

MEVLANA  
JALALUDDİN  
RUMİ  
and  
SUFISM

(A Dervish's Logbook)

Mim Kemâl ÖKE

## **Dr. Mim Kemâl ÖKE**

Mim Kemal Öke was born in Istanbul in 1955 to a family with Central Asian Uygur heritage. Öke attended Şişli Terakki Lyceum for grade school and Robert College for high school. After graduating from Robert College in 1973, he went to England to complete his higher education in the fields of economics and history at Cambridge University. He also specialized in political science and international relations at Sussex, Cambridge, and Istanbul universities. In 1979 he went to work at the United Nation's Palestine Office. He returned to Turkey in 1980 to focus on his academic career. He soon became an assistant professor at Boğaziçi University in 1984 and a professor in 1990.

In 1983, TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) brought Öke on as a general consulting manager for various documentaries, including "Voyage from Cadiz to Samarkand in the Age of Tamerlane." Up until 2006 he was involved in game shows, talk shows, news programs and discussion forums on TRT, as well as on privately owned channels. He also expressed his evaluations on foreign policy in a weekly syndicated column, "Mim Noktası" (Point of Mim). Though he manages to avoid administrative duties, he has participated in official meetings abroad on behalf of the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

Throughout his academic career, Öke has always prioritized research. Of his more than twenty works published in Turkish, English, Urdu and Arabic, his writings on the issues of Palestine, Armenia, Mosul, and the Caliphate as they relate to the history of Ottoman and Turkish foreign policy are considered foundational resources.

Aside from non-fiction, Öke has written several novels portraying man's contradictions throughout the course of history: *Günbatımı* (Sunset), *Kızılalma* (*Kizilelma*), *Yaşanmamış Anılar* (Unlived Memories) and *Duvardaki Kan* (The Blood on the Wall).

Öke also authored Turkey's first comprehensive examinations into civil-military and religious relations: "*Din-Ordu Gerilimi* (Religious-Military Tension), *Derviş ve Komutan: Özgürlük-Güvenlik Sarkacındaki Türkiye'de Kimlik Sorunsalı* (Dervish and Commander: The Identity Problematic in Turkey on the Freedom-Security Pendulum), *Kılıç ve Ney* (The Sword and the Reed), and *Gazi ve Sufi* (Ghazi and Sufi).

In two other works, Öke explores music's role in uncovering post-modern man's personality, identity and spirit as he evaluates the mystical experiences of Latin American (*Kaderle Dans* [Dancing with Fate]) and African (*İlahlarla Dans* [Dancing with Gods]) communities.

Over the last ten years Öke has gravitated towards human sciences in his quest to understand mankind, which in the Turkish context rests in Sufi philosophy: *Aşkla Dans: Türkler, Tasavvuf ve Musiki* (Dancing with Love: Turks, Music and Sufism). The author has also published four books with Sufi Kitap: *Aşkın Ekolojisi* (The Ecology of Love), *Yaralı Ceylanlar Kulübü* (The Wounded Gazelles Club), *Dervişin Sema Defteri* (The Dervish's Sama Notebook), and *The Dervish's Logbook*.

Though Öke has won various awards for cultural and scientific studies, he is also an accomplished visual artist. He has shown his charcoal drawings in solo and group exhibitions. He also participates in Sufi and Turkish classical music ensembles with his daughter and enjoys equestrian sports.

As an extension of his social awareness, Öke offers rhythm and folk dance classes to disabled individuals. He also put together a family-oriented handbook about Down syndrome called *47. Kromozom* (The 47<sup>th</sup> Chromosome), which includes research and experiences. He is married to his wife, Neval, and together they have two children, Alihan and Nazlı Hilal. They have one grandson, Demirhan Kemal.

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## Translator's Note on Sources and Translation

*The Dervish's Logbook* is heavily rooted in the teachings of Rumi, in particular those from the *Masnavi*. Every chapter begins with a line from this six-volume work of poetry, with many more to follow throughout the chapter. Therefore, it was critical to accurately translate these lines, as they form the backbone of this book.

The English translations of passages from Rumi's *Masnavi* that appear in *The Dervishes Logbook* are my own. They are based on four sources: Reynold Alleyne Nicholson's English translation, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*; Veled Çelebi İzbudak's Turkish translation, *Mesnevi*; Ahmet Avni Konuk's Turkish translation with commentary, *Mesnevi-i Şerif Şerhi*; and Süleyman Nahifi and Amil Çelebioğlu's Turkish translation, *Mesnevi-i Şerif*. The passages that appear in the original Turkish version of *The Dervish's Logbook* come from this last source.

I chose to consult four different sources because concealed within each line of Rumi's poetry are many layers of meaning, allowing for numerous avenues of interpretation.

The volume and verse listed in the footnotes correspond to Nicholson's version as it appears on *Masnavi.net*. İzbudak's Turkish version is also found on this site. If you wish to read a certain passage in its broader context, you may easily do so by visiting this site, which also contains the original Persian.

I translated the passages from Rumi's *Rubaiyat* and *Fihi Ma Fihi* using solely the text found in the original Turkish version of this book. The translations of songs, poems, prayers and commentary, such as that by Hüseyin Top and A. A. Konuk, are also mine.

The verses from the Qur'an, however, appear verbatim from the Sahih International edition, which is also available online.

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## FOREWORD

The book you hold in your hand is a logbook, similar to the kind kept by sailors at sea, who after weighing anchor record the voyage of their ship. But this is “a dervish’s logbook,” in which we will be charting the course for the ship of humanity as it sets sail on a spiritual sea. As there are seven seas, there are seven stages of the soul.

A dervish is a person in the Sufi tradition who sets out on a metaphysical journey to reach a higher spiritual level. The maritime metaphor embodied in this book’s title is in fact rooted in the Sufi readings and teachings. A person who embarks on such a journey is traditionally addressed as “*salik*,” an Arabic word for wayfarer. The *salik* is a disciple, an initiate to a dervish – or Sufi – order. The spiritual journey they undertake is referred to as the *seyr-u suluk* “the wayfarers’ voyage.” This book charts that extraordinary journey towards God, the Beloved, towards Oneness with the Universe.

I hope to set out on this mystic journey with you to attain *yaqin*, or certainty. To reach a state of certainty means to feel and perceive Him and His Oneness, to possess intimate knowledge of the Beloved.

We can say that we are boarding the Ark of Noah, but that the port from which we embark on this journey lies deep within us. This is a voyage undertaken within the heart and by the heart.

After all, the heart – the soul – is God’s house. It is the home in which His proof manifests itself. If God is reflected – humbly so – in the soul, that soul then becomes the Kaaba, the focal point of ritual worship.<sup>1</sup>

A person who manifests the Creator’s light in his heart becomes a family within the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the House. He becomes equipped with the tradition of the Prophet, and is dyed with the color of God.

This journey’s destination is the awareness and comprehension of God’s glorious manifestations. The breast of that fortunate servant splits open, his heart expands, and he finds courage. He draws a deep breath and reaches felicity. He is elated and satisfied.

The captain on this journey is the *murshid*, the mentor. He is a knowledgeable guide who has already sailed these routes. He provides the dervish with companionship and know-how. Without him, this journey would not be possible.

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<sup>1</sup> The Kaaba is the black cubic structure at the center of Islam’s holiest mosque. It is the House of God, around which Muslims on the hajj circumambulate.

This book is a dialog between the guide and the *murid*, the aspiring disciple. It is a simulation of the Sufi spiritual conversation known as *suhbat*, wherein the mentor imparts advice, inspiration and instruction on the disciple. The passages we will soon read explain how the murshid leads the disciple, step by step, towards the Beloved.

This book works through all the stages of the Sufi process, offering a full account of the dervish's "formation." Sufism provides an "education in love," the love of God, the Beloved! The objective of this education is to make the heart swell, in stages, with the spirit of the Prophet. In a word, we are concerned with the soul's "enlightenment."

This enlightenment is crucial because people who fail to reach their own spiritual capacity become unhappy and anxious. They burden themselves as well as the community in which they live. It becomes a problem and escalates.

Twenty-first-century man is suffering, and without even knowing why. In this sense, Sufism is a salve, a remedy, a medicine for the heart, a prescription for inner peace.

Sufi culture is a living tradition. Legends and shrines exist to shed light on our present and on our future. But that tradition, and the heirs to that tradition, have always carried on. Perhaps they are right here within our midst. Right here, of course, for those who can see. This book shows us how we can find and see them.

Sufism has attracted a lot of interest lately. And that interest is growing! Resources on the subject are widely available, yet the material and concepts are difficult to understand in all their complexity and nuance. Establishing an intellectual foundation on classic Sufi literature is an incredibly arduous endeavor.

This book attempts to explain to you and familiarize you with this highly elaborate world using terminology suited for a modern, twenty-first-century audience, while leaving its essence intact. You may have already noticed the use of Sufi jargon, with words like *murshid*, *salik* and *murid*. These terms come from Arabic. After all, Sufism is rooted in Islam, and the language of Islam is Arabic. Sufism is in fact the mystical, esoteric dimension of Islam. Naturally, this book, and Sufism in general, makes frequent references to the Qur'an and to the Prophet Muhammad, whom the dervish attempts to emulate in terms of the Prophet's spiritual life and his intimate relationship with God, the Beloved.

You should also know that in Sufism applying the theory is important. It could be said that one becomes versed in Sufism by reading and studying. But this does not make him a *Sufi*! A Sufi is someone who knows this path through experience, who sees with the *Ayn al-yaqin*, the Eye of Certainty. Sufism, in a figurative sense, exists not to be read, but to be "worn."

Speaking more literally, even this is not enough. In his *Rubaiyat*, Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi states, “You cannot become a Sufi merely by wearing the coarse robes of the ascetic. Nor will you become a murshid by only listening to the conversations of the masters. You must practice and experience first hand what you have learned. The Sufi’s heart must be pure, his soul cleansed of evil, lust, and anger. A Sufi who holds a grudge? God forbid, can there be such a thing?”

This Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi, known in the West as Rumi and in the East as Mevlana, is counted among the greatest Sufi masters ever to walk this earth. His pupils founded the Mevlevi Sufi Order during the thirteenth century in Konya, Turkey. The Mevlevi derive many of their teachings from his magnum opus, the *Masnavi*, a six-volume work of poetry that includes parables, Qur’anic exegesis, and spiritual advice. This book you hold in your hands also makes extensive use of material from the *Masnavi* as we guide you on this journey.

