



RUMI, JALĀL-AL-DIN VII. PHILOSOPHY

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vii. Philosophy

Rumi's teachings, whether in the *Maṭnawī* or his other works, focus on “the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion” (*oşul oşul oşul al-din*, *Maṭnawī* I intro.). By “the religion” he means the Islamic tradition, not religion generically; he is saying that his works go to the heart and soul of the Qur'anic message and do not get mired down in the limitations of theological formalism or juridical nitpicking. He sees himself as belonging to the line of prophets (*anbiā'*) and saints (*awliā'*), whose God-given function is to provide guidance (*hedāyat*) to the human race. He has a good deal to say about most Islamic teachings, as can be verified by the traditional commentaries on the *Maṭnawī* or modern studies like that of Jalāl-al-Din Homā'i (1900-1980). Despite the extent to which he has been singled out in modern times as a unique exponent of love, much of what he says about love is fairly standard in Sufi works; it is prefigured in poets like *Sanā'i* and Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār as well as in Persian prose classics like *Kaşf al-asrār va 'oddāt al-abrār*, the great Qur'an commentary by Abu'l-Faẓl *Meybodi* (completed in 520/1126), or *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fi šarḥ asmā' al-malek al-fattāḥ*, a lengthy explanation of the divine names by Aḥmad Sam'āni (d. 534/1140; Chittick, 2013). Perhaps the most systematic exposition of his vision of a world infused by love is provided by



another prose classic, *Merṣād al-‘ebād men al-mabda’ ela’l-ma‘ād*, written by his contemporary Najm-al-Din Rāzi [Dāya] (d. 654/1256). No one else, however, combines explicit and detailed teachings on love with such magical poetry.

The gist of what Rumi is trying to convey is expressed by a Qur’anic verse cited by Šams-e Tabrizi as the crux of prophetic guidance: “Know that ‘There is no god but He,’ and ask forgiveness for your sin” (Q. 47:19). The first clause, says Šams, commands people to seek knowledge of *tawḥid* ([belief in] monotheism), and the second tells them to negate their own existence (Šams-e Tabrizi, p. 218; Chittick, 2004, p. 90). People can only do the latter by living *tawḥid* to the fullest or, to put this in Rumi’s terms, by loving, which is *tawḥid*’s praxis. Rumi makes the connection between love and *tawḥid* especially explicit in lines that describe love as “that flame which, when it blazes up, burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved.” Comparing the Arabic word *lā* (“no” in the formula of *tawḥid*) to a two-bladed sword (similar to *Du’l-Faqār*, the famous sword of ‘Ali), he then tells us that love “slays everything other than God,” not least the self of the swordsman (*Maṭnawi* V, ll. 588-90). This is why “The religion and creed of the lovers is nonexistence” (*Maṭnawi* VI, l. 233).

The role of knowledge. In the just-cited saying as well as in many other passages, Šams-e Tabrizi—despite the popular depiction of him as an unlearned rascal, intoxicated by love—insists that knowledge is the foundation of the path to God, and Rumi echoes this position throughout his works. Some modern-day scholars would object to this, not least because Rumi can be highly critical of *‘aql*, reason or intellect, the tool that acquires knowledge. But he also points out that *‘aql* has degrees, analogous to the degrees of light: There is an *‘aql* like a glowing coal, another like a spark, another like a candle, another like the blazing sun (*Maṭnawi* V, ll. 459-61). He commonly differentiates between “partial” (*jozwi*) and “universal” (*kolli*) intellect. The former is ruled by the ego (*nafs*), which was created from the same fire as Iblis (*Eblis*), and the latter is none other than the angelic light through which God created the universe, “born of Mustafa” (*Maṭnawi* I, l. 1966). Clever merchants as well as erudite scholars—here Rumi likes to poke fun at *Avicenna* and Faḫr-al-Din Rāzi—partake of the intellect’s husk, but prophets and saints are “mounted on the intellect of intellect.” The husk offers a hundred proofs but can never be sure of itself; the kernel dwells in certainty (*Maṭnawi* III, ll. 2527-30).

