

Rūmī and the Sufi Tradition

by

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چرخ در گردش اسیر هوش ماست باده در جوشش گدای جوش ماست
قالب از ما هست شد نی ما از او باده از ما هست شد نی ما از او
(مثنوی در فتاوی، ۱۸۱۱)

Wine in ferment is a beggar suing for our ferment, Heaven in revolution is a beggar suing for our consciousness.

Wine was intoxicated with us, not we with it; the body came into being from us, not we from it.
(*Mathnawī, I*, 1811, trans. by R. A. Nicholson).

LIKE a majestic peak that dominates the countryside around it near and far, the figure of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, that supreme Sufi poet of the Persian language, dominates the whole of the later Sufi tradition in the eastern lands of Islam. He stands out as a spiritual pole not only for the Persian people to whom he belongs by origin but also for the Turkish world where his earthly remains are interred and even for the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent whose soul still reverberates to the music of his poetry. Moreover, the message of this towering figure which has remained alive to this day in the Islamic world is now sought ever more eagerly in the West beyond the circle of orientalist by those who have become tired of the rapidly passing fashions of the day, of the supposedly timely and pertinent new ideas which in the twinkle of an eye turn into stale thought no longer possessing any actuality or relevance.

Rūmī is fast becoming a leading spokesman in the West for the *philosophia perennis*, for that eternal wisdom which is timely precisely because it is timeless. Rūmī is the bearer of a message that is most relevant and timely for modern man because it

concerns the real man within all of us, the man who has always been and will always be the same, but who has been stifled by the veil of negligence and forgetfulness with which modern civilization has shrouded him, a veil which is now suddenly rent asunder by the colossal failures of this very civilization.¹ To the extent that this veil is removed and the fallacies of the modern world are seen to be what they really are, Rūmī and sages like him will become ever more timely, and their message will be heard ever more clearly across the barrier of many centuries even by Western man who has been heir to another civilization than the one which brought Rūmī into being.²

Rūmī is indeed a major peak in the tradition of Sufism, but like every peak which is related to a mountain chain of which it is a part Rūmī is inextricably linked to the Sufi tradition, to the sacred tradition which as a result of the possession of sacred teachings and the grace (*barakah*) present within its spiritual means was able to produce a saint and poet of this dimension. The appearance of Rūmī was not an accidental affair. Rather, he was the flower, albeit an outstanding one, of a tree that was at that time in full bloom. He appeared at a moment when six centuries of Islamic spirituality had already molded a tradition of immense richness. And he lived during a century which was like a return to the spiritual intensity of the moment of the genesis of Islam, a century which produced remarkable saints and sages throughout the Islamic world, from Ibn ‘Arabī, who hailed from Andalusia, to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā from Samarqand. Rūmī came at the end of this period of immense spiritual activity and rejuvenation which in fact molded the subsequent spiritual history of the Islamic peoples.

By the time Rūmī appeared upon the stage of history the Islamic tradition of which Sufism is like the heart or marrow had already crystallized into its classical form.³ The

¹ See S. H. Nasr, "Contemporary Man, Between the Rim and the Axis," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol 7, Spring 1973, pp. 113-26; also F. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, trans by Lord Northbourne, London, Perennial Books, 1965.

² It is of interest to note that already the selection of the poetry of Rūmī translated by R. A. Nicholson as *Rūmī, Poet and Mystic*, London, 1950, has sold many more copies than works of most European "thinkers" who were supposed to be very "progressive" and "timely" at the moment when they first appeared.

³ In the strict sense one should refer to the Islamic tradition and not to the Sufi tradition, because the first is an integral tradition and the second a part of the first and inseparable from it. In using the term "Sufi tradition", therefore, we have the more limited sense of the word in mind and do not wish in any way to

various Islamic sciences from Quranic commentary to philosophy and theology had already produced their Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzīs, Ibn Sinās, and Ghazzālīs. Sufism itself had also left its early period of relative silence and heroic asceticism to enter into the phase of eloquent expression of love and gnosis. The cycle of fear, love and knowledge (*makhāfah*, *mahabbah* and *ma'rifah*) which is present in every religion and in a sense is to be seen within the Abrahamic tradition itself in the successive appearance of Judaism, Christianity and Islam⁴, had already appeared within the Sufi tradition. The early Mesopotamian ascetics emphasized above all else that reverential fear before the Divine Majesty which is the origin of wisdom according to the famous prophetic saying (*ra's al-hikmah makhāfat Allāh* “the origin of wisdom is the fear of God”) and which is itself the source of majesty and nobility within men. The era of these saints, such as Dā'ūd al-Antākī, who spoke of the fear of God, in turn led to the period in which the love of God was openly expressed, most of all in exquisite poetry by such Sufi masters as al-Hallāj and Abū Sa'īd Abī'l-Khayr. And finally the explicit formulation of *ma'rifah* or gnosis which was begun to a certain extent by al-Ghazzālī and 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī reached its peak with Ibn 'Arabī, that supreme master of Islamic gnosis whose formulation of Islamic metaphysics has dominated all later Sufism.⁵

