

*"Each verse of the Mesnevi
is a teaching and a love-letter."*

Mevlana
Jalaluddin
Rumi's
Forgotten
Message
SHEMS FRIEDLANDER



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Forgotten Message

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A Love Letter from Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi

I am a bird of the heavenly garden
I belong not to the earthly sphere,
They have made for two or three days
A cage of my body.

For 743 years, men in black cloaks have performed a *zikir* in the form of a whirling dance in a continual remembrance of their Creator.

The Sufi poet and mystic Jalaluddin Rumi learned the *sema* from Shems-i Tabriz but it was his son Sultan Veled who standardized the dervish order known as the *Mevlevi*s. Since Rumi's passing in 1273 the *Mevlevi*s have made a kinetic *zikir* that was stylized by Sultan Veled on the basis of the movements established by his father.



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With the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire in 1924, the 'Mevlevi Turn' was interrupted for over 25 years. All the *tekkes* in Turkey were closed and it was against the law to be a dervish.

In 1954 a small group of dervishes led by Sadettin Heper convinced the local government in Konya that it would be harmless to introduce the Turn 'as a historical tradition' to the new culture of Turkey. UNESCO invited the Mevlevi to Paris in 1964. During this, their first European trip, Selman Tuzon and Suleyman Loras sat on the Sheikh's red post as nine *semazens* turned to the music of several dervish musicians. This event signaled the beginning of a widespread interest in the West in the remarkable works of Rumi.

Since then the *sema* has been performed in Konya on December 17th to honor the *Shebi Arus*, the Wedding Night of Jalaluddin Rumi (the night of his passing).

The turners pass the post and bow to the Sheikh. Their tall honey-colored felt hats representing their tombstones are tightly pulled over their ears, symbolizing the tying down of their lower selves. In the Sultan Veled Walk they trail the Sheikh around the *semahane* still wearing the black cloak that reflects their attachment to the world, the box of their actions. Before they begin to whirl, each lets their cloak fall and, like a fledgling bird, unfolds and stretches out his arms as the long white *tenure*, the shroud of their future, engraves a circle in the air. With each turn they invoke the Name of Allah, and perhaps for a moment experience their death before dying.

When the seed of love is planted in the heart of a believer, only Allah knows where it will bear fruit. The *sema* is a spiritual field where one can plant seeds of faith.



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A person without faith is like a man who arrives at the marketplace after dark. In the darkness, this man cannot tell what he is buying. There are all kinds of people among the sellers. He pays his money and stuffs whatever they give into his sack. He does not examine what he is getting. That man has paid his money, but he has no idea what he purchased. Back home, he empties his sack. He thought he had bought a rope, but finds he has a snake. The honey proves to be tar. The meat is a stinking carcass. All his money has been wasted, and he has bought himself a heap of trouble in the bargain. The human being entering this world is like a man going to market in the dark.

Listen to the words of the *Sufi* poet.

To market we came
From our mother's womb,
We bought a shroud,
Then back to the tomb.

Mevlana Jalaluddin's life has been well recorded. His years as a religious teacher, his meeting with his *sohbet-sheikh* Shems-i Tabriz, the wandering dervish in search of a real sheikh, the mysterious disappearance of Shems, becoming the poet of love inspired by the Koran and the Prophet Mohammed, his death known as the *Shebi Arus*, his Wedding Night with the Beloved, and his founding of the Mevlevi Order of Dervishes and its continuation have been documented with clarity as well as the fog of unknowing.

Mevlana left a treasure chest some 800 years ago containing the knowledge of how to live that is as relevant today as it was then. On his deathbed he said not to look for him in the grave but in the hearts of learned men. The truth is not altered by time, but the message can be forgotten. If you want the treasure in the mine you must dig in the earth.

We are the heirs of Mevlana Jalaluddin. How will we treat this inheritance? Will we squander it among those who have been deceived by the world? Argue its validity with scholars in classrooms and teahouses; or will we feed yearning hearts, enhance the intellectual desires of youth, and fill the gap of disappointment of those who have reached maturity and seniority and are still empty?

