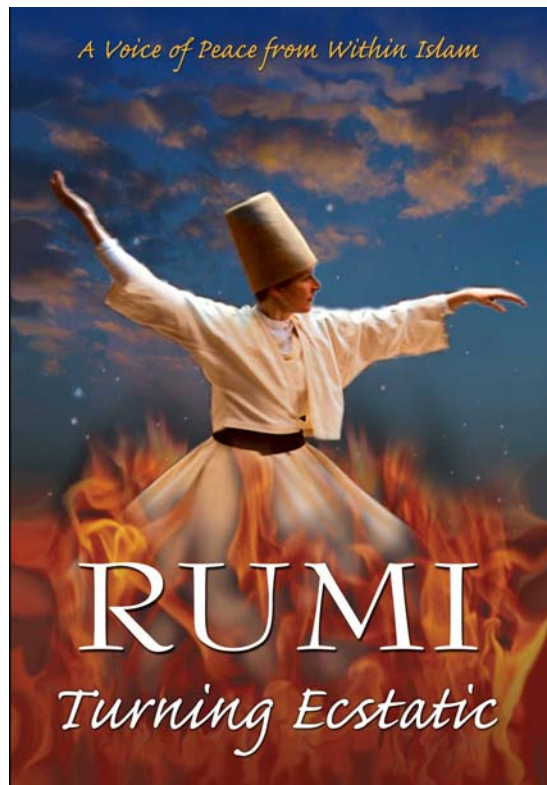




RUMI: Turning Ecstatic

Guidebook



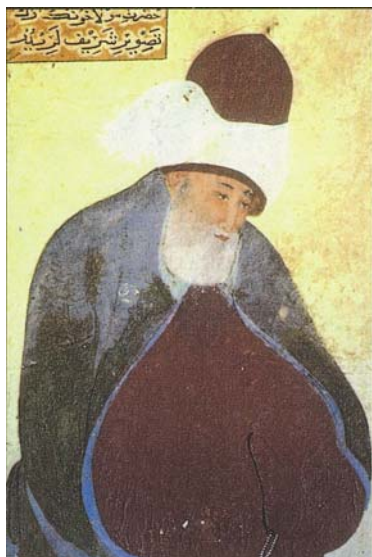
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RUMI: Turning Ecstatic



In the first years of the Twenty-first Century the spiritual influence of Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi is being strongly felt by people of diverse beliefs throughout the Western world. He is being recognized here in the West, as he has been for seven centuries in the Middle East and Western Asia, as one of the greatest literary and spiritual figures of all time.

Different qualities of Rumi have been brought forth by a variety of new translations that have appeared since the nine teen-eighties. He has been presented as both refined and sensual, sober and ecstatic, deeply serious and extremely funny, rarefied and accessible. It is a sign of his profound universality that he has been so many things to so many people.

It is our wish in this short booklet to begin to present his spiritual teachings concisely and comprehensively, to offer some jewels from this vast treasure.

Jelaluddin Rumi was born in 1207 into the Persian Empire- in an area which today is Balkh Afghanistan. At an early age his family left Balkh because of the danger of the invading Mongols and settled in Konya, Turkey, which was then the capital of the Seljuk Empire. His father Bahauddin was a great religious teacher who received a position at the university in Konya.

Mevlana's early spiritual education was under the tutelage of his father Bahauddin and later under his father's close friend Sayyid Bahaeddin of Balkh. The circumstances surrounding Sayyid's undertaking the education of his friend's son are interesting: Sayyid had been in Balkh, Afghanistan when he felt the death of his friend Bahauddin and realized that he must go to Konya to take over Jelaluddin's spiritual education. He came to Konya when Mevlana was about twenty-four years old, and for nine years instructed him in "the science of the prophets and states," beginning with a strict forty day retreat and continuing with various disciplines of meditation and fasting. During this time Jelaluddin also spent more than four years in Aleppo and Damascus studying with some of the greatest religious minds of the time.

As the years passed, Mevlana grew both in knowledge and consciousness of God. Eventually Sayyid Burhaneddin felt that he had fulfilled his responsibility toward Jelaluddin, and he wanted to live out the rest of his years in seclusion. He told Mevlana, "You are now ready, my son. You have no equal in any of the branches of learning. You have become a lion of knowledge. I am such a lion myself and we are not both needed here and that is why I want to go. Furthermore, a great friend will come to you, and you will be each other's mirror. He will lead you to the innermost parts of the spiritual world, just as you will lead him. Each of you will complete the other, and you will be the greatest friends in the entire world." And so Sayyid intimated the coming of Shams of Tabriz, the central event of Rumi's life.