Rūmī, who had undergone a long period of training, both formal and initiatic, was fully acquainted with the long tradition before him both in Sufism and in other Islamic sciences. Although his father was a Sufi, Rūmī became first an authority in the exoteric sciences before becoming a Sufi master. He was deeply immersed in the Quranic sciences and the numerous Quranic commentaries that had come before him. Careful study of his works reveals not only the truth of his own assertion that his *Mathnawī* is a commentary upon the Quran but that even his *Dīwān* flows like a vast river which has come into being

imply that Sufism can be practiced in itself without reference to the Islamic tradition of which it is a part.
⁴ In the Abraham family the dominant aspect of Judaism can be said to be related to the fear of God, of Christianity to the love of God and of Islam to the knowledge of God, although of necessity in every integral tradition all three elements must be present. See F. Schuon, “Images d'Islam,” *Etudes traditionnelles*, vol. 73, Nov.-Dec. 1972, pp. 241-43.

⁵ See S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1946, chapter 3; S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, chapter 7.

from the mountain springs of the Quranic revelation.⁶

Likewise in the case of the *Hadīth* literature and the early sacred history of Islam, Rūmī shows himself to be a full master of his subject. Over and over again he cites various traditions as the source for his doctrines and his inspiration. In fact one of the most sublime and profound descriptions of the personality of the Prophet of Islam is to be found in the *Mathnawī* and the *Dīwān*. If one were to assemble those parts of Rūmī's works which deal with the Holy Prophet one would come into the possession of an incomparable spiritual biography, which is in fact so much needed today especially in a European language.⁷

Likewise, Rūmī draws from both Quranic accounts of other prophets and *Hadīth* sources to provide a new life for the sacred history of the Abrahamic prophetic chain as a reality within the souls of men. The stories connected with such patriarchs and prophets as Abraham, Solomon, David, Moses, Joseph and Christ as well as the Virgin Mary are interpreted esoterically to reveal the spiritual personality of these figures not only in history but also in the ever-living firmament through which the spiritual man journeys on his way to ultimate beatitude and union. All of Rūmī's works are in the profoundest sense what he considers his own *Mathnawī* to be, namely “The principles of the principles of the principles of religion concerning the unveiling of the mysteries of union and certitude.”⁸

(هذا كتاب المشنوی وهو اصول اصول الدين في كشف اسرار الوصول واليقين)

Rūmī began to acquire his knowledge of the religious sciences through their formal

⁶ One of the greatest living authorities on Rūmī in Persia today, Hādī Hā'irī, has shown in an unpublished work that some six thousand verses of the *Dīwān* and the *Mathnawī* are practically direct translations of Quranic verses into Persian poetry.

⁷ Despite numerous biographies of the Prophet in Western languages very few succeed in underlining his spiritual grandeur. One remarkable and exceptional work in European languages which does succeed in illuminating the contours of the Prophet's spiritual personality is F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, trans. by D. M. Matheson, London, 1963 and Baltimore 1972, chapter 3; see also S. H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, London, 1967, and Boston 1972, chapter 3, with an annotated bibliography at the end.

⁸ This is the very first statement with which the prelude of the *Mathnawī* begins.

study, but he did not stop at this stage. Rather he continued by penetrating into their inner meaning until he reached that pearl of wisdom which is the origin of all sacred tradition, or “the principles of the principles of the principles of religion” to use his own words. Herein he attained that knowledge which is the origin of both the exoteric religious sciences and the esoteric sciences associated with Sufism.⁹

Rūmī was intimately associated with the Sufī tradition both through formal and external contact with earlier Sufī writings and as a result of the vastness of his own spiritual personality and the breadth of his spiritual experience, which in a sense embraced all that had come before him. He had already experienced and lived the reverential fear of a Dā'ūd al-Antākī, the Divine love of an Abū Sa'īd and the gnosis of an Ibn 'Arabī. He was like a vast sea into which all the streams of earlier Islamic spirituality had flown so that his rapport with the earlier Sufī tradition was not merely scholarly and formal. It was "existential" and "experiential." In a sense he contained within himself the earlier Sufī tradition because he had lived and experienced the various spiritual possibilities inherent in Sufism within himself.