The history of Mevlana can be placed in the history books, but the essence of Mevlana's teaching, his *zikh Allah*, his meditation on Allah and the virtues of his Prophet, constant remembrance, gratitude and adherence to the examples of the Prophet Mohammed belong in each and every heart.

Muzaffer Efendi is talking. "Read the books and then perhaps Allah will reveal to you what is not in the books."

Rumi lived in the thirteenth century but his message is for all time.



Can you make an exegesis of the *Mesnevi*? To understand the works of Mevlana Jalaluddin is a struggle. It is not a coffee shop where you drink your fill, chat and exchange stories, then leave.

Each verse of the *Mesnevi* is a teaching and a love letter. How do you read a love letter from Mevlana Jalaluddin? Words and thoughts born in his heart, mingled with his breath, scratched with ink on paper. Who will read this? Will your tears fall to the paper and cause the ink of words to flow into a drink of meaning? Will you first sweep your heart of the dust of the world so there is space for Rumi's love letter to you?

Will you sit in a clean, quiet place and open your self to the 'sheikh' who sits before you?

Rumi expresses his attitude with these lines:



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I am the slave of the Koran While I still have life.
I am dust on the path of Mohammed, the Chosen One.
If anyone interprets my words in any other way,
I deplore that person, and I deplore his words.

The Sufi

There was a tradesman in a small village in the East who sat on his knees in his little shop, and with his left hand pulled a strand of wool from the bale that was above his head. He twirled the wool into a thicker strand and passed it to his right hand as it came before his body. The right hand wound the wool around a large spindle. This was a continuous motion on the part of the old man, who each time his right hand spindled the wool, inaudibly said *La illaha illa 'Llah*. There could be no uneven movement or the wool would break and he would have to tie a knot and begin again. The old man had to be present to every moment or he would break the wool. This is awareness. This is life. Sufi means awareness in life, awareness on a higher level than we normally live.

Nuri, that was his name, was a quiet man of reflection and taught his sons his trade.



The Persian word *darwish* (literally the sill of the door) is accepted in Arabic and Turkish (*derwish*) to describe the *Sufi* who is the one who is at the door to enlightenment.

Some say *Sufi* (in Arabic *suf* means wool) comes from the wool cloaks worn by these pious beings. Others like to think that its origin is from the Greek word *sophos* that means wisdom.

The similitude of this world is of a garment torn from end to end, that remains attached by a thread at one extremity. This, almost broken, thread is the remainder of life for each of us.

Its length is a secret, known only to God. The repetition of "There is no reality but God," is a polish for the heart, it is a satisfaction for the heart, it dissolves the hardening of attitudes that has caused a crust to form on the heart.

Neutralizing the Earth's Glue A Beginning

The body is like the earth, the bones like mountains, the brain like mines, the belly like the sea, the intestine like rivers, the nerves like brooks, the flesh like dust and mud. The hair on the body is like plants, the places where hair grows like fertile land and where there is no growth like saline soil. From its face to its feet, the body is like a populated state, its back like desolate regions, its front like the east, back the west, right the south, left the north. Its breath is like the wind, words like thunder, sounds like thunderbolts. Its laughter is like the light of noon, its tears like rain, its sadness like the darkness of night, and its sleep is like death as its awaking is like life. The days of its childhood are like spring, youth like summer, maturity like autumn, and old age like winter. Its motions and acts are like motions of stars and their rotation. Its birth and presence are like the rising of the stars, and its death and absence like their setting.



Everything in the world is invisible except that which we make semi-visible. By the introduction of awareness, all things can become visible. The aim of the dervish is to open the eyes of the heart and see infinity in eternity. His goal is to loosen himself from the earth's glue which binds him and become one with God, to become a channel for His Light, and enter the realm of no boundaries.