Through the teachings of Rumi and other masters, *The Dervish’s Logbook* takes you through the dervish’s various spiritual states and the transitions from one state to the next. In other words, it portrays Sufism as it is lived. God bestows on us these spiritual states, which are each known as a *hal*. We will take you step by step on your journey towards the Beloved.

In the Qur’an it says, “Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.”<sup>2</sup>

But what happens in the time between? True friends of God have wondered, “Are we really separate from Him during our life when we are between these two points?”

We are not separate, of course. But unawareness – for whatever reason – envelops our ego. The dervish, you see, understands this; he is awake and fully conscience. He can discern *tawhid*, the Oneness of God. Sufism is essentially a journey from God (from the Day of Alast) and back again (to Eternity). The wayfarer experiences transformations along the way at seven different stations, each of which bears an attribute of God and is known as a *maqam*. The subject in question at every *maqam* is perfection – perfection of emotion, perception, and comprehension, of the mind and conscience. Sufism is the path to man’s perfection and enlightenment. It leads a person down the path to be a true servant of God, and a people to a state worthy of the Prophet.

This book strives to show you what you must do on this long and narrow path, but in a way that is easy to understand yet does not cheapen or debase the tradition.

Imperfections are the fault of the writer. Success is up to God.  
Happy reading! In the book it will seem like a murshid is speaking. But really what you are reading is your own book. Read what is in your heart, and read with your heart. Best of luck...

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<sup>2</sup> The Qur’an, Al-Baqarah 2:156



# 1 SALAAM!

*“The announcer said, ‘Ever since your royal majesty planted in him the seed of love, he has had no other desire but for you.’”<sup>3</sup>*

They say all great works begin with the *Basmala*, the Arabic phrase, *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*: In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Indeed, nothing is possible without the Beloved. And what secrets, what prophecy, what abundance are contained within this single phrase! One of the beauties of the Arabic language is the many hidden meanings it conceals within its alphabet and the words and poetry it forms. The *Basmala* is no exception.

The *Basmala* begins with the letter “*bā’*,” equivalent to the letter “B” in sound and alphabetic order. Yet the *Basmala* should have began with the letter “*alif*,” the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, for *alif* represents God’s oneness. However, that *alif* is hidden within *bā’*. Scholars assert that this “indicates that absolute oneness is concealed within multiplicity.” *Bā’* then, according to this idea, consists of multiplicity. The transition from the greatness of *alif* to a state of humility is rendered as though *bā’* is bowing down.

There is much to say about the *Basmala*’s divine calligraphy, but let’s cut to the chase and make one or two brief remarks about it in regards to *bā’*.

In the beginning, when God asked, “Am I not your Lord?” the answer came back, “*Bala*,” yes. As you can guess, *bala* begins with *bā’*. Creation then begins at this exact moment. Sufism too takes that moment as its starting point.

“*Bā’*” is written as a line with a dot underneath: the point of unity! Ali the Chosen, of whom Muhammad said, “I am the city of knowledge, Ali is the gate,” declared, “Knowledge is a point. The ignorant have reproduced it, but I *am* that point.”

Hopefully we have not already tired you out or confused you right off the bat. Our path ahead is long, and we have much to talk about. There is a time and place for everything. Let us just say another phrase that begins with B: “Be patient.” Hang in there.

But first we must praise the Glory of God.

Glorification belongs only to God, and praising Him appropriately comes naturally once you thoroughly know His nature and attributes. The hadith state that God has

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<sup>3</sup> 6:4412

99 attributes, known as the Beautiful Names of Allah. They appear in the Qur'an, the hadith and other sources. We will mention a few here as we give praise.

O God, You said, "I want to be known and to be loved," and through your love You created Mankind and the world. This is expressed in the holy attribute of "*Al-Wadud*," (The Loving). As "*Al-Muhymin*" (The Protector) You watch over and protect us. And through your manifestation of "*Ar-Rahman*" (The Exceedingly Compassionate), You grant us countless blessings, both physical and spiritual.

We know that as "*Al-Wali*" (The Protecting Friend) You are our unique friend, our confidant, our "*Ar-Refiq al-'Ala*," the highest of companions.

As "*Al-Hadi*" (The Guide) You show us the correct way, the straight path. We, as dervishes, wish to gain understanding and insight into this path.

In accordance with the Beautiful Name of "*Al-Fattah*" (The Opener), it is You who will grant us the possibilities to open our hearts, to reclaim our souls, and to be able to benefit from your beauty and benevolence.

O God! We are your helpless, insignificant, and humble servants – if of course you command us to accept our servitude. We cannot glorify you by describing you. We cannot praise you in a way worthy of your glory. But, by making an effort to absolve You of everything, we are saying that we have infinite praise and thanks for you, O God.

May You grant peace be upon that prophet who is the messenger of both man and jinn, whom you call "*My Habib*" (my love), for whom you reserved the Praised Station in heaven, and whom you have named Ahmed there and Muhammad on earth. And may you grant peace upon His exalted family (*Ahl al-Bayt*), his companions, and our great forebears who have tread down this path and have passed through the gate to His companionship!

And we wish peace specifically upon the great Sufis of the Mevlevi order: Bahauddin Walad,<sup>4</sup> Jalaluddin Rumi, the great Shams Tabrizi, Husamuddin Chelebi, Sultan Walad,<sup>5</sup> Syed Burhanuddin Mahaqqiq, Sheik Saladin of Konya, Sheik Karimuddin, Arif Chelebi, and to all the sheikhs, dervishes, caliphs and lovers.

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By opening this book, you have made it clear to us that you intend to set out on the Sufi path. Bravo. Wanting to embark on this journey, and taking the steps to do so, as you have done, is a commendable act.

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<sup>4</sup> Rumi's father

<sup>5</sup> Rumi's eldest son

You are already a kindred soul, a love-seeker. You have a place in our circle. You have joined our conversations. You know though, that we do not turn anyone away, nor do we make anyone stay.

However, crossing that threshold and devoting yourself to the Sufi path is no small feat. Sufism is a tough (perhaps the toughest) occupation.

But you know, it is not required. There is no tenet in God's Book that says everyone must become a "Sufi." You may ask, "Aren't those who become dervishes 'chosen'? Why do they get accepted? Do they have something that I do not?" You may even search your heart for these answers.

At first glance, you may be right to ask these questions, but when you look at Sufism from its inner, hidden perspective you need not to worry. Sufism embodies a wisdom that is not readily apparent, as everything has both an interior (*batin*) and exterior (*zahir*) dimension. The *batin* is the unseen purview of the heart, the concealed meaning that underlies an object or an action, whereas *zahir* refers to the physical and visible manifestation of that object or action. Simply put, an action is *zahir*, while the intent is *batin*. You will come to understand this as you labor on the path, removing the patina from the mirror of your heart.

The Sufi path is a long, narrow road. Some will lose their footing, and some will not. But won't the guide see them slipping? Of course, but there is such a thing as turning a blind eye. Otherwise how else would the poor dervish move forward in his lessons?

At any rate, there are some that whirl and some that stumble. In Sufism, at this beginning stage the dervish is a traveller, or wayfarer. The diversity of wayfarers is myriad: There is the traveller of the oath and the wayfarer in love. We have the shameless traveller, the incomplete traveller, the authentic traveller, the mad wayfarer, the vulgar wayfarer, the unripe wayfarer, the loyal wayfarer – I could go on, if you'd like.

If you look at the heart of the matter, people these days – I'm not talking about you, believe me – are quite quick to fall in love. They want it all, but they do not want to work for it. They look at us or they read a couple of Sufi books and immediately become enthusiastic. But we are not concerned with enthusiasm. We are here to relieve mankind of temporal pleasures and desires. That is our job.

Does it sound daunting? There is nothing to fear. This is not a personal development course, as is commonly believed. Yes, on this path people undergo a profound change, absolutely, but this path is thorny, rife with hardships, and spiked with traps and ambushes. Will you be able to rid yourself of desire? Think long and hard about it. We are warning you in advance.

Incidentally, there are some imposters who will say, “Oh, you cannot leave once you have been accepted into the dervish order. They will beat you,” or “they will rob you.” This institution is neither a mafia nor a secret organization. If you cannot cut it, you may leave. You apologize to your sheikh and say your goodbyes. You trade in your *khirqqa*<sup>6</sup> for the burden that you had come in with, you kiss your mentor’s hand, and you return to your normal life and no one is offended. Everyone goes his or her own way.

Perhaps you have noticed that we say, “path.” Sufism is a path. Those without a path are lost. Lacking direction has been a problem since the beginning of time. Our ancestors have said as much.

Like all paths, the Sufi path leads from one place to another. We will talk about where it begins and where it goes. We will discuss the first stop, and whether there is in fact a final stop.

Islam has also emphasized the path. Let’s say that it marked the journey. But do you know just where the history of Islam begins? The event that started it all was the Hegira, Muhammad’s emigration from Mecca to Medina. But this was no ordinary journey. It symbolizes the transition from Mecca’s merchant aristocracy, whose interests were threatened by the message that Islam was spreading, to a civilization that would transform Medina into the beating heart of social justice. This was a revolution, even in terms of concrete facts. But that’s not all. The Hegira was fundamentally the “second” journey of Muhammad’s life. Muhammad’s first journey was a spiritual one: the Mi’raj. The Night Journey, as it is also known as, took Muhammad through the seven heavens to the foot of God’s throne. Now we are getting to the heart of the matter. The universe functions in such a way that everything is first created in meaning before it becomes manifest and visible. You see, Sufism is a path from the esoteric to the exoteric, from the *batin* to the *zahir*, from intention to action. We won’t go into it too much here, but let’s say that first came the Mi’raj, then the Hegira. We’ll leave it at that.

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Returning to Sufism, there are many ways to describe it, but I will offer one of them: Sufism is perfecting the ability to transform the science of love into *marifat*, ultimate knowledge and awareness of the divine. Sufism is the methodology for teaching it.