Philosophers and Sufis often distinguished between two basic sorts of knowledge, one deriving from the partial intellect and the other from the



universal intellect. They called the two *taqlid* (imitation) and *tahqiq* (realization). In the *Maṭnawī*, Rumi compares the human self to a house with a courtyard, in the midst of which is a pool, the heart. Imitative knowledge, which is acquired through upbringing, environment, and study, is like water piped into the courtyard from outside; realized knowledge gushes up from the center of the pool. Piped water turns stale and burdens the soul, but the inner water is in fact the fountain of life, forever fresh. The human task is to seek the water from within (*Maṭnawī* IV, ll. 1960-68). Those who find the water join the ranks of “the folk of the heart” (*ahl-e del*), the saints who have achieved realization and see everything with the light of the universal intellect. It is they who are living witness to the *ḥadīth qodsi*, “Neither My heavens nor My earth embraces Me, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace Me” (*Maṭnawī* I, ll. 2653-55; VI, ll. 3071-73; *Divān*, l. 30224).

This is not to deny that imitative knowledge plays an essential role in human affairs, not least in the specifically religious sciences; there is no other way to learn language, grammar, Qur’an, hadith, jurisprudence, dogmatics, and so on. The second testimony of faith, for example, “Mohammad is the messenger of God,” depends utterly on *taqlid*. Rumi’s accomplishments in imitative knowledge prepared him for the coming of Šams and the achievement of realization, which is real understanding of the first testimony of faith, “There is no god but God.” This cannot be achieved from catechisms and creeds, only by discovering it in the heart. Thus the Qur’an speaks of this formula as a universal truth, known to all prophets and pertaining to the original human nature (*feṭrat*). The partial intellect is ignorant of *tawḥīd*, so it needs the guidance of prophets and saints, “those who have joined the partial intellect to the Universal Intellect” (*Fih*, p. 143). Rumi contrasts the two sorts of knowledge in numerous passages and with various images, such as hearsay and vision, letter-writing and encounter, debt and ready cash, traveling and arrival (Chittick, 1983, pp. 125-35). He is especially critical of scholars who study their disciplines simply to gain students, livelihood, and prestige. As for himself, he says, “My knowledge is substance, not accident. . . //I am a mine of candy, a plantation of sugar cane—it grows up within me and I eat of it myself. //Only imitative and instructional knowledge laments at the aversion of the audience” (*Maṭnawī* II, ll. 2427-29).

The world-view of tawḥīd. Rumi has more in common with the Muslim philosophers than he likes to admit. Specifically, he shares their overall vision of the universe and their stress on the transformation of the soul in order to



achieve real understanding. If he thinks that Avicenna is “an ass on ice” (*Divān*, l. 35277), this is not because he disagrees with the general picture that Avicenna provides, but because he is convinced that rational understanding cannot take people forward on the path to God without the intervention of love. Like the philosophers, Rumi frequently discusses God in terms of *wojud* (and its Persian synonym, *hasti*), reflecting Avicenna’s distinction between the Necessary Being and contingent things. Rumi reminds his readers that they often confuse the two. They think that the world exists, when in fact it does not: “We and our beings are nonexistent,” and God “is absolute existence, appearing [to the ignorant] as evanescent” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 602).