Why is man interested in the magic flying carpet? Where does he think it will carry him? To a land of fantasy or to a place outside of himself where each being has inner peace and freedom?

The mystic Rabia was in her house when her friend said, “Come out and behold what God has made.” Rabia answered, “Come in and behold the Maker.”

Jalaluddin Rumi is talking.

In a fair orchard, full of trees and fruit
And vines and greenery, a Sufi sat with
Eyes closed, his head upon his knees,
Sunk deep in meditation, mystical.

“Why,” asked another, “do you not behold
These signs of God the Merciful displayed
Around you, that He bids us contemplate?”

“The signs,” he answered, “I behold within;
Without is nothing but symbols of the Signs.”

The experience of looking within, uncovering the buried treasure on which we sleep and living in the moment in remembrance of Allah, has been transmitted through the chain of Sufism.



It is an autumn day in 1960. Naqshibendi Sheikh Necmeddin deeply inhales the *nargile* before him, turns to the small circle of listeners in an old Istanbul coffee house, and between puffs says; “When you are everywhere, you are nowhere, and when you are somewhere, you are everywhere.”

Man is the magic flying carpet, and the ability to fly, to rise above all things, completes the weaving process of the carpet. It is the esoteric meaning of the Prophet Jesus walking on the water and the mythical horse *Buraq* (breath) that carried the Prophet Mohammed from Makkah to Jerusalem and then to Heaven.

In Hindu mythology, the giant bird *Garuda* (breath) lifted the Gods to Heaven. By becoming aware of breath, man can virtually ride on his own breath and rise above earthly situations.

Rumi is talking. “A bird that flies upward does not reach the skies, yet it rises far above the rooftops and so escapes.”

The dervish experiences a similar freedom. He may not become the ‘perfect man,’ but he gains a majestic quality in life that neutralizes the earth’s glue, freeing him from worldly cares and anxieties.

A dervish tells the story of his sheikh, a man famous for his love of God, who used to spread his cloak on a lake adjoining the *tekke*. Seated upon it, he was carried wherever he liked. The Sufi poet Sa’di relates in his *Bustan* the tale of the dervish who crossed a river on his prayer carpet because he could not pay the ferryman’s fee.

The method of the Sufis is *zikr*, the repetition of *La illaha illa ‘Llah* (there is no god but God). There are some Sufis who only repeat ‘Allah’ because they know man can die at any moment, and they want only the name of God on their lips and in their hearts. All Sufi orders perform *zikr*. The manner in which *zikr* is performed is the essential difference in the various orders. *Zikr* opens the door to the spiritual world that can also be opened by a gift from Allah.

Sufism is for human beings. It brings to humanity the culture of mankind. The Sufi leads a rhythmic life. In the Koran it is written:

“Men whom neither trading nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God.”

Out of the being of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi emerged the *Mevlevi*s or Whirling Dervishes, one of the most important and visually exciting dervish orders. At one point in his life, after meeting the wandering dervish, Shems-i Tabriz, Rumi went through a metamorphosis that triggered an opening in him, that transformed his vision and understanding, beyond formal knowledge of Sufism, into the secrets of Sufism. Although little



was known of Shems, there is no doubt that he belonged to a group which knew how to interiorize oneself, thereby reaching the place of the *kalam-i-qadim*, the ancient word. Mevlana described this as a place where:

There comes a Sound, from neither within nor without,
From neither right nor left, from neither behind nor in front,
From neither below nor above, from neither East nor West,
Nor is it of the elements: water, air, fire, earth, and the like.
From where then? It is from that place you are in search of,
Turn toward the place wherefrom the Lord makes His appearance.
From where a restless fish out of water gets water to live in,
From the place where the prophet Moses saw the divine Light,
From the place where the fruits get their ripening influence,
From the place where the stones get transmuted to gems,
From the place to which even an infidel turns in distress,
From the place to which all men turn when they find this world
a veil of tears.



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It is not given to us to describe such a blessed place;
It is a place where even the heretics would leave off their
heresies.