You will learn the methodology of love so that you can bring to the world prosperity and relief. This is our main purpose. This is the “eye of *mim*,” our difficult and selfless task. The “eye of *mim*” refers the tiny space enclosed within the twenty-fourth letter of the Arabic alphabet. Mi’raj begins with the letter *mim*. And if you take *mim* from Ahmad, Muhammad’s celestial name, you get Ahad, the One, God. Take a look then at the letter *mim* and notice the little, tiny point in its belly. Now

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<sup>6</sup> The woolen robe worn by dervishes.

see how Rumi uses this alphabetic metaphor to describe the struggle towards perfection:

“O Gracious One! Like *alif*, I possess nothing, save for a heart more constricted than the eye of *mim*.”<sup>7</sup>

The late Ahmed Avni Konuk, an expert on the *Masnavi*, clarifies Rumi’s verse:

“In other words, ‘Oh God most Gracious! Like the letter *alif*, which has neither shape nor dot, I too own nothing, I have nothing other than a heart more constricted than the space within the letter *mim*.”<sup>8</sup>

This beautiful verse brings us back to the *Basmala’s alif*. You will see that in Sufism everything is connected and tied together. Perhaps by now you are saying to yourself, “If I have to keep following all these tangents...” But what do you talk about when you are sitting with your friends? What are the topics of your conversations? Don’t forget the saying, “Tell me who your friends are, and I’ll tell you who you are.” The friends in the adage are whom God is talking about when He says, “I am friends with those who mention my name.” I am cautiously proceeding and presenting this knowledge gradually, so bear with me.

Returning to the topic of travel, it is on this journey that a person’s true character comes to the fore. “The road lays bare the authenticity of a friendship,” say the wise men of old. When we look at who aided Muhammad on his travels, we see an extraordinary cast of characters. The archangel Gabriel accompanied Muhammad on the Night Journey to the point at which the angel could not cross. Then when Muhammad set off for the Hegira, he left Ali, the Lion of God, in his place in his bed so that the Prophet’s assailants would not know he had fled. And it was with the Abu Bakr, the Great Friend, that Muhammad undertook the Hegira. So not only is the path you set out on important, but also whom you set out on that path with.

In the *Masnavi*, Mevlana illustrates the importance of choosing the right friends in the parable of the mouse and the frog. It goes something like this: One day the mouse met a frog down by the bank of a river. They began to chat and soon struck up a friendship. They decided to meet there often to chat, but since the mouse could not go into the water, it needed a way to keep in touch with the frog. So the mouse suggested that they each tie an end of a long string to one of their legs.

One afternoon while the two friends met on the riverbank, a rapacious raven swooped down and snatched up the little mouse. Since the two creatures were tied together, the poor frog was also lifted into the air. Those who witnessed this curious event remarked, “Look at the raven’s cunning! With what graft has it managed to catch a frog?”

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<sup>7</sup> 6:2329

<sup>8</sup> Konuk XII, p. 140

As the frog set out on its last voyage, it said to himself, “This is what happens to those who make friends with someone inferior and incompatible.”

Here Rumi is advising us to consort with people who are of a good and compatible disposition so that we do not succumb to the same fate as that of the frog.

The animals in the parable embody specific meanings and symbolize different aspects of the human soul. The mouse is an animal that can survive only on land and must make its home on the filthy ground. Even the sight of such a creature is repulsive. The frog is a poor wretch forced to live in lakes and reservoirs. If not transformed into a handsome prince by some magical touch or kiss, it is doomed to moan a deep, sorrowful sigh. Then we have the crow, a greedy and ravenous creature. In fact, the crow is one of the five animals in Islam in which there is no harm in killing. The mouse, and its cousin the rat, are also included on this list.

The frog represents someone who desires to gain understanding as it lives in a murky, yet versatile habitat, while the mouse stands in for a materialistic person. The land on which it lives symbolizes material wealth. Rumi seems to be suggesting here that if you latch onto to a mouse to get ahead it would be the end of you! The mouse will either drag you down into the sewer or send you straight to the belly of the crow. Stay away from friends like the mouse.

Now let’s put them all inside the same body. The frog becomes the soul of a person who serves God, but being a novice on the true path, it is incomplete. The mouse is a person’s intelligence, which appears to provide solutions to certain problems. So the frog forms a friendship with the mouse, as the frog thinks it lacks intelligence. But what will happen if the frog starts out on such a path? It will inadvertently fall victim to the raven, which Rumi uses to symbolize the greed and desire within us, or – to introduce an important keyword in Sufism – the *nafs* within us. The *nafs* refers to the carnal soul, or ego; it is the little voice within us that urges us to give into our desires. So by using your mind rather than your heart, you will meet your demise at the hand of your ravenous *nafs*.

I am giving you the most basic interpretation of this parable for starters. But Mevlana enriches this tale with a trove of hidden meanings and with a profundity that is too complex to get into just now. If you can wait, we will discuss this later on.

For now, don’t be the mouse or engage in its mouse-like ways. Mevlana goes on to tell us:

“If a thousand of mice rose up, the cat would feel no fear or apprehension. Please, how could the mice rally before the cat? They have no power in their souls to amass themselves.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 6:3042-43

The crucial factor lies in the soul's ability to find the Beloved. God is the true friend as are the friends of God. If in this life you can wear their dervish mantles, you will be protected. Through the pen of Rumi, God is saying, "You cannot protect yourself with anything but this mantle. No other covering can withstand My light."<sup>10</sup>

This mantle is that black cloak worn by the Mevlevi order. Black is the color of absence. "Here you are," they say. "If you are prepared to annihilate your self then wear this."

That mantle is the cloak that Muhammad sent to Uwais al-Qarani, a Yemeni Muslim mystic who lived during the time of the Prophet. When you wear it, God ignites you with fire but will never allow the pharaohs to burn you, because that fire is not the same as the fire of hell's burning logs. It is not the fire of flame, but of spiritual light that sets you aglow!

Rumi writes:

"Should even Mount Qaf try to eclipse it, that light would obliterate it like Mount Sinai."<sup>11</sup>

That light manifests itself in the true friends of God:

"By the power of God, the bodies of the saints endure this unconditioned light...  
Their bodies are the lamp niche and their hearts the lamp. This lamp illuminates the heavens and the throne of God."<sup>12</sup>

I once saw that light literally. My master had met his Maker and I was full of grief. But one night he appeared in my dream. He sat next to my bed and had me recite some verses. I looked at his body and at his face. It was as though a lamp was shining from inside of him. The light emanated straight from his heart, just how Rumi had described it!

They say the stars are the light of the heavens, yet they disappear when the sun comes out. "Hence," says Mevlana, "those disappearing stars are astonished at the never setting sun, the everlasting light, within the saints, precisely because they never set!"<sup>13</sup> I'll give you another verse:

"The Seal of the prophets has told us what God Almighty has said:  
'No place can contain me, not the heavens or the earth, nor minds or souls.

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<sup>10</sup> 6:3064

<sup>11</sup> 6:3065. Mount Qaf is the highest, most remote mountain in Persian mythology.

<sup>12</sup> 6:3066, 3069

<sup>13</sup> 6:3070

Yet I unquantitatively and unqualitatively fit into the heart of the believer, unrestrained by time and space.”<sup>14</sup>

That light which manifests itself in the heart is the light and spirit of Muhammad. This is what is worn, and what offers refuge. It was under this cloak that Muhammad took his family under protection. Muhammad covered himself, his daughter Fatima, her bridegroom Ali, who was also his nephew, as well as his two grandchildren, Hasan and Hussein. He then asked God to protect them, his family, *Ahl al-Bayt*. The mantle, according to the legend of Uwais al-Qarani, crisscrossed the world, passing from hand to hand through the ages to the heirs of the Prophet’s wisdom.

If you become a dervish, you too will receive a piece of this mantle and come under its protection. This cloak is the Dervish Dowry bestowed upon those who can wear it, who are worthy of wearing it. What it looks like is not important; it is not some kind of Sufi crown, after all. But meaning is derived from symbols, as the interior is reached from the exterior, as the *batin* is attained from the *zahir*. This, my friend, is why we use symbols.

Now that we are on the subject of clothing, let me make mention of the “*faraji*,” another name for the dervish cloak. There is a little chapter in Book V of the *Masnawi*. Although the chapter is tiny in length, it is huge in meaning. It explains “the reason why the name *firaji* was first given to the garment known by that name.” The answer is quite simple actually:

“A certain Sufi tore open his robe. He found great relief afterwards. He called the torn robe a *faraji*. And so this nickname spread and became well known!”<sup>15</sup>

Relief. There is your answer. *Farah* means relief, as in breathing room. A *faraji* is then something that offers that relief. The symbol of relief appears again during the *Sama* ceremony. This ceremony is commonly and erroneously referred to as a “whirling dervish show.” Don’t ever call it a show. We can’t stress this point enough that the *Sama* is a religious ceremony. It is worship. During the ceremony’s fourth and final *salaam*, or movement, the head sheikh rises from his place and advances toward the middle of the circle. He then thrusts open his metaphorical mantle as though to rend it and free his constricted heart.

The *Sama* is a reenactment of the Mi’raj. During the ceremony’s climax, the sheikh can no longer contain himself and, enrapt in ecstasy, he reaches a state of non-existence.

During the ceremony’s first *salaam*, the dervishes discard the black *khirqah* symbolizing absence and start to spin towards heaven in the circle of love wearing

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<sup>14</sup> 6:3071-73

<sup>15</sup> 5:354-55



their white skirts, whose color represents purity. The sheikh joins them in the final phase of the rite. Like I said before, the Sama is a rehearsal, a representation, a reenactment of the Mi'raj. If you give your due, you too will experience it! The black cloak is your body; break open your chest and offer up your heart to its owner. Then you will find release. Rend that *firaji*, which you call the skin, and see how you attain pure joy!

The lines I have just been citing from the *Masnavi* offer you a summary of Sufism, or rather an outline of "a dervish's logbook." If you examine this section carefully, you will find that all the concepts, states, and stations you will experience on this journey have been presented to you on a platter of delicious wording. All that is left for you to do is to consume those morsels of meaning. Try to take in and understand as much as you can as we go over them.

From the Sufi's woolen raiment Mevlana then segues to the topic of purity. In fact, the word Sufi comes from "*suf*," which refers precisely to the wool mantle, but also means "pure" in Arabic. Rumi is saying that you have to separate the pure essence from the dregs, and that you must deliver yourself from impurities. "It is difficult, but despair not," he adds. Suddenly he alludes to death: "Death is the exquisite path to life."<sup>16</sup>

"If you want release, rend your robe so that you may emerge from that purity."<sup>17</sup>

The critical juncture is found here in this verse.