As Absolute Existence, God has no opposites, given that “nonexistence” does not exist. But, “Things become clarified by their opposites”—a proverbial *meṣraʿ* by the poet Motannabi (d. 354/955) that Rumi often cites (*Fih*, p. 80; ed. note, p. 291). To know and speak about God one must have recourse to his names and attributes, each of which is distinct from the others, and many of which can be understood as opposites or complements, even though they pertain to the same Being. Especially important for Rumi’s depiction of the human situation are gentleness (*loṭf*) and severity (*qahr*), or mercy (*raḥmat*) and wrath (*ḡaḏab*). God was a Hidden Treasure and he desired to be recognized, as the famous hadith tells us. In Rumi’s terms, God is saying, “I created the whole universe, and the goal of all of it is to make Myself manifest, sometimes through gentleness and sometimes through severity” (*Fih*, p. 176; cf. *Maṭnawī* IV, ll. 3028-29). This pair of divine attributes reverberates throughout the universe and the human self, and the resulting homologies provide the key to Rumi’s dialectic. Gentleness always has the upper hand, because, as the hadith has it, “God’s mercy takes precedence over His wrath.” Nonetheless, light cannot be perceived without darkness and being cannot be grasped without nonbeing, so mercy demands wrath, gentleness uses severity for its own purposes, and roses surround their beauty with thorns. The interplay of gentleness and severity appears in the contrasting qualities of light and fire, angels and devils, intellect and ego, Adam and Iblis, saints and unbelievers, nearness and distance, union and separation, joy and heartache, sugar and vinegar, spring and autumn, day and night, faithfulness (*wafāʿ*) and cruelty (*jafāʿ*), wine and dregs, intoxication and sobriety. Only love can harmonize all opposites and “make them one” (the literal sense of *tawḥīd*).

One of *tawḥīd*’s basic implications is that everything comes from the One and returns to the One. The “origin and return” (*mabdaʿ wa maʿād*) is a major



theme in both philosophy and Sufism, though many interpreters of Rumi, especially from the Indian subcontinent, seem to have been unaware of its importance. A number of them have proudly thought that Rumi anticipated Darwinian evolution. In fact, he is explaining the ascent of the individual soul to God, beginning with the inanimate stage of existence, then the vegetal, animal, human, and beyond. This is a standard discussion in philosophical texts and in contemporary Sufi authors such as 'Aziz Nasafi, though no one other than Rumi explained it with such captivating language. The very notion of “return” (*ma'ād*)—the third principle of Islamic faith after *tawḥid* and prophecy (*nobuwa*)—demands that nothing can rise up to God without having come down from him in the first place. He created human beings in his own form (*ṣurat*), as the hadith tells us, but the divine attributes can only be actualized and realized gradually. It is because people have descended from God in stages (to which Rumi refers, as in *Maṭnawī* III, l. 560 ff.) that they are then able to ascend from the mineral and plant stages (in the womb), to the animal stage (in infancy and childhood), to the human level (as adults observing the necessities of human goodness), and then to even higher levels, following Mohammad in his Night Journey, the *me'rāj*. Borāq, the steed that takes the seeker on the *me'rāj*, is nonexistence, for at each stage, the limitations of the previous stage disappear. This is not a physical *me'rāj*, like vapor to the sky, but a spiritual climb, like that of an embryo to intelligence. “The Borāq of nonbeing is a fine steed! When you are *not*, it takes you to Being!” (*Maṭnawī* IV, ll. 552-55). To put this whole discussion in a nutshell, “Form comes out from Formlessness, then it returns, ‘for unto Him we are returning’ [Q. 2:156]” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 1141; Chittick, 1983, pp. 72-82).

“Form” is one of Rumi’s key notions, and his use of the word can only be understood in terms of its opposite, “meaning” (*ma'nā*). Form designates things as they appear, and meaning designates the invisible, spiritual something that is the source of their appearance. Meaning is thus the reality (*ḥaqīqat*), form the metaphor (*majāz*); meaning the inward or non-manifest (*bāṭen*), form the outward or manifest (*zāher*); meaning the spirit (*ruh*, *jān*), form the body. Ultimately, says Rumi, citing “the shaykh of the religion”—that is, Šams-e Tabrizi—“Meaning is God” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 3338; Chittick, 2004, pp. 73, 187). In more poetical terms, “Form is shadow, meaning the sun” (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 4747). Or again, addressing God, “Inwardly You are the Spirit of the spirit of the spirit of the spirit, outwardly the Sun of the sun!” (*Divān*, l. 28789).