The Chishti Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan says of Shems, “Shems of Tabriz was an example of a soul who had fully attained God-consciousness, who had arrived at a stage where even mentioning the name of God limited his power as a name limits God. And his life proved that the realization of truth stands above words. People say he experienced ecstasy. But I say he himself was ecstasy. And to the seekers of truth, even today, his words move to ecstasy.”

The *Divani Shems-i Tabriz*, containing 40,000 lines of verse, is an outpouring of feelings and thoughts that describe the natu-

ral state of man unfamiliar to ordinary life, and an expression of his mystical transformation that occurred through Shems. Mevlana's devotion to Shems caused him to write this collection of lyrical verse as if in the voice of Shems.

Within Rumi was the complete oneness of life. He was the living example of a man thoroughly in life. He was a father, husband, and university professor, who merged all these aspects of life into a unified existence, linking all of his life with the thought of God and the practices toward humanity that this thought manifests. He broke through to the Oneness, and solved the problem of seeing One with two eyes.

Although there were men who lived within the principles of Sufism well before they were so labeled, the Sufi orders we know have their foundations with the Prophet Mohammed, who was a huge tree. All Sufi Orders are branches of that tree.

In the autumn of A.D. 622 Mohammed departed his native Makkah and journeyed 200 miles north to Medina where the structure of Islam was becoming more manifest. The Muslims accept this date, the day of 'Emigration' (*Hijra*), as the beginning of the Islamic calendar. He completed the *Hijra* entering Medina on the twelfth day of Rab-i Awal, the date of his birth and the date of his death. The holy doctrine of Islam is the Koran, which was revealed by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed, over a period of twenty-three years, in the form of *suras* (chapters) that often pertained to specific instances in his life. All *suras* of the Koran begin with the words *Bismi'llah ir-rahman ir-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Compassionate One, the Merciful), except *sura at-Tawba*. The opening *sura* of the Koran is a prayer called the *Fatihah*, that is repeated by all Muslims:

Praise to God, the Lord of the worlds,
The Compassionate, the Merciful,



The King of the Day of Judgment.
 It is You whom we adore
 And it is with You we seek refuge.
 Lead us on the straight way,
 The way of those on whom is Your grace,
 Not (that of) those who suffer Your wrath,
 Nor of those who stray.

Without knowledge love loses its direction. It becomes diversified, split, a wasteland, like water losing itself in the desert. The love of the Sufi has to be directed to Allah. This is only possible with knowledge of Him. The Sufis say: "If you seek Him, you will never find Him. But if you do not seek Him, He may not reveal Himself to you."



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The prayer of the dervish is the prayer of realization. He is ashamed to ask even of God. In the *Fihi Ma Fihi* (In It Is What Is In It), Rumi relates that Adam sinned and was expelled from Paradise. "O Adam, when I took you to task and punished you for your sin, why did you not contend with Me? You could have said, 'Everything is from You. You created everything. Whatever You will comes to be in the world, whatever You do not will can never come to be. Why did you not state this clear defense?'" "O Lord, I knew that but I could not be impolite in Your presence. My love for You would not allow me to take You to task."

Here is a perfect example of *adab*, (spiritual courtesy), that the Sufi practices within the *tariqah* and the world. He is content whatever comes. If there is food, it is right. No food, it is right. No covering, it is right. By this contentment he becomes greater than a king. Sitting under a tree, clothed in a patched robe, he is wealthier than the richest, those who own all the earth and yet are needy, because he has the kingdom of God. His prayer

is *zikr* and *fikr* (reflection). His presence can spark a heart of stone. On the palms of his hands are symbolically written the Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God.

Rumi's spiritual couplets, known as the *Mathnawi-i Ma'nawi* (*Mesnevi*), are a living scripture that has enlightened the souls of numberless beings. In its simplicity, Rumi expressed the law of life in a series of teaching stories, a style influenced by the Sufi Faridu'd-Din Attar. He has chosen the symbol of the reed, separated from the reed bed, as the state of man wandering the earth in the sandals of Moses.