In the words of Konuk, Mevlana is saying, "Oh my son, wayfarer on the true path of God, if you desire spiritual peace, tear your robe. That is, abandon physical human qualities and all the strictures of the body! By eliminating these qualities, purity of spirit and intention will immediately emerge from the cloak of your body."<sup>18</sup>

Well, how do we accomplish this? The following verses examine the "procedure" involved. If you stay tuned during our conversation, we will have a chance to process everything step by step. But first, let's try to commit the following verse to memory:

"The true Sufi is one who seeks purity. Do not think that purity means wearing wool, mending your tattered garments, or ambling slowly down the street."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 5:361

<sup>17</sup> 5:362

<sup>18</sup> Konuk, IX p. 135

<sup>19</sup> 5:363

Sufism is not a look nor is it ever a display of vanity. We are concerned only with grasping the essence. This path is not how you think or imagine it to be.

Therefore, "Go beyond the image until you reach its essence. Be not like those who merely worship images."<sup>20</sup> Pursue that image towards its source like a cat following the scent of milk.

"O, you who searches for love, this scent is the guide. This scent of love opened Jacob's eyes."<sup>21</sup>

Take note of the word "scent." This is another key term in Sufism.

We have now brought together love and scent. We make it a guide for us. Look at what happened when Jacob, the father of Joseph, breathed in the scent of his son's shirt. His eyes began to open as if a curtain had begun lifted.

And what an emotional hymn he began to sing, "I was Jacob, from the land of Canaan..."

Perhaps you are thinking that I am beating around the bush, maybe even speaking in riddles. Let it go; this path is a meandering one. We will pause now and again to smell the flowers. After all, Rumi has basically just said, "Smell, and let your eyes be opened!" The lines continue:

"Illusion serves as the guardian called struggle that prevents you from prowling around the curtain of Divine Beauty."<sup>22</sup>

Pay attention in this line to the word "struggle." What really was your desire to come to us?

"Our desire is a sip from that hidden goblet You have poured out from the cup of the noble saints onto the parched earth."<sup>23</sup>

You have come to us to drink. But, which thirst will you quench? And you will indeed quench a thirst! Soon you will quaff down the sweet elixir of the ney flute. You may call this wine, but Rumi calls it "medicine."

"When the Cupbearer of Alast poured a drop upon this wretched, arid earth, The earth seethed, and in that seething we become another priceless drop."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 5:366

<sup>21</sup> Konuk, IX p 136

<sup>22</sup> 5:367

<sup>23</sup> 5:372

<sup>24</sup> 5:390-91

We are that parched earth. After all, were we not created from a fistful of clay? Look at what just one drop from the Cupbearer does! Clay made flesh is no small thing.

I hope you are not yet bored. You came to us and said, "I am here to join the order," and look where we have led you. Just remember with what verse we started our conversation: "He has had no other desire but for you..."

This line occurs in the parable of the princes at the end of the *Masnavi's* sixth and final volume. The king's announcer introduces the petitioner to the monarch as an admirer. He says, "Your majesty, this person has fallen in love with you."

You too are clearly a petitioner. But are you in love?

A man once came to Rumi in order to be his disciple. Rumi asked him, "Have you ever been in love?" When the initiate looked straight ahead and turned red with embarrassment, he said, "My son, first go and fall in love. Then come to us." This path begins with metaphor.

Love is a strange bird. Yunus Emre, that great Turkish Sufi poet, wrote a beautiful ode to the nightingale, the one which begins, "I know you are in love with the rose." It brings tears to my eyes every time I hear it. "Do not sing so strangely, nightingale / Don't add fuel to this pain in my heart." Indeed, love is like that. We really do get angry at the nightingale for reminding us of our separation. But we also become jealous of him. We are jealous of his love, and we lament the fact that we are not the lover.

But in a world where even the heart of the nightingale, mere "fauna," is burning with love for the "flora," how could it be that man's heart has never burned!

And we are of course talking about divine love. We strive to fall into His favor. Even the great Yunus beseeches the nightingale to put in a good word in for him, basically asking the songbird for intercession: "As you sing, 'Hak, Hak,' at twilight, nightingale, do not forget me too."<sup>25</sup>

Before I get too sentimental, allow me to take refuge in Rumi and let him be the interpreter of our hearts: "The worldly dominion is legitimate only to those who worship the flesh. We are servants to the everlasting kingdom of love."<sup>26</sup>

That verse also comes from the parable of the princes. You will read and understand this story later.

To be in love and to endure love is a matter of "disposition." Rumi emphasizes this over and over again in the tale of the princes. He likens disposition with wheat,

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<sup>25</sup> Hak is another name for God.

<sup>26</sup> 6: 4421

saying, “When they show up at the mill without wheat, only their hair and beard turn white.”<sup>27</sup>

“But to those who bring wheat, this mill yields bread, prosperity, and abundance.”<sup>28</sup>

Here we have arrived at the “mill” metaphor. The mill symbolizes the mentors who grind the wheat – the disposition – that the disciples bring. If what is brought is indeed wheat, then the mill grinds it. The metaphor goes even further: It is no coincidence that in order to make bread from wheat, the blades of the windmill must turn round and round. It diligently grinds, without strikes and stoppages, providing nourishment and love.

The murshids are dedicated to serve. They creak and moan as they turn like a “woeful waterwheel.” We spoke of Yunus Emre’s nightingale a moment ago. Now consider this poem of his: “Waterwheel, why do you moan, for I have woes I moan/ I fell in love with God, for this I groan.”

The travellers of this road are woeful in every respect, both inside and out. On the one hand they weep and moan out of their love for the Creator, and on the other, they see people suffering and grieve over what they can do for them. They struggle selflessly and self-sacrificially for the sake of God.

You will soon realize that Sufis are altruists. The *Masnavi* frequently mentions a great saint by the name of Abu al-Hassan al-Kharaqani (963-1033 CE), whose sacred tomb lies in Kars in Eastern Turkey. This sublime individual once said, “From Turkistan to Damascus, if a thorn in the field pricks someone’s finger, that finger is my finger. If someone’s foot stumbles on a stone, that foot is my foot. I too feel his pain. And if there is pain in someone’s heart, that heart is mine.”

The dervish is – to express it in contemporary terms – a romantic, an idealist. His heart is wounded. He searches for a dervish lodge that will be able to open up his heart. The dervish lodge is “a club for wounded gazelles.” Within its walls, these poor creatures can mend their broken hearts before once again returning to the world to help and comfort other wounded gazelles.

But finding the right lodge for you takes effort. Say if you were considering joining a social club, wouldn’t you want to look for some common ground? It is the same with us. We are gazelle hunters or perhaps more correctly, gazelle seekers. Is there a “wounded gazelle” inside of you?

Do you suffer alongside those who suffer, or are you a party to their suffering? Let me tell you something: We are not here to profit nor are we concerned with taking.

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<sup>27</sup> 6: 4431

<sup>28</sup> 6: 4433

We are a club founded on the principle of giving. Realize this and don't be afraid to ask.

I don't know what your expectations of us are, but we do not demand anything from you for ourselves. This path cannot be bought with money. If someone asks for your money, they are not one of us. We ask on your behalf. We ask God to help you. But we do want something from you in return.

We kindly request you to keep a strict moral code and serve the people in the name of God, because this is the pinnacle of happiness in this world as well as in the next. Try it and see! If only people knew that making others happy could make them happy as well. But unfortunately they do not.

I know we keep grilling you on whether or not you have what it takes to carry this responsibility once we have given it you. Please forgive us; such are the ways and conventions of this path. We must trust this responsibility to someone we know will hold onto the faith and the tradition of the Prophet. Understandably we must keep a tight hold on this business, especially these days. No offense, but today's generation takes matters of this kind too lightly. At some point it became fashionable to cut corners. But don't expect any shortcuts here. However much an ordinary person must work for what he or she wants, God Almighty makes the dervish work two or three times as hard. Why? Is it to torture you? Not at all! Think about an athlete, a runner for instance, and the workouts her coach makes her do.

If an athlete shows potential the coach works her extra hard. This potential is what we mean by disposition. The coach may make the promising runner run six to twelve miles in one practice, but what about your workout? Life is longer than a marathon. You must not become short of breath on that track called Sufism. It won't do to bow out of the race. There is no giving up. Think about that.

You must also think about the flipside of the coin. So far we have just discussed whether you are right for us. But are we right for you? You should also look at the issue from that perspective.

Do you get what I mean here? We have to be careful as we set out on this path. In this profession there are many imposters and fakes out there. How will your heart discern true gold? If you get taken advantage of, well then, "Too bad, son!" Right? God forbid.

Let's set this aspect aside for now and suppose that the door you knock on is solid, that behind it lies sincerity and benevolence, and that the murshid is in fact a true friend of God. Very well. You have taken a liking to him and your heart has lit up. But have you crossed the threshold and been admitted yet? No.

We only have one goal in Sufism. While our destination is the same, there are many roads, many lodges, that will carry you towards it. "Where does this variety originate from?" you may ask.

It comes from each of us. We are all different. Are the five fingers on our hand all the same? In difference there is abundance and wealth. But difference is also a necessity. Without difference how could we struggle to attain unity? Has there ever been an aggregate in which there was no difference in the sum of its parts?

These concepts are deep, so don't let me drown you in these waters. My point is this: You should start down this path if it is in your destiny. If not, you must find another way suited to your disposition, temperament and spiritual nature. You know how prospective students painstakingly deliberate over choosing which universities to apply to. Well, university lasts only four years, whereas this education, this path of knowledge, lasts a lifetime. So take your time and be particular about choosing your path.

We, the dervish orders, are essentially the same. We use more or less the same methods. Some methods will guide you by disciplining the human soul and focusing on piety. Others steer you towards the maturation of the spirit. There are yet others that apply both methods in varying combinations. The choice is up to the murshid. I have even witnessed different treatments for different dervishes of the same lodge. Everything has a reason, seen or unseen.

The question we must ask is this: "Are you destined?" The second would be, "Does your destiny lie with us?"

These answers however, rest with God. They crystallize and manifest starting there. The choice is neither yours nor mine. It belongs to Him. When the order comes from on high, neither one of us can go against it. You are forced to accept it, and I am forced to offer it. That is how the system works.

I will now explain to you how the system works and what you will encounter along the way, starting from the time you are initiated. I will outline the stages you will pass through and the kinds of situations you will find yourself in. What you will get in fact is a kind of Sufi guide, or better yet, "a dervishes logbook."