In short, Rumi sees all apparent existence as the Real Being showing itself as



signs, forms, shadows, metaphors, manifestations, apparitions, things, creatures. All activity and rest, strife and harmony, war and peace, are forms displaying the Hidden Treasure. This implies that God is the source of evil as well as good. Given the precedence of mercy over wrath, what appears to us as evil can only be serving a greater good. Evil cannot be eliminated from the created world because that would be tantamount to destroying the world. Hence God appointed two sheriffs to keep the world going, remembrance of him (*dekr*), and heedlessness (*ḡaflat*). If either dominated, the world would disappear (*Fih*, pp. 109, 206-7; *Maṭnawī* I, ll. 2064 ff.). One also needs to consider the infinite creativity of Being; a painter who cannot paint ugly pictures can hardly be called skillful (*Maṭnawī* II, l. 2544). Moreover, the divine light in itself cannot appear to others, because it is far too intense to be perceived by created things, which are shadows and darkness (*Divān*, l. 21967, l. 30842). “Light is the First Cause, and every secondary cause is its shadow” (*Divān*, l. 525). Just as “you come to know light through light’s opposite” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 1134), so also “you will not know evil until you know good” (*Maṭnawī* IV, l. 1345). There can be no right path without wrong paths, no pleasure without pain, no mercy without wrath.

Rumi always applies such relatively theoretical discussions to the human situation. In this case, he asks his readers why they should be so ignorant as to complain about the existence of evil. Any elementary understanding of *tawḥīd* should have made clear to them that the forms, pictures, reflections, and shadows that comprise the realm of appearances have no inherent good, for there is nothing truly good but God. Given that it is impossible to find lasting good in anything, why are people so passionately and shamelessly attached to the world and their own egos? Ultimately, what they see as evil is simply God’s severity, announcing to them that they must seek his gentleness. “Whenever you turn your heart toward something, His severity will detach you from it—O heart, don’t fix your heart on any place, don’t persist!” (*Divān*, ll. 11949-50). But why must God make us suffer? When someone beats a rug with a stick, says Rumi, it is not because he hates the rug, but because he wants to get rid of the dust. Our souls are veiled by the dust of the ego, “and that dust will not leave all at once. // With every cruelty and every blow, it departs little by little from the heart’s face” (*Divān*, ll. 12074-79). In the end, Rumi tells us, all the cruelty and suffering offered by the world is nothing compared to staying distant from God, “For, that cruelty will pass, but distance from Him will not” (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 1757 ff.). As part of his explication of the wisdom in evil, Rumi tells a number of tales defending the activity of Satan, though he does not go as far as Sufis like Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). The interplay of



gentleness and severity demand that the divine attribute of guidance (*hedāyat*), made manifest by the prophets, be contested by misguidance (*eẓlāl*), which is the activity of Iblis and the satans. Together, prophets and satans are the touchstones (*meḥakk*) by which God tests the faith of his creatures (Chittick, 1983, pp. 99-101).

Love. Precisely because Rumi's works focus on "the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion," their basic theme is love, the fire of *tawḥid* that burns away the illusory existence of created things and results in a *me'rāj* to the divine presence. If his passionate poetry and marvelous tales have always captured the imagination of listeners and readers, this is because he speaks to every lover's concerns—and who is not a lover? Nonetheless, to understand what he is trying to convey, we need to have a thorough grasp of what he means by love—even if, as he reminds us, love cannot be expressed in words and must be tasted to be known (Chittick, 1983, p. 195). Nonetheless, if anyone has unpacked love's significance in language, it is certainly Rumi. Like other Sufis and theologians who talked about love, he found the key proof-text in the Qur'anic verse "He loves them, and they love Him" (Q. 5:54; *Maṭnawī* II, intro.; V, 2184ff.). This verse says that God and human beings are both lover and beloved and provides us with four basic issues: God as lover, man as God's beloved, man as lover, God as man's beloved. Rumi addresses each of these in terms of *tawḥid*, which is to say that he explains why there is no lover but God and no beloved but God, and why this means that by definition, to be human is to be a lover and a beloved.