The Chishti Sufi Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan is talking. "There is a beautiful picture Rumi has composed. He tells why the melody of the reed flute makes such an appeal to your heart. First it is cut away from its original stem. Then in its heart the holes have been made; and since the holes have been made in the heart, the heart has been broken, and it begins to cry. And so it is with the spirit of the Messenger, with the spirit of the sheikh, that by bearing his difficulties he becomes hollow like a reed. There is scope for the player to play his melody. When it has become nothing, the player takes it to play the melody. If there was something there, the player could not use it. On one end of the reed flute are the lips of the Prophet, and at the other end is to be heard the voice of God.



"God speaks to everyone. It is not only to the Messengers and sheikhs. He speaks to the ears of every heart, but it is not every heart that hears. His voice is louder than the thunder, and His light is clearer than the sun, if one could only see, if one could only hear. In order to see and in order to hear, man should remove this wall, this barrier, which man has made of self.

"Then he becomes the flute upon which the Divine Player may play the music that can even charm hearts made of stone.

“This is the esoteric meaning of the Prophet Mohammed’s receiving of the *kalamullah*, the Word of God. The message given to Mohammed, in the form of the Koran, is the message of Peace. That is why the religion is called Islam and not Mohammedism. The Prophet was the instrument through which God expressed Himself to man.”

The original words of Rumi are so deep that they penetrate the heart of man, and he has been referred to as ‘the soul of the poet.’ The *Mesnevi* is man’s journey to the Source, to the Beloved.

The lover visible
and the Beloved invisible—
Who ever saw such a love
in all the world?



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The spiritual symbol of the flute did not originate with Rumi, although his life is the perfect example of the longing of the reed to be reunited with its stem. An ancient Chinese legend tells of the first music being played on small pieces of reed. The original musician of China cut holes in a piece of reed the distance of two fingers, and the reed flute came into being.

Inayat Khan is speaking. “In Hindu symbology, Krishna, the god of love, is pictured playing a flute. Divine love enters into man and fills his entire being. The flute is the human heart, and a heart that is made hollow becomes a flute for the god of love to play. The pain and sorrow the soul experiences through life are the holes made in the reed flute. The heart of man is first a reed. The suffering and pain it goes through make it a flute that can then be used by God to produce His music.”

Here lies one secret in the *zikr* of the Sufis. All desires should be eliminated from the heart with the repetition of the negation, *La illaha* (there is no god) and replaced with the love of God,

illa 'Llah (but God). When nothing but God is remembered, one's *zikr* is pure.

The Whirling Dervishes repeat their *zikr* as they turn. They empty their hearts of all but the thought of God and whirl in the ecstatic movement of His breath.

Because of the universality of his teaching, Rumi became known as the Sultan of Love. Mevlana Jalaluddin is speaking just before he died. "When you see my funeral procession, my body carried on the shoulders of men, do not think that this is a separation, for it is my union with God. When you see the sun rise at dawn and give off great light during the day only to set at evening, it is not a disappearance, but a rebirth of the sun. The light which comes from it is not affected."

As Mevlana's body was placed into the earth it was as if a seed of love was planted for all men, a seed that bears its fruit in the hearts of learned men. Mevlana spoke of the heavenly spheres and of the hidden treasures buried in the love of God. He lived a diagram of how to complete the weaving of the magic flying carpet and spoke of its real meaning to men who thought that the earth was flat.

Konya Sheikh Suleyman Loras is talking. He is seated on a cushion on the floor of the *sohbet* room, a short walk from Mevlana. "If we do not strive for inner perfection, we will remain what we are now, talking animals. The world has never been without teachers. Each age has its teachers. Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed were some of the great ones, but there are always *qutubs*, special beings who take care of the world. The perfect man, the complete man, lies within each of us."

The sheikh pauses for a moment, closes his eyes in contemplation, as if he were traveling to another place, then continues.