On board every ship is a logbook, right? In it the captain records all the details of his voyages. This is how we will proceed with you. Perhaps you know this, but Sufi literature makes frequent use of metaphors such as ocean, sea, and the great deep. The path of God is an eternal sea, with neither shore nor bounds. We, or rather our bodies, are the ship, the vessel. The sea shines with all its magnificent beauty, but is also fraught with storms and peril. One must be fearless on such a sea, and entrust themselves to the company of a competent captain.

The spiritual journey is indeed like venturing out into the deep, blue sea. Do you like sailing? If so, all hands on deck! The great ones called this boat, the “Ark of Noah.” Are you ready?

*The Dervish’s Logbook* relies heavily on the works of Rumi. You will follow the disciple’s road map found in the *Masnavi*. We will draw on the matchless verses of Mevlana, the master, in order to impart on you what you need to do and in what order you need to do it.

That said, this is not an exercise devoted to the rules and conventions particular to the Mevlevi way. Yes, every order abides by different precedents, uses different terms, and even practices different rituals. However, this diversity does have a limit. The orders share more similarities than differences. We will choose tenets from the *Masnavi* that are generally accepted by all Sufi orders.

What I have in mind is the way in which Rumi describes in great detail the mentor-disciple relationship. The *Masnavi* remains to this day the leading source on this topic. No matter what the Sufi order, all the great mentors have certainly benefitted from the *Masnavi* in this respect, and have even done the customary *Masnavi* readings themselves.

I would like to warn you though before we start. We have taken you in as a “*nevniyaz*,” an initiate. As such, we will present you with concise, succinct and coherent information. If we continue with the ocean metaphor, think about the “sea foam,” that effervescent froth that laps the sandy shore. If you can grasp what is washing over the sandy beach and slipping back into the sea, that knowledge will benefit you immensely. But you must remember this: Sufism is deep water. We will not throw you in before you have completely learned to swim. Hopefully you will one day join the ranks of those spirit divers who plumb the oyster fields of the deep to fetch pearls of wisdom.

*The Dervish’s Logbook* is a guide for initiates. It is a spiritual handbook, a Sufi primer. We will leave the “door” ajar for you. If you cross the threshold, you will begin to experience firsthand what we are talking about with you. Sufism’s depth and complexity will become more apparent to you the further out you wade.

We reference many verses from the *Masnavi*. If you wish to go back and read those passages in their entirety and within the context of the *Masnavi*, we have provided a works cited list in the beginning of the book, complete with online resources. There are also various Rumi and Mevlevi conferences all over the world that discuss the Sufi master’s great works and ideas.

You too have participated in these meetings, in a sense. It is one thing to read the *Masnavi* verse by verse from cover to cover, but it is quite another to go so far as to extract a sort of “concept catalog” from the book’s content and explain them in context. That may be an indication of a true Mevlevi dervish.

Giving thanks is an obligation. The honorific “*Chelebi*,” used often in Mevlevi Sufism, describes a gracious person. Giving thanks and being gracious are the ethical and aesthetic values that make humans human. Unfortunately the capitalist self-interest that dominates the times we live in has made us selfish, rude, and callous. We have all but forgotten how to give thanks. It is not surprising. After all, can we expect these generations who don’t even know how give thanks to God, to give thanks to His servants!

Sufism at its heart is civility and decency. We teach this to people.

Have we left anything unsaid at this point? Yes, we have. I want to dedicate this work to my initiates, to you. You ought to know how much I love you all. How happy it would make us all if we left in our wake good deeds, virtuous works and committed devotees when we finally go our own ways.

Let’s recite a verse that is customarily said at the beginning of every *Masnavi* lesson:

“Do not say, ‘We have no access to that King.’ Dealing with the generous is not difficult.”<sup>29</sup>

Yes, this journey is headed toward His presence. Let His breath fill our sails! But remember, only the effort comes from us. Our success still remains in the hands of God. Now listen well, for what I am about to tell you is your story.

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<sup>29</sup> 1:221



## 2 COME!

*“He said, ‘O lover suffering from affliction and tribulation! Come now, the door to union is open.’”<sup>30</sup>*

Certainly you have heard the name Rumi before, as he is perhaps the most famous Sufi poet of all time. People the world over know and love him, and his crowning achievement, the *Masnavi*, is an international bestseller. But how much do you really know about him? And how much of that is true?

Perhaps you have heard the following lines before, or something similar:

“Come, come, whoever you are.  
Whether you’re an infidel, fire worshiper, or idolater,  
Come, still come, for our lodge is not the lodge of despair.  
Still come, even if you’ve broken your vows a hundred times over.”

People often attribute them to Rumi, and so they have become associated with him. But these words do not in fact belong to Rumi! They are the words of Abu Said Abul-Khayr, another man of God. But no matter, everyone drinks from the same spring anyway. There exists of course only one source.

To everyone’s credit, Rumi does express similar sentiments in the *Masnavi* as well as in his other works. The important thing for us here is the message, “Come!” This is the great invitation, the calling.

Come! Let’s begin today’s conversation with this welcoming imperative. Who is calling? And what is involved in this calling?

When we use the word “come,” it is an invitation to communion. The call to prayer heard five times a day in Muslim countries around the world is essentially broadcasting the sentiment, “Come!” Muhammad once lamented, “If people only knew what the call to prayer entailed!” If we only knew, indeed! In its simplest definition, the call to prayer summons us to worship, to prayer. It beckons us towards salvation so that we may enjoy everlasting happiness and prosperity in this life and the next.

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Rumi too beckons us to come. Like a muezzin reciting the call to prayer, he invites us to worship. In fact, all the friends of God recite the call to prayer for us, because God

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<sup>30</sup> 3:4682

has instructed them to do so. He has charged them with telling to the people to come. God says to his friends:

“Do not turn away from the word, *ta’alaw* (come ye!). This word is the most excellent elixir.

If that copper is adverse to you saying this word, do not withhold from him the elixir...

The words, ‘Come ye, come ye,’ is certainly God calling you to His salvation.”<sup>31</sup>

Allow me elaborate a bit: God instructed Muhammad to tell his people, “*Ta’alaw!*”<sup>32</sup> in order to separate the pure from the dregs. And so, the heirs to the Prophet’s domain are obligated to exclaim, “*Ta’alaw!* Come, rise up from lowliness!” Do not cut this exclamation short! For this phrase is a very potent elixir that will turn the lowly copper-level novice into something as perfect as gold.<sup>33</sup> The alchemy metaphor occurs frequently in Sufi literature. Just as alchemists of the middle ages sought to transform base metals, such as copper, into gold using a purifying chemical elixir, Sufism too aims to purify the hearts of the wretched.

When we say “heirs to the Prophet’s domain,” we mean the saints, the murshids, the guides that lead the way along this spiritual path. We have a name for these people of God: *al-Insan al-Kamil*. The perfect human, or the “Universal Man,” as this degree of person is often referred to as. Women can also attain the level of Universal Man; there have been a number of female Sufi saints. The notion of *al-Insan al-Kamil* is a person who has annihilated his ego and attained union with the Beloved. This person then goes on to help others, calling them to the path and guiding them along it.

So come! Do not get left behind. There are those who heed this call and those who do not. Don’t be deceived. Focus on the work at hand. By saying, “Come ye,” Mevlana is emphasizing the message God has given to the people via His friends:

“Save yourself from this egoism; abandon leadership and seek a leader.”<sup>34</sup>

Let’s say we ourselves had said this, but just for fun, let’s say we sent it to someone via text message. What would they think when they receive that message?

Some people would probably say, “You’re right, I do need to do what you’re talking about, but it’s impossible. I’m a terrible sinner. I’m hopeless. Even if I repent, I won’t be able to change. I have no determination. Don’t get upset, that’s just what’s in the cards. C’est la vie.”

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<sup>31</sup> 4:2025-26, 2028

<sup>32</sup> The Qur’an, Ali ‘Imran 3:61

<sup>33</sup> Konuk, VIII, p. 53

<sup>34</sup> 4:2029

We will assume this attitude is a response built upon a completely irrational and spiritually broken foundation. It is dangerous to make a mockery of fate like that. If you have made mistakes, those are your mistakes. Do not make God a partner to your sins.

God gives a person power when that person shows persistence. Sufism is the discipline of guiding that change – change in attitude, change in effort – towards perfection.

There is also the matter of “I’m a terrible sinner.”

There was a great, eighteenth-century saint named Ahmed Kuddusi. He was from the small Anatolian town of Bor. Here is one of his poems: “Oh, merciful king / I have come to you with guilt / I have committed an egregious sin / I have come to you with guilt.” If even a saint like Kuddusi is begging God for forgiveness, have we any reason to be so resigned and pessimistic?

Let me provide some context for Ahmed Kuddusi’s words by recounting one of the legends surrounding him. Kuddusi had wanted to visit Rumi’s tomb. But the time had come for the evening prayer and the tomb keeper had just locked the gates. The saint pleaded, but to no avail; the tomb keeper refused him. At that moment, instead of performing his evening prayers, he broke out into a hymn that he had composed for Rumi: “You are the king of saints / Oh Mevlana, your excellency / Forgive me for straying / Oh Mevlana, your excellency!”

Just as he had sung the last line, the gates to the tomb opened up on their own accord. The tomb keeper was bewildered. Kuddusi paid his visit and left. The next day, the Mevlevi sheikhs who had heard about this incident exclaimed, “That had to have been Kuddusi of Bor!”

Kuddusi was not afraid to admit sin, for he knew that God was merciful and that he could be cleansed of his sins. Mevlana talks about purification in the following verses:

“Come, come O one whose body has been defiled with superstition and fear!  
How can you get clean outside the pool?...  
When the pure water said to the defiled man, ‘Come into me,’ the filthy man  
said, ‘I am ashamed before you.’”<sup>35</sup>

The defiled one in the story represents a person plagued by sin. As long as people retain a sense of shame, hope that they can extract from their flesh a pure soul still exists. The pure water says to the sinner, “Come, let me wash you.” It is not a body cleanse, but a spiritual catharsis that is implied here. The pool represents the murshid’s heart. Time is wasted idling outside the heart, for the heart contains the

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<sup>35</sup> 2:1361, 1366

Pool of Abundance. Come, enter this heart. Merely the ability to enter such a heart will purify you.

Rumi goes on to say:

“Doubtless the heart is like a pool, because within it there is a hidden aquifer to the sea.”<sup>36</sup>

Put plainly, there is a hidden channel that connects the heart of the mentor to the ocean that is God.

