there, on this silvery sky
and the wild grouse greet you
passing in winter nights into homelessness.
And I, the dust at your feet,
protect you , praying till spring...

Mevlana Spoke

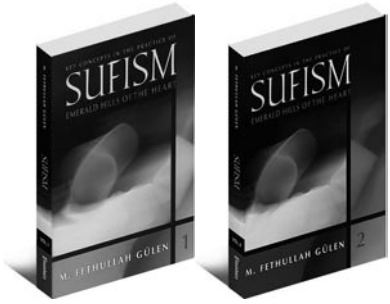
Mevlana spoke:
The lover
weaves satin and brocade
from tears, O friend, to spread it
one day beneath your feet...
Only from tears, Mevlana?
Every breath
Forms the weft of the endless fabric of love.

With every breath I weave the brocade of your name,
Golden letters inscribed in the satin-robe of my blood.
O, what garments have I prepared for you,
taking the ruddy dawn and the fist green silk of spring,
star-embroidered velvet, and feather-light wool!
Every thought embellishes your name, O my friend,
Weaving into the fabric the turquoise domes of Iran,
Dyeing the yarn in the pearl-studded depth of the sea.

Every pulse bears the drum of primordial love
Every breath is the flute of impossible hope
Every goblet is filled with you

And I weave
ever new silken garments of words
only to hide you.

Further Readings



Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism (vol.1, vol.2)
by M. Fethullah Gülen

People follow the Sufi path when they sense that Islam has a deeper dimension. The resulting self-purification leads to this inner dimension of Islamic rituals, a deeper understanding of the Divine acts, and a greater knowledge and love of Him. After this, God draws the novice to Himself. With the help of a spiritual guide, the novice begins the life-long journey back to God.

This continual process of spiritual development along a path of the innate human poverty, helplessness, and powerlessness before God is undertaken in the knowledge that everything comes from God. Each novice does what is necessary to grow spiritually, and God bestows the appropriate blessings and stations.

The highest aim of creation and its most sublime result is belief in God. The most exalted rank of humanity is knowledge of God. The most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for jinn and humanity is love of God contained within the knowledge of God; the purest joy for the human spirit and the purest delight for the human heart is spiritual ecstasy contained within the love of God. Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and unclouded pleasure are contained within the knowledge and love of God. Sufism is the school by which people seek to realize this highest aim of creation.

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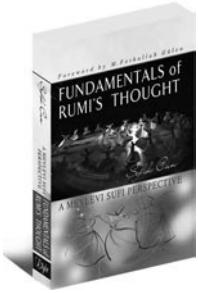

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Marcia K. Hermansen, Professor of Islamic Studies,
Loyola University, Chicago

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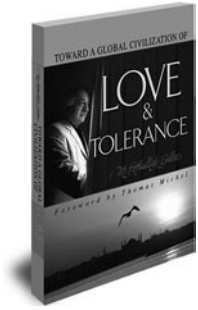

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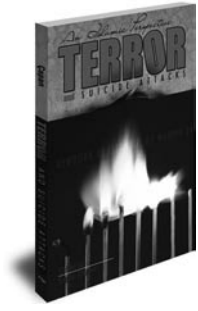

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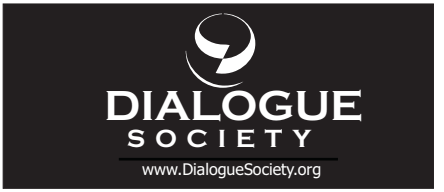
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