As far as the early Sufīs are concerned, Rūmī was well acquainted with the spiritual personality of nearly all these masters and must have made an intimate study of their writings and their biographies in the standard Sufī hagiographies, from such early works as the *Hilyat al-awliyā'* of Abū Nu'aym to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyū'* of 'Attār.¹⁰ Moreover, he had an intimate inner knowledge of these figures which can only be the result of his vision of their celestial reality beyond their earthly form. The early saints of Islam, particularly Bāyāzīd al-Bastamī, Hallāj, Dhu'l-Nūn al-Misrī, Ma'rūf al-Karkhī and Abū'l-Hasan al-Kharraqānī, gain such transparency and shine with such luminosity in the *Dīwān* and the *Mathnawī* that one might say that through Rūmī they re-enter upon the stage of Islamic history. Like the prophets whom they follow both in time and in the

⁹ Like many of the greatest spiritual poles of Islam, such as al-Ghazzālī, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Ibn 'Arabī before him and Shaykh al-'Alawī after him, Rūmī was a master and authority in both the exoteric and the esoteric sciences.

¹⁰ On the early Sufis, especially those in Persia who were directly connected to the line of Rūmī, see S. H. Nasr, "Sufism" in the *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol IV, (in press); also A. J. Arberry, *Sufism*, London, 1950; and J Spencer Trimingham *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1971.

spiritual hierarchy, the saints of Sufism shine through the writings of Rūmī as so many living poles of spirituality, as so many living norms and prototypes which concern the seeker of the truth here and now. Even the concrete *barakah* of some of these earlier saints can be felt in various poetical utterances of Jālāl al-Dīn, while their spiritual experiences are invoked by him to resuscitate within the soul of the reader an awareness of the ever present landscape of the world of the spirit.

The following *ghazal* from the *Dīwān-i Shams* is a clear example of how Rūmī makes use of various incidents of sacred history (here the story of the taking of refuge of the Prophet and Abū Bakr during the night of the *hijrah* in the cave) and episodes in the life of earlier Sufī saints (here Mansūr al-Hallāj and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār) to re-awaken in man the nostalgia for the Divine.¹¹

<p>بی وصل او از خویشتن، بیزار شو بیزار شو خواهی که آید نزد تو، بیمار شو بیمار شو</p> <p>خارا ز کفت بیرون کند گلزار شو گلزار شو گریباز غاری تویقین، در غار شود رغار شو خواهی که معمورت کند معمار شو معمار شو خواهی که منصورت کند، بردار شو بردار شو خواهی کز بوئی بری عططار شو عططار شو</p>	<p>بیدار شو همین وقت شد بیدار شو بیدار شو آمد نورا از آسمان، آمد طبیب عاشقان</p> <p>بیچون ترا بیچون کند، روی ترا گلگون کند این سینه را چون غار دان، خلوتگاه آن یار دان ویران چو کردت این زمان شود، یمنید ارتقا عالم همه پر شور بین، و آن دولت منصور بین چون زلف او هر صبح دم محراب صبا بر هم زند</p>
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Awake, the time hath arrived, awake, awake!
Without union with Him, detest thyself, detest thyself!
The heavenly proclamation hath arrived, the healer of lovers hath arrived,
If thou wilt that He visiteth thee, become ill, become ill!
In an inexplicable way He shall purify thee, and make thee rosy-faced,
He shall remove the thorn from thy hand; become a garden of roses, become a garden of roses!
Consider thy breast as a cave, the place for the spiritual retreat of the Friend;
If thou art really the “companion of the cave,” then enter the cave, enter the cave!
Once time hath brought ruin upon thee, laments will be of no avail,
If thou wilt that he restore thee, become a restorer, become a restorer!
See the world filled with tumult, see the dominion of the victorious (*mansūr*).
If thou wilt to become victorious (*mansūr*), hang on the gallows, hang on the gallows!
In as much as each early morn the zephyr entangles Her hair,

¹¹ *Rūmī, Diwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, ed. by B Furūzānfar, vol. 5, Tehran, 1339, *ghazal*, No. 2133, trans. by S. H. Nasr. In this *ghazal* Rūmī plays upon the name of Hallāj and ‘Attār. The first name of Hallāj was Mansūr, which means “victorious,” while ‘Attār means “druggist” in the traditional sense of one who sells both drugs and perfumes.

If thou wilt to benefit from its scent, become a druggist (*'attār*), become a druggist!