At the age of thirty-seven Mevlana met the spiritual vagabond Shams. Much has already been written about their relationship. Prior to this encounter Rumi had been an eminent professor of religion and a highly attained mystic; after this he became an inspired poet and a great lover of humanity. Rumi's meeting with Shams can be compared to the Prophet Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek. We owe to Murat Yagan, a Sufi who emigrated from Turkey to British Columbia, this explanation: "A

Mekhezidek and a Shams are messengers from the Source. They do nothing themselves but carry enlightenment to someone who can receive it, someone who is either too full or too empty. Mevlana was one who was too full. After receiving it, he could apply this message for the benefit of humanity."

Shams was burning and Rumi caught fire. Shams' companionship with Rumi was brief. Despite the fact that each was a perfect mirror for the other Shams disappeared, not once but twice. The first time, Rumi's son Sultan Veled searched for and discovered him in Damascus. The second disappearance, however, proved to be final, and it is believed that he may have been murdered by people who resented his influence over Mevlana.

Rumi was a man of knowledge and sanctity before meeting Shams, but only after the alchemy of this relationship was he able to fulfill Sayyid Burhaneddin's prediction that he would "drown men's souls in a fresh life and in the immeasurable abundance of God . . . and bring to life the dead of this false world with . . . meaning and love."

For more than ten years after meeting Shams, Mevlana had been spontaneously composing odes, or ghazals, and these had been collected in a large volume called the *Divan-i Kabir*. Meanwhile Mevlana had developed a deep spiritual friendship with Husameddin Chelebi. The two of them were wandering through the Meram vineyards outside of Konya one day when Husameddin described an idea he had to Mevlana: "If you were to write a book like the *Hahiwme* of Sanai or the *Mantik'ut-Tayr'i* of Fariduddin Attar it would become the companion of many troubadours. They would fill their hearts from your work and compose music to accompany it."

Mevlana smiled and took from inside the folds of his turban a piece of paper on which were written the opening eighteen lines of his *Mathnawi*, beginning with:

*Listen to the reed and the tale it tells,
how it complains of separation. . .*

Husameddin wept for joy and implored Mevlana to write volumes more. Mevlana replied, "Chelebi, if you consent to write for me, I will recite." And so it happened that Mevlana in his early fifties began the dictation of this monumental work. As Husameddin described the process: "He never took a pen in his hand while composing the *Mathnawi*. Wherever he happened to be, whether in the school, at the Ilgin hot springs, in the Konya baths, or in the Meram vineyards, I would write down what he recited. Often I could barely keep up with his pace, sometimes, night and day for several days. At other times he would not compose for months, and once for two years there was nothing. At the completion of each book I would read it back to him, so that he could correct what had been written."

The *Mathnawi* can justifiably be considered one of the greatest spiritual masterpieces ever written by a human being. Its content includes the full spectrum of life on earth, every kind of human activity: religious, cultural, political, sexual, domestic; every kind of human character from the vulgar to the refined; as well as copious and specific details of the natural world, history and geography. It is also a book that presents the vertical dimension of life— from this mundane world of desire, work, and things, to the most sublime levels of metaphysics and cosmic awareness. It is its completeness that enchants us.

What do we need to know to receive the knowledge that Rumi offers us?

First of all, it needs to be understood that Rumi's tradition **is** not an "Eastern" tradition. It is neither of the East nor the West, but something in between. Rumi's mother-tongue was Persian, an Indo-European language strongly influenced by Semitic (Arabic) vocabulary, something like French with a smattering of Hebrew.

Furthermore, the Islamic tradition, which shaped him, acknowledges that only one religion has been given to mankind through countless prophets, or messengers, who have come to every people on earth

bearing this knowledge of Spirit. God is the subtle source of all life, whose essence cannot be described or compared to anything, but who can be known through the spiritual qualities that are manifest in the world and in the human heart. It is a deeply mystical tradition, on the one hand, with a strong and clear emphasis on human dignity and social justice, on the other.

Islam is understood as a continuation of the Judeo-Christian or Abrahamic tradition, honoring the Hebrew prophets, as well as Jesus and Mary. Muhammad is viewed as the last of those human prophets who brought the message of God's love.

In Rumi's world, the Islamic way of life had established a high level of spiritual awareness among the general population. The average person would be someone who performed regular ablutions and prayed five times a day, fasted from food and drink during the daylight hours for at least one month a year, and closely followed a code which emphasized the continual remembrance of God, intention, integrity, generosity, and respect for all life. Although the *Mathnawi* can appeal to us on many levels, it assumes a rather high level of spiritual awareness as a starting point and extends to the very highest levels of spiritual understanding.