Some of the people who received our text inviting them to come belong to the “wounded gazelle” category. They are the ones who have experienced the wrath of fate and suffered the pain of love. These are the people who wander hopelessly in limbo or are teetering on the precipice between heaven and hell. A little effort will hoist them to safety, while left on their own they are sure to slip and fall. This is an important group.

For the sake of metaphor, picture yourself in a government office. You see a row of file cabinets. Some of them have a note stamped on them: “First to be spared from the hellfire.” These files belong to this group, the wounded gazelles. You cannot abandon them for they will surely perish. They will go up in a flash. So take them by the hand. Look at them and say, “Come.” Their hearts are broken. This is such a critical moment! If you do not mend that wound, the poor gazelle will spiral into a heartless state in which it will attempt to take revenge on fate by breaking the hearts of others. We will take that heart in and repair it, after which we will get back out on the road again to mend other broken hearts. In hymns and poems, they call us, “*Tabib al- Kulûb*,” or “doctors of the heart.”

Listen to what Rumi says:

“We are physicians, and the disciples of God...  
We demand a fee from no one; our fee comes in the form of God’s blessings.  
You who suffers afflictions of the heart, come to us! We have the medicine you need.”<sup>37</sup>

You may be familiar with a certain a category of well-to-do people known as the leisure class, who live their lives however they feel. This might surprise you, but we say to them too, “Come!”

“You consider yourselves the happy few,” we say to them, “but we are the true happy few. Come, experience what real pleasure is.” Are you surprised?

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<sup>36</sup> 2:1364

<sup>37</sup> 3:2700, 2708-09

Let me share with you another story from the *Masnavi*. There was once an evil king who made a great fire and set an idol in front of it. "Whoever bows down to this idol," he declared, "shall escape the fire." His Jewish subjects despaired and grew anxious. As a warning to others, the king forcefully brought before the fire a mother who refused to worship the idol. She stood there clutching her child. "Worship the idol and you may pass. Or else you will burn." The woman was pure of religion and faith. She still refused, enraging the king. The king's soldiers wrested the child from the woman's arms and cast it into fire...

The mother's heart burned with grief. Just as she was considering prostrating before the idol, the child cried from the fire. And what do you think it said?

"Come!"

"O mother! Come in, it is nice here. It seems as though this fire is a place of delight...

Come in, mother, and see the gift of God and the pleasure and comfort He reserves for the faithful.

Come in and see fire resemble water. Transcend mortality and see this beautiful abode of the soul.

Come near and see the mysteries of Abraham, the rose garden in the fire and the waters of heaven...

Come, come O mother, for the sake of motherhood! Seek refuge in the fire.

O mother! Come, do not let greatness and felicity slip from your grasp.

Come, come, you have seen the contempt of that dog, now look at the power of God...

Come in and call the other believers as well. The greatest feast of pleasure is in here.

O true believers! Come, the sweetness of faith is nothing like the torment of the body and soul.<sup>38</sup>

As the true believers feast in the fire, Mevlana, the master of metaphor and double entendre, invites everyone to a meal of pleasure at the wounded gazelle club.

The above verses reference the story of Abraham and Nimrod. When the tyrant Nimrod threw Abraham into the fire, "Allah said, 'O fire! Be coolness and safety upon Abraham,'"<sup>39</sup> and the spot where the fire had burned instantly became for Abraham a rose garden. Fire does not burn unless God commands it to.

We also see this in the *Masnavi* story above. The fire in which the mother and her child were cast became extinguished. Yet before the flames went out, the child's coaxing voice riled the people. They lost control of themselves and all dove into the fire, leaving behind a disillusioned and overthrown king.

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<sup>38</sup> 1:786, 788-790, 796-78, 800-01

<sup>39</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Anbya 21:69

We should take this story and its wisdom to heart if we don't want to someday find ourselves as sinners – not before temporal deities – but before the true king.

After all, it is pointless to create for ourselves through decadent and self-indulgent living a false heaven, no matter what anyone says, king or not. If you worship that idol known as the ego – the nafs – you are throwing yourself into the fire. But if you wear the dervish cloak made from that fire (anxiety and strife) which burns you in this world, then neither God nor servant will burn you. You will look, and what you had seen as fire will suddenly become the light of God.

It will feel as though you had dove into the cooling waters of a mountain lake. Fire, in this case, is an obstacle to overcome on the true path. Approach it. It is calling. The earth and sky resound with the call to prayer. There are those who hear it, and those who do not.

There are some people who avoid the followers of God, saying, “Thanks, but no thanks. I don't need this. My heart is pure. Don't intervene between God and me. What's it to you, anyway?” Some may even act hostile towards them. I hope for their sake that their hearts are indeed pure. When the time of judgment comes, the scales will weigh true.

There is no clergy class in Islam. True, but can you learn something to the degree of mastery without going to college or without studying under the tutelage of an expert? This topic has led to many very boring arguments, but really, the answer is clear enough that it does not warrant any further discussion. You cannot truly learn something by going online, for example, and reading about it. A guide is necessary to steer you away from false or inaccurate information. There is a reason why God sent Muhammad as his messenger.

Rumi weighs in on this briefly with a single verse. His answer resounds like a slap:

“Abraham said, ‘Do not intervene! There is no need for an intermediary when you are a true lover!’”<sup>40</sup>

Wait, are we contradicting ourselves? Actually we are not. Allow me to explain. Remember how Nimrod threw Abraham into the fires. At that moment the angel Gabriel appears. He asks, “Do you need anything?” Abraham replies, “No, I do not need anything that you can provide. I need only God.” Gabriel then says, “In that case, ask Him!” to which Abraham responds, “Since he knows the state I am in, there is no need to directly ask anything of him.”

Based on this dialogue, who is able to say, “I don't need an intermediary,” you or Abraham?

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<sup>40</sup> 4:2977

Rumi answers this question in the verse that immediately follows:

“The prophet serves as a link between the believers in this world and God in the next. He is their intermediary.”<sup>41</sup>

Now hear Mevlana’s simple words of truth:

“If every heart were attuned to divine inspiration, there would be no need in this world for words and sounds.”<sup>42</sup>

To put it another way, if every heart could hear divine revelation, there would be no need for the heirs of the Prophet to beckon us to come!

But do the friends of God ever come between servant and the Beloved? Not true friends, as they are far above stooping down to our level. They do not act as a curtain! Quite to the contrary. They are the ones that would tear off any veils or remove any barriers that may come between us and God. These holy men will take and deliver you, the wayfarers, to the divine presence, just as Gabriel took Muhammad up to the *Sidrat al-Muntaha*, that heavenly lote tree marking the boundary of creation. From there it is up to you. The true friends of God will say “Here’s you, and that’s God over there,” before (if you are that fortunate) leaving you face to face with the Beloved. If only there was that closeness between us! It is necessary to understand and discuss like this these truths. You must heed the master who beckons, “Come!” Mevlana again warns us against doing otherwise:

“Your intent was to set to work without a master. But you will die in such ignorance a wailing death.”<sup>43</sup>

Every endeavor has a way, a method, so say the wise. Rumi emphasizes this point again and again. This time, for instance, he does so with a story that will turn the soul of man inside out.

We will not reprint the whole story here, for it is a bit risqué. However, you can find the tale in the *Masnavi* and read it on your own. It is the story of a young maid who devised a way to have intercourse with a donkey by placing a gourd over the animal’s member so to shorten its length. When the lady of the house learns of this situation, she sends away the maid and secretly tries the donkey out herself. But she does not know the trick of the gourd and is killed in the act.

The *Masnavi* does indeed contain ribald tales, such as the one above. Ill-intentioned and ill-informed people have often tried to exploit this fact to their own ends.

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<sup>41</sup> 4:2978

<sup>42</sup> 4:2979

<sup>43</sup> 5:1404

However, Rumi puts this kind of storytelling to didactic use, relating his message to the people on the street, the patrons of the taverns and even to those engaged in the most ignoble professions. As there are such deficiencies in people's base nafs, Rumi presents this tawdriness in the most open way possible rather than suppressing or denying it. But he does not stop there. He whisks the defective person out of his state of lowliness and introduces him, kicking and screaming, to the Qur'an and to the hadiths. He attempts to hammer into him the moral temperament that God prescribes. This quality is obvious in the story. In this story, the great Mevlana grabs the nafs by the collar right in the sludge pit where mankind suffers. He says, "Lustful inclination renders the heart deaf and blind. Its influence makes an ass appear as beautiful as Joseph and makes fire seem like light."<sup>44</sup> He then describes this disgrace before going on to say:

"Learn from the Qur'an what the torment of disgrace is, and do not give up your life so shamefully. Go down the right path."<sup>45</sup>

I am sure by now understand the ulterior motive behind Rumi's use of shocking language. Rumi's words contain both a literal (*zahir*) meaning as well as a figurative and symbolic (*batin*) one, so beneath even the most lewd and obscene passages lie important symbols which will become more clear to us as we venture out deeper.

Rumi is shouting, "Come, wayfarer, do not resort to these ways. Come and look, I am showing you the true way, the beautiful way. Come, travel down this path I have opened for you. You will certainly see the advantage it offers."

The friends of God are calling us to righteousness. Only they are speaking without words. Though they do not speak aloud, their hearts are crying out, "Come!"

"I am deafened by the shrieks, yet he is unaware of them. Even those with superb hearing cannot hear these piercing calls."<sup>46</sup>

Just as fathers pray and wish for a "dutiful child," the friends of God and the murshids beg with all their being for a dutiful disciple. Only instead of progeny, they pray for the path. They look for kindred spirits who will say, "Protect us, father."

And so they summon you silently, from deep within. "Come," they beckon. "Come as you are. Just come." Heed their calls, for the path is fraught with danger and deception. If even foxes and crocodiles can secretly lie in wait, think about the guiles of man. Mevlana writes:

"He is a deadly poison packaged as milk and honey. Venture no further without consulting an adept guide.

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<sup>44</sup> 5:1365

<sup>45</sup> 5:1391

<sup>46</sup> 6:4627



All the worldly pleasures are comprised of deceit and hypocrisy, like a flash of lightning in the dark.

This false and fleeting light lasts not even a second, before it is enveloped in darkness. Should this be your path, it is incredibly long.

By its light you can neither read a letter nor ride a horse to your destination. As punishment for your infatuation with lightning, the beams of morning light turn their back to you.