As far as later Sufism, especially of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, is concerned, there is again an intimate relation between this form of gnosis and Rūmī. There is still a great deal to be said concerning the rapport between Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī, these two giants of Sufism who were destined to live within a generation of each other and in each other's proximity. There is no doubt that Rūmī knew directly of the teachings of the master from Murcia through Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunyawī, who was at once the foremost expositor of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines in the East and Rūmī's most intimate friend, behind whom Rūmī performed his daily prayers. Some have in fact called the *Mathnawī* the *Futūhat al-makkiyyah* in Persian verse.

No doubt Rūmī accepted Ibn 'Arabī's fundamental doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, the transcendent unity of Being, which is the central axis of all Sufi doctrine. In several poems of exquisite beauty Rūmī describes this doctrine, as for example in the well-known verses of the *Mathnawī*¹²

تو وجود مطلق فانی نمسا	ماعد مهائیم وهستیهای ما
(تو وجود مطلق وهستی ما)	(ماعد مهائیم هستی هانما)
هستی ما جمله از ایچاد تست	باد ما بود ما از داد تست
عاشق خود کرده بودی نیسترا	لذت هستی نمودی نیسترا
نقل و باره و جام خود را وا مگیر	لذت انعام خود را وا مگیر
نقش با نقاش چون نیرو کنسد	ورگیری کیست جست وجو کنسد
اندر اکرام و سخای خود نگر	نگراندر ما مکن در ما نظر
لطف تو ناگفته ما می شنود	مانبودیم و تقاضا مان نبود

We and our existences are non-existent: Thou art the absolute appearing in the guise of mortality.
That which moves us is thy Gift: our whole being is of thy creation.
Thou didst show the beauty of Being unto not-being, after Thou hadst caused not-being to fall in love with Thee.
Take not away the delight of Thy Bounty: take not away Thy dessert and wine and wine-cup!
But if Thou takest it away, who will question Thee? Does the picture quarrel with the painter?
Look not on us, look on Thine own Loving-kindness and Generosity!
We were not: there was no demand on our part; yet Thy Grace heard our silent prayer and called us into existence.

¹² *Mathnawī*, I. 602ff. English translation by R. A. Nicholson, *Rūmī, Poet and Mystic*, p. 107.

No poet could depict in more moving words the utter nothingness of all existing things before the One who alone is. Here is the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* shrouded by the theophany of its own beauty.

Likewise Rūmī follows Ibn ‘Arabī in believing that the existence of everything is identical with the relation of that particular being to Being Itself, that existents are nothing but the relation they possess to the Absolute. This fundamental metaphysical doctrine whose intricacies and implications were later developed by such theosophers as Mullā Sadrā is summarized in a deceivingly simple couplet by Rūmī when he states, referring to the relation between beings and Being Itself:

اتصالی بی تکلیف بی قیاس هست رب الناس را با جان ناس

There is a link beyond all description and comparison between the Lord of creatures and their inner being.

As for the complementary doctrine of the universal man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which, like the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, was also formulated for the first time by Ibn ‘Arabī,¹³ its meaning is reflected throughout Rūmī’s writings, but he does not use the term *insān-i kāmil*. Rather when wishing to refer to the idea he uses such terms as the macrocosm (*‘ālam-i akbar*), which he considers the spiritual man to be in contrast to “profane man,” who is the microcosm. For example he addresses the man whom he wishes to awaken to his own spiritual possibilities in these terms:

پس به صورت عالم اصغر توئی پس به معنی عالم اکبر توئی

Therefore in outward form thou art the microcosm
While in inward meaning thou art the macrocosm.

¹³ For an analysis of Sufi doctrine upon the basis of the two fundamental doctrines of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *al-insān al-kāmil*, see S. H. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge, U.S.A., 1968, New York 1970, chapter 13. For an exposition of the meaning of *al-insān al-kāmil*, see the introduction of T. Burckhardt to *al-Jīlī, De-l’homme universal*, Lyon, 1953.

Rūmī, however, was not simply a continuator of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, as were such masters as Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunyawī, ‘Abd-al-Razzāq al-Kāshāni and Dā‘ūd al-Qaysarī. In fact, in certain matters such as the meaning of evil he departed from Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. Rūmī must rather be considered as another peak of Sufism, as the perfection of a type of spirituality that is akin but distinct from that of Ibn ‘Arabī. Throughout the later history of Sufism, the type of spirituality represented by each master has remained distinct, each with its own fragrance and form of radiance, while at the same time some like Jāmī and Hājji Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī have sought to bridge the gap between the two types of spirituality in question.