(1). God as lover. The hadith of the Hidden Treasure says that God "loved" (*aḥbabto*) or, in some versions, "desired" (*aradto*), to be known. Love is thus the energy behind creation and a quasi-synonym of the Qur'anic term "desire": "His command, when He *desires* a thing, is to say to it 'Be!' and it comes to be" (Q. 36:82). Love is "the formless with a thousand forms, the form-giver to Turk, Greek, and Ethiopian" (*Divān*, l. 14023). In the last analysis, all love that appears in the universe can be nothing but God's love, just as all being can be nothing but his being. "He alone is the Seeker, and we are like shadows. Oh, our words are all the words of the Beloved!" (*Divān*, l. 4657).

(2). Human beings as God's beloved. The hadith of the Hidden Treasure tells us that God created the universe to be known and recognized (*an o'raf*), that is, by "others" (*aḡyār*), since he knows himself. The others are the entire universe in its infinite expanse, everything that is not God. Among these others, only those who have been taught "all the names" (Q. 2:31) have the



capacity to recognize God in the fullness of himself, and these are the children of Adam, who was *'allamaho'l-asmā bag*, “Master ‘He-taught-him-the-names” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 1234; Commentary I, p. 96). In order for God to be the object of love, he must first be recognized, and since only human beings have the capacity to recognize him, only they can love him. God’s first beloved is Mohammad, the greatest of the prophets and the recipient of the message that embraces all knowledge of God. It is he concerning whom God said, “But for you, I would not have created the spheres.” Mohammad is the root, and all things are his shadow (*Fih*, pp. 105-6). “The mystery that began as the seed of the spheres ended as the lord of ‘But for you” (*Maṭnawī* II, l. 970 ff.). The gardener planted the seed for the sake of the fruit (the Prophet), so in fact it is the fruit that gave birth to the tree (*Maṭnawī* IV, l. 520 ff.). Rumi’s depiction of the Prophet as God’s original beloved gave his commentators plenty of justification to see references in his works to what the Sufi theoreticians called “the Mohammadan Reality,” i.e., the logos in God, that through which all things were created.

Despite Rumi’s stress on the Prophet as the supreme object of divine love (e.g., in his long description of him as God’s “witness,” *šāhed*, that is, the one in whom God contemplates beauty; *Maṭnawī* VI, l. 2860 ff.), his basic message is that all human beings are loved by God, even if God’s love is focused on the prophets and saints. “Man is the substance, and the heavens are his accident; all things are branches and steps—he is the goal” (*Maṭnawī* V, l. 3760). “In form man is a branch of this world, in attribute its foundation” (*Maṭnawī* IV, l. 3766). Thus God invites everyone to be his “friend” (*wali*), that is, one of his saints, and Rumi constantly urges his readers to become lovers (e.g., in ghazals which begin with “*āšeq šow!*” “Become a lover!”).

Given that *tawḥīd* demands that “There is no beloved but God,” how can human beings be God’s beloved? This is like asking how they can “exist” despite the fact that there is no existence but God, or how they can be creative, despite the fact that there is no creator but God. In the last analysis, people’s existence derives from God’s existence, as do all their attributes and qualities. “God created us in His own form: Our description takes instruction from His description” (*Maṭnawī* IV, l. 1194). Thus God is the “meaning” of the human being, man’s true reality, and human beings are the “forms” of God, his external manifestations, what the Qur’an calls his “vicegerents” (*kolafā*; caliphs). Rumi tells us that God desired in eternity to manifest himself, so “He made a vicegerent (*kalifa*). . . to be the mirror of His kingship” (*Maṭnawī* VI, ll.