You walk for miles along the path in the dark of night without a guide but by the lightning's deception.

You stumble on a mountain now and then into a river. Sometimes you stray this way and sometimes that way.

O seeker of power and status, you do not see the guide, and if you did see him, you would not heed him.

'Though I have traveled sixty miles down this road, this guide tells me I am lost.

If I pay him any mind, he will demand that I begin this journey anew under his guidance.

As for me, I have spent my life on this path. Leave me, O master, come what may!'

You have travelled this far on the assumption of lightning. Travel one tenth of that journey under divine inspiration.

The verse says, 'Assumption avails not against the truth at all,'<sup>47</sup> and so for choosing lightning you have been left without that rising sun .

Come, come aboard our ship, or at least tether your boat to ours."<sup>48</sup>

Is the text not crystal clear? Once again we come across a ship. As we have said before, the dervish lodge of capable mentors corresponds to the Ark of Noah. Rumi is telling you to not wait on the pier, but to cross the gang plank and step aboard. Are we not a sea-fearing people?

I suppose the faint of heart have a point. You should not board the boat of just any captain! What would we want with a ship on the verge of capsizing? We need a leader who can conquer the seas. That is what Rumi means when he says an "adept guide." Such a mentor is indispensable in this undertaking.

To reiterate, if Sufism is setting sail on the high seas, then we absolutely need a captain. We cannot simply go down to the port, buy a boat, and shove out to sea on our own. It doesn't work that way. And although we must have a captain, we do not want to embark this adventure with a captain who has scant experience and false credentials. The captain for this voyage must be an expert guide, a wise mentor.

You must find the right person. Not just any sheikh will do. Some sheikhs do not know the way, and others only pretend to know. For us it is very easy to recognize

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<sup>47</sup> The Qur'an, Yunus 10:36

<sup>48</sup> 6:4093-4107

an imposter on the path. But you do not yet have that kind of eye. So what will you do? You have gone to the shore, and there at the pier was a boat. The captain on deck says, "Come aboard!" Will you board any old boat? Alas, you remain indecisive!

There are standards with which to discern a true lover. I will mention one of these measures, as it is related to our conversation, but first let me explain briefly what we mean by true lover. In the language of the Sufis, we are talking about an *'arif*. The *'arif* is that adept guide, versed in the knowledge of the Unseen, and continually engaged in the quest for spiritual perfection. He is a mystic, a holy man, a saint. We can also use the word "gnostic." The *'arif* seeks *marifat*, the ultimate spiritual knowledge attained through this path. We will get more into that later.

Getting back to the distinguishing standards of a gnostic... We have been talking about the verb, "to come." So, you look at the captain's experience, his spiritual curriculum vitae if you will, and ask him where he has come from. From this you will be able to gauge his spiritual state. Do the stations on the path check out? Do the milestones line up?

When he invites you on board, ask him, "Where did you come from and how? Why did you come?" Do a background check and find out his story. The great Yunus Emre offers his:

*"I have come from the everlasting land.  
What need have I of this world that dies?  
I have seen the beauty of the Friend  
What need have I of the houris of paradise?"*

Turning to Rumi again, we see how he outlines the purpose of his journey.

*"We have come, like the sun, to give life to everything.  
We have come to cultivate you scattered seeds into a rose garden.  
We have come to inform the earthly body of the heavenly soul.  
We are not anyone's personal riches like gold or silver.  
We are the wealth of everyone, like the sea and the mines.  
We have come, like religion, to offer mercy to those who live in fear."*

Hence, the adept guide is sent with this goal in mind to those who heed the call to come.

So come, let's review once again the topics we have covered in our conversation today. Come, we have said. We are speaking from the heart. Those who can hear, reply, "I have come."

We do not take people by the collar and drag them into our lodge. They come of their own accord. We sincerely wish from the bottom of our hearts that people,

whoever they may be, will find a righteous mentor and go to him, that they will save themselves and their families too.

“Go straight to the heart,” we say.

Rumi says the same thing: “Go towards the heart, for you are a fragment of that heart. Know that you are a servant of that just King.”<sup>49</sup>

Rumi is telling you to enter the heart of the Universal Man. If he beckons you with his heart, what will you do? You shall enter his heart, for within that heart, divine order and divine love is reflected down from on high. Become a member of the House of God, that just King.

The verses that follow are quite beautiful. Come, let’s alter our tack a bit and examine this passage verse by verse. They will be a crown for our conversation.

The next line is as follows:

“Your servitude to him is better than being a king, for ‘I am better’ are the words of Satan.”<sup>50</sup>

The murshid of course does not expect you to be his slave. He does not want you to serve him; he wants you to serve God. The mentor will explain to you what servitude means. He will make you taste the pleasure of servitude.

The above verse also alludes to the “prostration before man” issue. This goes back to the time when God created man. God told the angels to prostrate before Adam. Satan refused to do this and was therefore banished. “I am better” refers to this incident. But let me ask: Is it bowing down to man, or to what is within man, to that covenant with which God entrusts mankind?

Sufism teaches the finer points of spirituality. Do not turn a deaf ear on Rumi’s warning, which is embedded in the fine print:

“Notice the difference between Satan’s pride and Adam’s servitude, and choose the servitude of Adam.”<sup>51</sup>

Do not be proud! God frowns upon this trait. Only God has the right to be proud, as he is “*Al-Mutekebbir*,” the Supreme, the Majestic. And you? Vis-à-vis God, what have you got to be proud of? Besides, arrogance and conceit will tempt you to lord over your fellow servants. God dislikes that quality in his servants, all of whom have been created by Him. He demands modesty, not pride.

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<sup>49</sup> 4:3341

<sup>50</sup> 4:3342

<sup>51</sup> 4:3343

“The Sun of the Path once said, ‘Blessed are those who abase their nafs!’”<sup>52</sup>

The Sun of the Path is of course none other than Muhammad, and in this verse Rumi is referencing a well-known hadith. As pride stems from your nafs, suppress your nafs so that your human character can rise up.

The next verse brings us to the tree of Tuba.

“Behold the shade of the Tuba tree and sleep well there. Lay your head in its shade and stay there.”<sup>53</sup>

This verse too draws inspiration from hadith. Tuba is the name of a tree in paradise, whose roots are in heaven while its branches reach towards the earth.

This tree is based upon the family tree of all Universal Men. The Tree of Tuba corresponds in a way to the *Silsilat al-Dhahab*, or “Golden Chain,” the spiritual genealogy that begins with Muhammad and links all the great masters of the Sufi orders. That is why, when Muhammad saw an *Insan al-Kamil*, he would say, “Rest under the shade of that tree and eat of its fruit,” that fruit being knowledge, wisdom, the mysteries of the Unseen. Because, as Mevlana tells us:

“What a wonderful refuge is offered by the shade of the nafs’s abasement. Be inclined to purity and find there a resting place!”<sup>54</sup>

The Perfect Man is a safe harbor. In this world, especially in the times we live in, who but these true Perfect Men can you depend on!

Now you have come to a crossroads, a fork in the road, as they say.

“If you step out of that shade and into egoism, realize that this defiance will lead you astray.”<sup>55</sup>

Rumi cannot help but give us signs:

“Therefore, submit to the path, obey, and shelter in the shadow of a sheikh or master.”<sup>56</sup>

This verse and the one before it both contain a nice incentive, a gracious bit of encouragement. Are these appeals for his own sake? No, they are for the benefit of

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<sup>52</sup> 4:3344

<sup>53</sup> 4:3345

<sup>54</sup> 4:3346

<sup>55</sup> 4:3347

<sup>56</sup> 4: 3348

the people to whom he has said, "Come." Does he make a commission, like a travel agent, off those souls he ushers onto the Ark? Certainly not. But nestled within his warm insistence to come is the love of man. Sufis love people. That is why they bustle and toil for the good of mankind. Those who try to perfect people also love people.

Now it's decision time. We expect "a step" from you, the first step that will be taken of your own free will. If you take one step forward, the mentor will draw ten steps closer to you. He may even come running to embrace you, just as God has promised his servants. It's your move.

So what is expected of you? Mevlana supplies you the answer:

"The time has now come for me to shed the body, to annihilate the human form and become completely spirit."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 6:613

### 3 SEEK!

*"If you sow chaff, no wheat will grow. Seek a man, seek a man, and become a man!"<sup>58</sup>*

Welcome back, wayfarer. Our last conversation left off at calling. The friends of God silently cry out, "Come! Come!" But if we on the other side of the fence cannot hear this call, we are in trouble! There must be an echo, a callback.

Come, today let's follow the story from the other side. What is the first thing you need in order to hear the Universal Man's cries? Perhaps you will say, "An ear!" But the ear only hears what it wants. You must first seek out what you intend to hear. And you keep an ear out for what you are looking for, right? This is what we call our selective perception. With this in mind, the key word for today's conversation is "seek."

Let's begin with philosophy's most basic question: What does mankind want? What are people looking for? We came or were brought into this world. We grow. We mature. But what do we want as we tear the pages off of that calendar called life?

First we want security, so say the experts, followed by liberty. Mankind has existed through its will to survive and to keep out of harms way. At the same time, we also want to be free and live life to our heart's content. We want to enjoy life as much as we can.

How miserable it must be to live in fear. Of course, if you asked people what they feared the most, what do you think the answer would be? If you said God, you are quite the optimist. Why would they fear God, though? I imagine they are afraid to face Him on the Day of Resurrection. There are at least a few people out there that fear God. But you have to wonder what some of these people did in this world that makes them so fearful God. I think most people are more afraid of dying than they are of God. Dying, to them, signifies nothingness. The end. Game over. For them, life is too short, so have fun, do what you want. Right?

The creature we call man has been prone all throughout history to this line of thinking. He has always sought one thing. What do you suppose it could be? If I dropped you the hint, "Gilgamesh," would you be able to guess it? Yes, the potion of youth! Drink a drop of this magical elixir and you will live forever. Splendid!

Rumi tells another tale about this age-old quest: Somewhere in India grew a miraculous tree. No one who ate the fruit of this tree would succumb to old age or

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<sup>58</sup> 2:2224

death. A king caught wind of this tree and sent his men out in search of it. The men searched high and low, roaming the country for years and years, many times over. Some people called the king's men crazy and steered clear of them. Others joked with them, saying, "Oh yes, there is a tree in such and such a place," either to deceive them or merely to get them out of their hair. In the end, their whole quest was for naught! They never found such a tree!