As far as Rūmī’s rapport with the Persian Sufī poets is concerned, there is no doubt that he stands directly in the line of those like Sanā’ī and ‘Attār and before them Abū Sa’īd Abi'l-Khayr and Khwājah ‘Abdallāh al-Ansārī of Herat who prepared the Persian language as a vehicle for the expression of Sufism. Of the earlier Sufi poets Sanā’ī and ‘Attār have already been noted by numerous historians of Persian literature such as Ethe, Browne, Rypka, Nu‘mānī and Safā as predecessors of Rūmī, and the relation between these three masters is too obvious to need elucidation.¹⁴ But what is not as well known is the relation between Nizāmī and Rūmī on the one hand and Firdawsī and Rūmī on the other. As far as Nizāmī is concerned, his work is like a body into which Rūmī breathed the spirit and which he endowed with spiritual life.

As for Firdawsī, his *Shāh-nāmah* is in a sense the complement of the *Mathnawī*. The first is the supreme epic poem of the Persian people of the pre-Islamic period and the second the supreme epic of the Islamic period, but an epic whose field of battle has now become transformed to the world within the soul of man. The *Shāh-nāmah* is in a sense an account of the "lesser holy war" (*al jihād al-asghar*) and the *Mathnawī* the tale of the "greater holy war" (*al jihād al-akbar*) to use the terminology of the well-known prophetic *hadīth*. In the same way that Suhrawardī sought through esoteric interpretation to

¹⁴ Extensive discussions in the histories of Persian literature of these and other scholars have been devoted to the link between Sanā’ī, ‘Attār and Rūmī, and there is no need to repeat them here.

interiorize the heroic tales of the *Shāh-nāmāh*,¹⁵ Rūmī on a much larger scale sought to create a vast canvas in which the supreme epic of the spiritual hero in quest of the Fountain of Life was depicted with the finest detail.

To achieve this end, Rūmī drew from all the resources of the Persian language and benefited from all the literary masters who preceded him. He was at once an excellent story teller, sacred historian, lyricist and above all poet. Yet, he was not a poet like other poets, even the great Sufī poets before him. For Rūmī the meaning predominated over the form in such a way that in the *Dīwān* he broke nearly all the rules of classical Persian prosody. Yet, because the meaning came from the world of the Spirit and not from his own whims and fancies, it always created forms of beauty. In the *Dīwān* even those metrics which are described as displeasing in classical handbooks of prosody possess the power to attract the soul of man to the vast empyrean beyond the confines of its earthly imprisonment and to create in man an ecstatic joy for union with the Infinite. It is, therefore, strange that this supreme poet whose tongue was touched by the wing of the angels should consider himself not to be a poet at all. In the *Diwān* he writes:

شعرچه باشد بر من تا که از آن لاف ز نسیم هست مرا فن دیگر غیر فنون شعرا
شعر چو آبروی است سیه ، من پس آن پرده چو مه ابرسیه را تو مخوان ماه منور به سما

What is poetry that I should boast of it,
I possess an art other than the art of the poets.
Poetry is like a black cloud; I am like the moon hidden behind its veil.
Do not call the black cloud the luminous moon in the sky.¹⁶

Rūmī, like Shabistārī after him, was an outstanding poet in spite of himself. The beauty of his verses is like the beauty of a sanctuary which is there of necessity as the “existential” condition for all authentic manifestations of the sacred. But despite this disregard for poetry, Rūmī could not cease to compose poetry. The ocean within his

¹⁵ See H Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 2, Paris, 1971, pp. 82ff.

¹⁶ Here as elsewhere in this essay, wherever the name of the translator is not indicated, the translation has been made by ourselves.

being could not spew forth its waves except in the rhythms and rhymes which have appeared in the nearly sixty thousand verses of the *Mathnawī*, the *Dīwān* and the *Rubā'īyyāt* and have made of Rūmī, who did not consider himself a poet, perhaps the greatest mystical poet the world has ever seen.

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It is, needless to say, a tribute to the spiritual personality of Rūmī that the 700th anniversary of his death should be celebrated now on such a wide scale in both East and West. This celebration is not only appropriate because it is recognized internationally and celebrated on a world-wide scale, but also because it concerns the date of his death. It was characteristic of Rūmī to combine the idea of death with joy and felicity. It is, therefore, most appropriate that today the anniversary of his death should also be an occasion for joy and celebration. Rūmī saw in death the supreme ecstatic moment of life, for he had already died before dying according to the famous prophetic saying, "Die before you die."

(موتوا قبل ان تموتوا)

For him death could only be entrance into the world of light, according to his own well-known poem:

تا نباشد زحمت جان دارنت	رو بمیر ای خواجه قبل از مردنت
نی چنان مرگی که درگوری روی	آن چنان مرگی که درنوری روی

Go die, oh Sire, before thy death,
So that thou wilt not suffer the pain of dying.
Die the kind of death which is entrance into light,
Not the death which signifies entrance into the grave.