2151-53). Whatever appears in man is God's reflection, "like the moon in a stream" (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 3139). Again, as the hadith has it, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty," and this means, as Rumi explains, "How could a young man choose an old crone?" (*Maṭnawī* II, l. 79). God loves human beings because they alone make manifest the entire range of his "most beautiful names," while everything else is at best a partial reflection of real beauty. "When God causes someone to have knowledge of Him and be familiar with Him, moment by moment he observes the self-disclosures of God and His ineffable beauty from the astrolabe of his own existence—that Beauty will never be absent from his mirror" (*Fih*, p. 10). "These beauties painted on canvas veil the beauties of the heart—lift up the veil and enter: Be with your own Beloved!" (*Divān*, l. 13185). As the refrain of one ghazal has it, "Return to the root of the root of your own self!" (*Divān*, l. 1354ff.); that root is the meaning that gave rise to you as its form.

(3). Man as lover. The general principle here is that all things are animated by love (as Avicenna had explained, and Aristotle before him). "Love" is simply a name given to the force that drives things to seek their ultimate good, their final end, their *telos*. A Qur'anic proof that love animates all things is the fact that God created everything in "pairs" (Q. 51:49). His wisdom "has paired all parts of the world and set them in love with their mates" (*Maṭnawī* III, l. 4402). Everything is driven by its own desires—"Everyone was made for a task, love for it was placed in his heart" (III, l. 1618). "God tells the rose, 'Celebration is best!' He says to the cloud, 'Weeping is best!'" (*Divān*, l. 26050). Rumi explains that in the human case, the aspirations and desires that grow up in the garden of the soul are God's attributes, placed there because the Hidden Treasure wanted to be known (*Majāles*, pp. 118-19).

The final object of everyone's love is God, but few people know this. The problem is ignorance, the solution knowledge. Imitative knowledge is not sufficient; catechisms and creeds, philosophies and theologies, rules and regulations, all have their role to play, but none can drive the seeker to the goal. Achieving realization demands harnessing the fire of love to burn away the others. The way to harness love is set down in the already mentioned verse, "Say: 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you.'" The path of following the Prophet is that of self-negation, of surrendering totally to love for God. Rumi describes this path with a host of images and scriptural supports, such as the purported hadith, "Die before you die." One of the many well-known Sufi symbols that he uses here is the heart as mirror (prefigured in the Qur'an, which speaks of the heart's "rust," [Q. 83:14]). It is the power of



love that “scrapes rust from mirrors” (*Divān*, l. 14084). Once polished, “the heart acts as a receptacle for infinite pictures.... For the heart is with Him—indeed, the heart is He” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 3484 ff.). In one story, Rumi tells of the man who heard of the incredible beauty of Joseph and undertook a long journey to Egypt to see him. Arriving in his presence, he presented him with a mirror, so that Joseph could contemplate his own beauty. The moral is clear: “What is the mirror of Being? Nonbeing. Take nonbeing [as your gift to God] if you are not stupid” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 3201).

In classical Sufi terminology, achieving nonexistence is called *fanāʾ*, “annihilation” of self, which is the complement of *baqāʾ*, the “subsistence” of the purified form in which God created Adam. Rumi contrasts existence and nonexistence using this pair of terms as well as several others, always circling back to the notion of love. One of these pairs is need (*niāz*) and the lack of need (*nāz*). Love is “want and need for something” (*Fih*, p. 139). In Persian poetry need is the typical attribute of the lover, who longs for his beloved, who has no needs and shows this through her haughtiness and disdain, not to speak of coquettish glances and subtle come-ons. Rumi makes clear that need is not only a synonym for love, but also for one of the most typical designations of the Sufi path, *faqr* or *darviši*, “poverty.” Like many other Sufi teachers, he takes poverty as an existential fact that must be understood and realized. When God says, “O people, you are the poor toward God, and He is the Rich, the Praiseworthy” (Q. 35:15), he is declaring the nothingness of the human soul in face of Being. The Sufi path aims at realizing this nothingness. “Poverty is not for the sake of hardship; rather, it is because there is nothing but God” (*Maṭnawī* II, l. 3497).