The spiritual practices which Rumi would have known were aimed at transforming the compulsiveness of the false self and attaining Islam or "Submission" to a higher order of reality. Without this Submission the real self is enslaved to the ego and lives in a state of internal conflict due to the contradictory impulses of the ego. The unenlightened human state is one of "faithlessness" in which an individual lives in slavery to the false self and the desires of the material world. The enslaved ego is cut off from the heart, the chief organ for perceiving reality, and cannot receive the spiritual guidance and nourishment which the heart provides.

Overcoming this enslavement and false separation leads to the realization and development of our true humanity. Spiritual maturity is the realization that the self is a reflection of the Divine. God is the Beloved or Friend.

In the preface to Book One of his *Mathnawi*, Rumi describes the essence and objective of his writing as: "The roots of the roots of the roots of the roots of the Religion, unveiling the mysteries of attainment and certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest way of God and the most manifest evidence of God. It is the heart's paradise, having fountains and boughs... Within it the righteous eat and drink, and the free rejoice and are happy; and like the Nile of Egypt it is a refreshment to those who patiently endure, but a grief to the people of Pharaoh and the faithless... It is the cure of hearts, and the purge of sorrows, and the interpreter of the Qur'an, and an abundant source of gifts, and the cleansing of character. . . since God observes it and protects it, *'and He is the best guardian and He is the most merciful of them that show mercy.'*" So says this feeble slave who is in need of God's mercy."

Edmund Kabir Helminski

Wheat

If wheat sprouts out of my grave,
the bread you make of it will get you drunk.

The baker and the dough will go insane,
and the oven will recite intoxicating verses.

If you come to visit my grave,
My tomb will appear to dance.

Brother! Don't come without a tambourine,
for the sad can't join in God's celebration.

Though deep in the grave, the chin closed tight,
this mouth still chews the beloved's opium and sugarplum.

If you tear a piece off that shroud and fasten it round your chest,
a tavern will open up from your soul.

From every direction comes the sound of the harp,
and hue and cry from the drunk.
Every action will perforce give rise to another one.

God has created me from love's wine;
even if death takes me, I am the same love.

I am intoxication; my origin is the wine of love.
Tell me: what comes from wine except intoxication?

Toward the lofty soul of Shams of Tabriz
my soul is flying, lingering not even a single moment.

O Drop

Listen, O drop, give yourself up without regret,
and in exchange gain the Ocean.
Listen, O drop, bestow upon yourself this honor,
and in the arms of the Sea be secure.
Who indeed should be so fortunate?
An Ocean wooing a drop!
In God's name, in God's name, sell and buy at once!
Give a drop, and take this Sea full of pearls.

[Mathnawi IV, 2619-2622]

The Root of the Root of Your Self

Don't go away, come near.
Don't be faithless, be faithful.
Find the antidote in the venom.
Come to the root of the root of yourself.

Molded of clay, yet kneaded
from the substance of certainty,
a guard at the Treasury of Holy Light—
come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

Once you get hold of selflessness,
you'll be dragged from your ego
and freed from many traps.
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

You are born from the children of God's creation,
but you have fixed your sight too low.
How can you be happy?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

Although you are a talisman protecting a treasure,
you are also the mine.
Open your hidden eyes
and come to the root of the root of your Self.

You were born from a ray of God's majesty
and have the blessings of a good star.
Why suffer at the hands of things that don't exist?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

You are a ruby embedded in granite.
How long will you pretend it isn't true?
We can see it in your eyes.
Come to the root of the root of your Self.

You came here from the presence of that fine Friend,
a little drunk, but gentle, stealing our hearts

with that look so full of fire; so,
come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

Our master and host, Shamsi Tabrizi,
has put the eternal cup before you.
Glory be to God, what a rare wine!
So come, return to the root of the root of your Self.



Photography by Nitin Dilawri

You are Joy and We Are Laughter

O my God, our intoxicated eyes have blurred our vision.
Our burdens have been made heavy, forgive us.
You are hidden, and yet from East to West You have filled the world with Your radiance.
Your Light is more magnificent than sunrise or sunset,
and You are the inmost ground of consciousness
revealing the secrets we hold.
You are an explosive force causing our damned up rivers to burst forth.
You whose essence is hidden while Your gifts are manifest,
You are like water and we are like millstones.
You are like wind and we are like dust.
The wind is hidden while the dust is plainly seen.
You are the invisible spring, and we are Your lush garden.

You are the Spirit of life and we are like hand and foot.
Spirit causes the hand to close and open.
You are intelligence; we are Your voice.
Your intelligence causes this tongue to speak.
You are joy and we are laughter,
for we are the result of the blessing of Your joy.
All our movement is really a continual profession of faith,
bearing witness to Your eternal power,
just as the powerful turning of the millstone professes faith in the river's existence.
Dust settles upon my head and upon my metaphors,
for You are beyond anything we can ever think or say.
And yet, this servant cannot stop trying to express Your beauty,
in every moment, let my soul be Your carpet.