Rūmī had already entered the world of light before encountering physical death. Consequently physical death could not but be the moment of celebration when the last obstacle was lifted and he was able to return fully to the ocean of light from which he had become momentarily separated. Rūmī had already realized that *amors est mors*; through the love of God he had tasted death while physically alive and was a resurrected being shrouded in the light of Divine knowledge when still discoursing and walking among men.

What had made it possible for Rūmī to look upon the encounter with death as a moment of supreme ecstasy was of course the kind of life he had led in this world, a life which had already led him into the state of sanctity before passing through the gate of death. We do not intend to deal with his life in detail. There are already numerous studies on his life in various languages.¹⁷ But a few points of special interest need to be mentioned here. The life of Mawlānā can be divided into three periods: from birth until the age of twenty-five, from twenty-five until about forty and from forty until his death.

During the first period Jalāl al-Dīn learned the Quranic sciences, Arabic and Persian and advanced in the domain of religious studies until he became an authority in various exoteric sciences.¹⁸ Although he studied extensively with his father Baha' al-Dīn Walad Sultān al-'Ulamā', who was himself a Sufi and author of the *Ma'ārif*, which has left so much influence upon the *Mathnawī*, during this period Rūmī was not as yet attracted to Sufism. This was the period of formal instruction for him which made of him a respected religious scholar in Qonya, an authority who taught the religious sciences and gave opinions on questions pertaining to the Sharī'ah.

¹⁷ In Persian there have been numerous studies, from the *Manāqib al-'arīfīn* of al-Aflākī to B. Furūzānfar's *Risālah dar tahqīq-i ahwāl wa zindigāni-yi Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad*, Tehran, 1315 (A. H. Solar). As for European languages the studies of Browne, Nicholson, Arberry, Harry and Meyerovitch contain detailed material on his biography.

¹⁸ Rūmī was also well acquainted with the "intellectual sciences," such as philosophy and cosmology, as well as *Kalām*, and often gives a masterly account of these disciplines, even when rejecting certain views of this or that philosopher or theologian. He was in fact also well acquainted with Greek philosophy as his many references to Plato and Galen demonstrate. But here as in the domain of sacred prophetic history he uses the personality and ideas of these philosophers as a means of expounding and illustrating his own metaphysical doctrines.

At the age of twenty-five this period came to an end and Rūmī met Burhān al-Dīn al-Tirmidhī, a student of Rūmī's father, who initiated him into Sufism and who guided him for nine years until his death. He bestowed upon Rūmī his father's esoteric teachings and made of Rūmī a Sufi well-versed in the intricacies of the path. After his death Rūmī continued to practice the Sufi way and was in fact already an accomplished spiritual personality by the time he met Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī at the age of thirty-nine. Rūmī had also known other Sufis at this time such as Salāh al-Dīn Zarkūb, who later became Rūmī's close friend and disciple. But the dominant figure of this second period of his life was Burhān al-Dīn, whose spiritual fragrance is also reflected in certain parts of the *Mathnawī*.

The third period of Rūmī's life begins with his meeting with the mysterious Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, is witness to the composition of his major works, the *Mathnawī* and the *Dīwān*, and terminates with the death of Rūmī. Few figures in Sufism are as mysterious as Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, a learned *qalandar* type of Sufi who appeared across the sky of Rūmī's life like a comet and disappeared with almost the same suddenness with which he came. Shams al-Dīn must be considered at once a Sufi master with a human form, the inner light of Rūmī's own being and the spiritual sun itself. In this remarkable man the supernal reality and the human form were fused in such a way that often it is difficult to distinguish about which aspect Rūmī was speaking. For example when he says,

شمس تبریزی که نور مطلق است آفتاب است وز انوار حق است

Shams-i Tabrīzī, who is the absolute Light,
Is the sun and a ray of the lights of Divine Truth,

one is left in a state of bewilderment as to whether Rūmī is speaking about a man or a spiritual function. It is our view that although Shams-i Tabrīzī was a human master and the author of the remarkable *Maqālāt*,¹⁹ which resemble Rūmī's *Fīhi mā fīhi* (*Discourses*) and have influenced the *Mathnawī*, he was a person of such exalted spiritual station that

¹⁹ The text of the *Maqālāt* has been edited recently by A Khushniwīs ('Imād), Tehran 1349 (A. H. Solar).

the spiritual reality which shone within him in a sense obliterated the confines of his human individuality. Moreover, Rūmī refers to him at once as a human master, the initiatic function of the master as such, the Divine Light, the uncreated and also created Intellect, and even as the sun which rises in the Western horizon at the time of the eschatological event identified as the Day of Judgment and which the seeker of the Truth experiences at the moment of the spiritual death and resurrection. It is symbolic of the particularly mysterious personality of Shams-i Tabrīzī that after his death several places were claimed as his tomb and to this day the saint possesses several mausoleums which are centers of pilgrimage for the faithful.