Need arises when people recognize that they have nothing of their own. Only God, the Rich and Praiseworthy is truly real. In order to gain any hold on reality, people must intensify their awareness of their own nothingness—their love, need, hunger, thirst, pain, suffering. “What is it to be a lover?” asks Rumi; he answers by setting down the program of his teachings: “Perfect thirst—so let me explain the water of life” (*Divān*, l. 17361). His role is to describe the beauty and attractiveness of the true Beloved, who alone can deliver the soul from separation (*ferāq, jodāʾi*), its basic problem—hence the first verse of the *Maṭnawī*, the complaint of the reed at having been cut off from its source. Awareness of separation stirs up need and love: “Pain is an alchemy that renovates. . . . Beware, do not sigh coldly in your indifference! Seek pain! Seek pain, pain, pain!” (*Maṭnawī* VI, ll. 43034).



Acknowledging pain, recognizing thirst, and focusing on the Beloved call down mercy and gentleness: “Where there is pain, the cure will come, where the land is low, water will run. // If you want the water of mercy, go, become low! Then drink mercy’s wine and become drunk” (*Maṭnawī* II, ll. 1939-40). “No physician gives pills and medicine without illness—I will become totally pain so that I may reach the Remedy.” (*Divān*, l.14841). “Every hungry man finds food in the end” (*Maṭnawī* V, l. 1755). “No matter what your state may be, seek! ... Seek water, for your lips bear witness that you will find a fountain” (*Maṭnawī* III, ll. 1439-40).

Suffering pain and anguish is a sign of one’s true situation, one’s separation from the reed bed. It follows that “Whoever is more awake has greater pain, whoever is more aware has a yellower face” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 629). Referring to a hadith about the Prophet’s own suffering, Rumi points out that it is precisely this awareness and wakefulness that explains “why the suffering and tribulation inflicted upon the prophets is greater than that inflicted upon all the world’s creatures” (*Maṭnawī* IV, ll. 97-100). Nonetheless, there can be no severity without gentleness, so the alchemical power of love transmutes pain into the most exquisite joy.

(4). God as man’s beloved. Rumi goes to great lengths to show that “they love Him” is a statement of fact: Human beings love God because, in reality, there is nothing else to love. The created realm is like pure water, “within which shine the attributes of the Possessor of Majesty.” The water changes, “but the reflection of the moon and stars,” i.e., the divine names, “remains” (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 3172ff.). People are in love with reflections, shadows, pictures, forms, all of which are “gold-plated by God’s attributes” (*Maṭnawī* III, l. 554). Their hopes, desires, loves, and affections for fathers, mothers, lovers, friends, gardens, palaces, knowledge, activity, food, drink, “are all desires for God, and those things are veils” (*Fih*, p. 35). “In reality God is worshiped by all things, for they all travel their paths in search of joy” (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 3755). Thus Rumi distinguishes between “metaphorical love” (*‘ešq-e majāzi*), which is love for shadows, and “real love” (*‘ešq-e ḥaqīqi*), which is love for God. “God alone is desired for His own sake”; everything else is desired for the sake of something else (*Fih*, p. 101).

Rumi also insists that, as the Arabic proverb has it, “The metaphor is the bridge to the reality” (*al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqa*). God has given us metaphorical love so that we may perceive its limitations and pass beyond. The warrior gives his child a wooden sword as a first training in the arts of



battle (*Divān*, l. 337). All love eventually leads to the same place, because there is no other beloved—“Whether love is from this side or that side, in the end it guides to that side” (*Maṭnawī* I, l. 111). This results from *tawḥīd*, the fact that all things must return to God, but it does not demand that the road be easy. The fire and burning that fill Rumi’s poetry reflect the urgency of his message: People have forgotten who they are and need to rediscover their own nature as lovers before they pass on to the next realm. If the love does not burn away the ego before death, it will escape to the other side, where its hellish nature will live on (*Maṭnawī* V, l. 3821ff.; *Fih*, pp. 166-67). The suffering of the afterlife is simply the pain whose cure was not found in this world: “The regret of the dead does not stem from death, it arises because they stopped at the pictures” (*Maṭnawī* VI, l. 1454).

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