[Mathnawi V, 3307-3319]

Quatrains

62

If you desire the self, get out of the self.
Leave the shallow stream behind
and flow into the river deep and wide.
Don't be an ox pulling the wheel of the plow,
Turn with the stars that wheel above you.

494

Someone who received
half a loaf of bread from heaven,
And because of her soul's attainment
was given a little nest,
someone who neither desires anybody,
nor is desired by anyone,
may she live happily,
for she owns a happy universe.

549

O pure people who wander the world,
amazed at the idols you see,
what you are searching for out there,
if you look within, you yourself are it.

1078

Have the aspiration of a falcon
and the pride of a leopard.
At the time of the hunt be graceful,
and be victorious at times of war.
Don't get too involved
with the nightingale and the peacock.
One is all words and the other all colors.

1131

I always see the remedy in pain.
I see the subtle gift and fidelity
in angry quarrels and betrayals.
When I look down, I don't see the earth.
And when I look up,
I don't see the vault of the sky.
Whatever I glance at I see You.

1616

We are puppets in the hands of God.
The power is His; we are all beggars.
Why are we always trying to outdo each other.
when we have all come from the same home?

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Wherever You Turn: The Mevlevi Whirling Ceremony

By: Kabir Helminski

Although practices of whirling, especially among the peoples of Central Asia, have existed from time immemorial, it was the thirteenth-century Sufi saint and poet Jalaluddin Rumi and his lineage, the Mevlevi Order, who developed whirling into a form of spiritual training and a high art.

Whirling, which requires an inner emptiness and a heightened awareness, is not a trance but an exercise of mindful presence and an act of service. While whirling, the student, or dervish, is conscious of several things at once; pure awareness uncluttered by thought, harmony with the other participating dervishes, an inner connection with the sheikh who is leading the ceremony, and a conscious opening of the heart to the Divine.

The basic form of whirling is this: the right foot is lifted up to the knee and returned to the same place from which it was first lifted, while the left foot and leg become the axis on which the whole body revolves 360 degrees in a counterclockwise direction, and with each revolution the name Allah is pronounced inwardly. The arms are extended with the right palm turned upwards, receiving Divine grace, and the left palm facing downwards, bestowing on the earth the Divine energy, which passes through the heart. Beginning dervishes must dedicate themselves to practicing this basic form before they can partake in a ceremony.

The ceremony begins when the sheikh and dervishes walk majestically around the ceremonial space three times in a procession. Then, at a specific point on the circle they bow to each other, face-to-face, essence to essence. They are reenacting the journey of life, the progression from mineral, to vegetable, to animal, to human, and, finally, to a state beyond ego in which they are “resurrected” by Love.

The bulk of the ceremony is divided into four sessions of whirling, approximately ten minutes long, called *selams*. The first selam ends when the music stops. The dervishes halt, facing the sheikh. The movement is so quick that their billowing skirts wrap around their legs as they bow. The dervishes do a second selam, similar to the first but accompanied by different music. Then they do a third and most ecstatic selam, which represents union with the Divine. The third selam begins with the sheikh steps forward and silently recites a prayer:

May Allah grant you total soundness, O travelers on the Way of Love. May the Beloved remove the veils from your eyes and reveal to you the secrets of your time and of the true center.

In the fourth and final selam the dervishes cluster around the sheikh, who is now for the first time revolving slowly in the center. This selam represents receiving one's selfhood back, now with a whole new state of being. It ends when a recitation of the Qur'an begins.

The whirling ceremony is one important facet of a way of life designed to maximize Divine remembrance, which in Islam is considered the highest of all human activities. The ceremony is typically offered once a week in a Mevlevi *tekke* or center. It is preceded by spiritual conversation and discussion (*sohbet*), similar to what Hindus call *satsang*. This is followed by *salaat*, the ritual prayer of Islam, performed at five specified times during the day. Then there is *Zikr* (chanting the name of God) and the whirling ceremony itself. Immediately after the ceremony, the dervishes meditate for as long as their obligations permit, sometimes late into the night.

The whirling ceremony of the Mevlevis serves two main functions. First, it strengthens the bonds of affection and respect within the community of seekers. More importantly, it serves as a means for communion with the Divine, developing in individuals the capacity to be in touch with spiritual reality in the midst of the most demanding activities of everyday life.

The goal of Mevlevi training, including whirling, is to beautify and spiritualize the self through cultivating various artistic and intellectual skills and practicing service and contemplation. For more than seven hundred years the Mevlevi Order has been a crucible of transformation, giving birth to a highly refined aesthetic culture and providing a spiritual discipline that has brought many souls to human maturity.

Kabir Helminski is a sheikh of the Mevlevi Order and a noted author and translator.

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