Whatever may have been the actual identity and personality of Shams-i Tabrīzī, there is no doubt that he was not simply a spiritual master for Rūmī. By the time he met Shams-i Tabrīzī Rūmī was already an accomplished Sufi. What in fact Shams did was to act as a pole of attraction for the manifestation and externalization of an aspect of Rūmī that had not manifested itself until that time. Like the fleeting comet that he was, his sudden appearance upon the firmament of Rūmī's being created vast tidal waves in the ocean of Rūmī's soul, waves which were then crystallized into poems of immortal beauty in the *Dīwān*. The voluminous *Dīwān* is the response of Rūmī to the *sympathia* (*hamdamī* in Rūmī's own words) created between Shams and Rūmī. It seems that this great saint-poet needed spiritual and intellectual companionship in order to force him to leave the world of silence and to have recourse to poetry to explain that which cannot but issue from holy silence.²⁰ In a sense Husām al-Dīn Chalabī played the same role for Rūmī *vis-a-vis* the *Mathnawī*. In the same way that if there is no appropriate disciple, the initiatic function retires within the being of a master, the lack of spiritual companionship and discourse can lead the most artistically creative of Sufis into silence. To quote the well-known verse of Sa'dī:

گسرنبود ی گل نخواند ی بلبلی برشا خساری

If there were no rose the nightingale would not be singing in the grove.

²⁰ It is of interest to note that Rūmī's pen-name (takhallus) was "silent" (khamush).

It was the hands of destiny that brought Shams and Husām al-Dīn, like two roses that attract the nightingale, into the life of Rūmī and thus bestowed upon the world the two great masterpieces which have made of Rūmī the supreme mystical poet of the Persian language.

But these two works could not *not* have come into being, for such a perfect wedding between wisdom and beauty was a possibility that had to be realized. Rūmī was one of those rare beings who possessed a kind of "sensual awareness" of spiritual beauty, a person for whom things appeared as transparent forms reflecting the eternal essences.²¹ For him the very existence of beauty was the most direct proof of the existence of God. It can also be said that for the perceptive reader the beauty of Rūmī's poetry itself is the most powerful proof of the reality of the world of the spirit. Rūmī bathed in beauty like an eagle soaring in the light of the sun and he left in his poetry as well as in the spiritual music and dance of the Mawlawī Order something of this beauty for posterity. The beauty of Rūmī's poetry, music and dance is a way of bringing about recollection and of awakening within man an awareness of that supreme Beauty of which all terrestrial beauty is but a pale reflection, for as Rūmī says:

جرعه ای بر ریختی ز آن خُفیه جام	بر زمین خاک من کأس الکرام
هست بر زلف و رخ از جرعه اش نشان	خاک را شاهان همی لیسند از آن
جرعه حسنت اندر خاک گش	که بصد دل روز و شب می‌وسیش
جرعه خاک آمیز چون مجنون کند	مرتزقا تا صاف او خود چون کند

Kings lick the earth whereof the fair are made,
For God hath mingled in the dusty earth
A draught of Beauty from His choicest cup.
Tis *that*, fond lover—not these lips of clay—
Thou art kissing with a hundred ecstasies,

²¹ "The teleological proof also embraces the aesthetic proof, in the profoundest sense of that term. Under this aspect it is perhaps even less accessible than under the cosmological or moral aspects; for to be sensitive to the metaphysical transparency of beauty, to the radiation of forms and sounds, is already to possess—in common with a Rūmī or a Ramakrishna—a visual and auditative intuition capable of ascending through phenomena right up to the essences and the eternal melodies." F. Schuon, "Concerning the Proofs of God," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter, 1973, p. 8.

Think, then, what must it be when undefiled!²²

Complementary to Rūmī's sensitivity to beauty is his awareness of the sacred in all things and his ability to provide keys for the spiritual solution of practically every problem man faces in any age or situation. The Prophet of Islam was given the possibility of experiencing everything that a human being can experience, from losing his only son to uniting all of Arabia under the banner of Islam. He was given this mission in order to be able to sanctify all of human life. Rūmī, who is one of the outstanding fruits of the tree of "Muhammadan poverty" (*al-faqr al-Muhammadi*) was able to accomplish this same task on of course a smaller, yet vast, scale. He was able to express the fullness and diversity of human existence in such a way as to reveal the fact that behind every possible kind of experience there lies a door towards the Invisible. Rūmī is able to address every man and to lead him from where he is towards the spiritual realm, provided he is willing to be guided and to open his eyes to see beyond every situation that man faces the Hand of God, with whose aid alone can any situation be solved in an ultimate sense. That is why Rūmī has continued to rule over the hearts of men to this day.

During the seven centuries that have passed since his death Rūmī has left such an immense impact upon the Persian, Turkish and Indian worlds that volumes would be needed to track down the visible traces of his influence. In the Turkish world the Mawlawī Order founded by him has played such a dominant role in the history of the Ottoman Empire that even from an external point of view no account of Ottoman and even modern Turkish history would be complete without mention of it. Moreover, the Turks extended the influence of Rūmī to the Balkans, as far as Albania, as well as to Cyprus, Syria and Lebanon where Mawlawī centers are to be found to this day. The people of Anatolia also wrote numerous commentaries upon the *Mathnawī*, beginning with Ahmad Rūmī and continuing to this day. His tomb in Qonya, moreover, remains until the present day the spiritual centre of the Turkish world.

In Persia, likewise, numerous commentaries have been and continue to be written on

²² *Mathnawī*, V, 372-75. English translation by R. A. Nicholson, *Rūmī, Poet and Mystic*, p. 45.

the *Mathnawī*, from the *Jawāhir al-asrār* of Kamāl al-Dīn Khwārazmī to the present day commentaries of Jalāl Humā'ī, Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar and Muhammad Taqī Ja'farī.²³ There is practically no Persian speaker who does not know some verses of the *Mathnawī* by heart, while the art of singing the *Mathnawī* has become a recognized musical form of a most delicate and profound nature whose continuing influence upon the cultural and artistic life of the Persians is immense.

In the Indian subcontinent Rūmī was appreciated among the Naqshbandiyyah Order already in the 9th/15th century and his influence has grown ever since. Not only have numerous commentaries been written upon him, such as those of 'Abd al-Latīf al-'Abbāsī and Shāh Mīr Muhammad Nūrallāh al-Ahrārī, but also there developed in the subcontinent, as well as in Persia and the Ottoman worlds, a particular musical *genre* which is associated solely with the singing of the *Mathnawī*, a form that again remains popular to this day. More particularly certain of the Sufis of that region, especially Shāh 'Abd al-Latīf, the great Sindhi poet and mystic who was also an outstanding musician, may be said to be direct emanations of Rūmī's spirituality in the Indian world.²⁴ It is not without reason that many have compared Shāh 'Abd al-Latīf's *Risalo* with the *Mathnawī*.

Today in the Western world, impoverished of spirituality and suffocating in an ambience where ugliness has become the norm and beauty luxury, Rūmī is discovered by many as the antidote to the ills from which the modern world suffers. And indeed he is a most powerful antidote provided his teachings are followed, however bitter might be the medicine he proposes. In order to draw aid from Rūmī in the spiritual battle at hand one must read him not as a *mere* poet but as the *porte-parole* of the Divine mysteries who like the birds could not but sing in melodies that move the spirit. It is our hope that the occasion of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the death of this master will also be an occasion for recollection and for the coming into being of a new yet ancient awareness of

²³ The immense commentary of Ja'farī has already reached eight long volumes and many more are to follow. This popular commentary alone shows to what extent Rūmī is still alive for the Persians.

²⁴ See N. A. Baloch, *Maulana Jalaluddin Rūmī's Influence on Shah Abdul Latif*, International Mavalana Seminar, Ankara, 1973.

the Truth which is always wedded to beauty and of the beauty which is an aspect of Divine Mercy and which leads to the Truth. The works of Rūmī and his ever living spiritual presence stand as a strong beacon to guide men by means of beauty to that Truth which alone can liberate them from the illusory prison of deprivation and ugliness that they have created around themselves, a prison whose confines cannot be eradicated save by means of the message of men like Rūmī in whom the vision of the Truth and its expression in the most perfect human form are combined. Verily it must be said of the works of Rūmī that:

هرکه زان برمی رود آید به بام
بل به بامی کز فلک برتر بود

نردبان آسمان است این کلام
نی به بام چرخ کواختر بود

These words are the ladder to the firmament.
Whoever ascends them reaches the roof—
Not the roof of the sphere that is blue,
But the roof which transcends all the visible heavens.