Finally they gave up. But one of king's men said, "Let me at least go to a wise sheikh before turning back. Let me explain to him my predicament. From there I will set out with his blessings."

He went to the holy man in tears and told him his story. Let's listen to the parable as it appears in the *Masnavi*:

"The sheikh laughed and said to him, 'O simpleton, that tree is knowledge. Any wise man would understand this. It is soaring, enormous and vastly far-reaching. It is the all-encompassing sea and the source for the Water of Life. You have gone after the form, O careless one. For you there is neither leaf nor fruit on the branch of meaning. Sometimes its name is "tree," sometimes "sun." Sometimes it goes by "sea," and sometimes by "cloud.'"<sup>59</sup>

Have we returned to the Tree of Tuba? Or perhaps the focus should be on Universal Man, for the secret of immortality lies with him. So then, what are we seeking?

Before we get ahead of ourselves, I want to point out that we are here talking about "seeking" and what we expect out of life. How many people think about these things? For the most part people live – if it is in fact living – then they die and are gone. To live like that, I will tell you, is neither living nor not living. The world is full of the living dead or the half dead. I will explain to you later what it means to actually live.

We will leave that group alone for now and turn to those who see life as "a quest." Our business is with them.

Let me just say this: Bravo to people who see the need for seeking in their lives. They have come to this realization and achieved a certain awareness. Amen!

Now for the second step: happiness. This quest is linked to a high chance of "happiness." Who doesn't want to be happy in life? Of all the crowds of people who gather at the start line to chase after happiness, how many of them will say by the time they cross the finish line, "Thank goodness, I had a happy life."

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<sup>59</sup> 2:3668-71

Happiness is our number one goal. But how do we achieve this? What is the key to happiness? There will always be some people who will answer this question by shouting out, "Money!" O money, how many people chase after you instead of what matters! There are several reasons why money cannot be the key to happiness. For one, the obvious; money is not guaranteed to bring happiness.

Another reason is that not everyone who seeks money will find it. Besides, after a while money ceases to be the vehicle and becomes in and of itself the goal.

There is also a third reason! Rumi of course says it best: "You are what you are seeking in life." The "what" that you are searching for is as important as the quest.

If I asked you now, what would you say?

"I am seeking God"? Don't say that! Maybe you would say it, but how many other people out there would say something so crazy? If you keep saying, "I am seeking God," they'll put you away. Let's modify your answer into something a bit more appropriate.

You are searching for "yourself!" Beginning with your family and extending into your work life, you are constantly trying to identify your talents, disposition and values, just like everyone else. You will then be able to find a job and a partner that suits you. Only then can you be happy. So say the self-help gurus. But they are not too far off the mark, you know!

For them, the earlier people begin to ask themselves, "Who am I?" the better.

Sometimes we get so annoyed at the drunks when after they have one too many drinks they start asking, "Who am I? What is this place? What am I doing here?"

But in fact, these are the right questions to be asking. I do not drink, but people need not be drunk to bear in mind certain truths.

Intoxication is in fact a concept in Sufism, but when we use the term, we are speaking metaphorically. I will expand on the topic of "drinking" later. You will feel what drunkenness means for those of a heightened spiritual state.

Sufism has its own particular terminology. Those unfamiliar with this body of literature stumble into errors of comprehension. Certain nouns, adjectives, and expressions that occur in everyday life mean something totally different to the *ahl al-hal*. These everyday expressions are charged with different and ulterior meanings when used in the Sufi context. Let's examine, for example, the lyrics of a well known bar song written by the Turkish poet Turhan Oğuzbaş:

*"Tonight I wandered through every dive in Istanbul  
I searched for you in the lip marks on the wine glasses*



*I felt like getting drunk to my heart's content."*

It's a drinking club song reeking of anise-flavored booze. But from the Sufi point of view, the song's hero is on a quest to visit every dervish lodge in Istanbul. Why? To find that Universal Man! As the wine glass is man, and the lip marks correspond the soul, singer croons about his intent to find his murshid, his cupbearer. If the hero is successful, the potency of divine love will cause him to blackout.

A person's quest begins with his or herself. Who am I? What am I? Philosophers have been grappling with this question since time immemorial. Some have said a mind, others a body.

If people merely consisted of a body, then they would need only to satisfy their material needs and bodily yearnings, and be done with it. But this does not happen. We may become rich, but also unhappy.

Others have suggested the mind. Yet too much intellect confuses people. It drowns us in anxiety and causes us to become schizophrenic. Inner peace still remains out of reach.

We, as Sufis, say that the primary factor that makes a human human is one's "spirit" or "soul." That spirit is the Spirit of Muhammad, which God has breathed into us. That spirit manifests itself gracefully on the mind and body. If we look at our metaphors, the heart is where we talk about that spirit existing. We do not teach this in school. It is not for nothing then, when Yunus Emre voices his complaint in the following poem:

*"Knowledge is knowing knowledge  
Knowledge is knowing yourself  
If you do not know yourself  
Then what was the point of college?"*

Would you believe that I begin every university semester by reading this verse to my students?

"Knowing yourself" not only means being comfortable in your skin, but also finding your true self. This is crucial. As you seek your essence, you will discover a truth. And if you possess spiritual awareness, that truth will be a guide to you. It will put you on the path and take you somewhere. But where?

There are two parts to finding your essence. The first part is this: Discovering your true self allows you to figure out what your goal in life ought to be. It does not lead you to your goal, but tells you which goal to pursue in order to become happier. If you start working your way down this path, the meaning of life will become more apparent to you the closer you get to your destination – your goal – and you will find

inner peace. When you are going in the right direction you will know it. It feels like you are doing the work you love.

But that is not all! There is another component to this: "Those who find themselves find God."

This echoes the hadith, "*Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbahu*" which means "the one who knows himself knows God." This is it: Man can drive away his existential misery merely through the discovery of his own metaphysical depth. You may have all the money and social standing you want, but if you cut off communication with God it will be impossible to get what you really want out of life. Your spirit will remain restless unless you find God in this world. Arranging communication between man and God is indispensable to personal (even social) righteousness and salvation.

Yunus Emre asks himself, "Yunus, why did you come into this life / So that your tongue prays to God day and night / If your path does not reach the prophets / Then our caravan has broke down in the mountains."

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To find God is to learn of the Creator's plans for you, of finding out what He has written down for you on the Preserved Slate. Learning your own eternal truths and "discovering" what He, your true master, wants from you in this world will ensure that you walk on the path of life. So give yourself over to Him and let the autopilot or the Team Viewer as we call it on the internet jargon known as "*Al Qayyum*," the Self-Existing One, take over.

When you achieve awareness of this degree, there is no longer any question of security or freedom. As Rumi says, "I may kiss the sultan's hand / But I would never kiss his feet!" meaning that a person who has found God does not worship earthly gods nor what they place before them as idols. Now that is freedom. Indeed Rumi has tasted true liberty.

Acquiescence of this kind is of course difficult for everyone. But then again, whom are you "seeking?" God, right? He does not conceal Himself. He exists out in the open. It is we who are unable to see Him. Our senses, in the undeveloped state they are in, cannot reach that level of perception. Yet God is closer to us than our own jugular vein; He holds us by our forehead, and our life between His fingers.

From Him we came, to Him we shall return. In between we are not far from Him nor are we disconnected from Him. The issue is "awareness." We must acquire it. I will ask again: What are you seeking?

"Our Lord whom we saw on the Day of Alast, and whom we acknowledged."

Who are we seeking?

“The Universal Man, the one who will unite us with Him.”

Is the equation not solved? Now you understand the reason for a guide. He is that cupbearer who will offer you the elixir of everlasting life that we talked about at the outset of this conversation. He is the person who will guide you through the mortal world and into the next. If we have reached an understanding thus far, then take a breath. Allow me to recite an ode from our Yunus, king of the seekers:

*“If only I could find after so much searching a trace of you  
If only in the dust of your tracks I could rub my face  
If only God would permit me to see your face  
Oh Muhammad my soul yearns for you”*

Oh how the poet holds a mirror to our souls. The friends of God are indeed a “mirror” to us. We lack this mirror in our daily lives. And no, I am not talking about that object we use to fix our hair. I am talking about the mirror that reflects our true selves back to us. We all get uncomfortable when people shower us with undue flattery to manipulate us or when they give intentional and malicious criticism to knock us down. But imagine a mirror that reflects your essence, your true self, back to you in a constructive tone without hurting your feelings. That is the Universal Man we all need.

In his mirror, the believer can merely see himself – with all his material and spiritual dimensions. There is a hadith that goes, “A believer is a mirror to another believer.” The mirror’s symbolism does not end here; the believer as mirror to another believer is an extensive topic. But for now let’s leave it at that and turn our ear to Rumi:

“Seek a mirror that reflects true and straight!”<sup>60</sup>

True and straight alludes to *As-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*, the narrow bridge that spans the lake of fire. All people must cross it in order to enter heaven. Mevlana weaves a beautiful tapestry of wisdom from these metaphors. It moves from being a mirror to the disciple to seeing God in the mirror. Now let’s look at it from yet another angle, from the eyes of God.

Mevlana says:

“Therefore He made an heir, one who has a heart so that he might be a mirror to the luster of His perfection.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> 4:3855

<sup>61</sup> 6:2153

In this profound expression, Rumi is emphasizing the wisdom within the Qur'anic verse that says, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority."<sup>62</sup> This successive authority, this heir, is the Universal Man.

It's a shame that throughout Islamic history, starting with the Umayyads, the word for this successor, "caliph," has been applied to earthly royalty. Caliph literally means spiritual successor, or heir, to the Prophet Muhammad. Later, during the Ottoman era, the term caliph became synonymous with the sultan. The sultan was additionally known as Our Master, The Prophet's Successor on Earth, and God's Shadow on Earth, to name a few epithets that intimated the sultan's divinity. We do not mean to downplay the service the Ottomans provided to Islam, it is just that our saints would not be pleased that these terms were being used for terrestrial emperors. It is not right, in my opinion, to degrade these concepts by applying them to worldly pursuits.

At any rate, let's return to the true caliphs. We have referred to them as mirrors. When we look at them they remind us of God. They are God's servants or shadows, as well as the heirs to Muhammad's guardianship. In the verses to follow Rumi introduces us to the concept of "shadow," a term used frequently in Sufism. We already mentioned the word when we said that the Ottoman sultans were addressed as "God's Shadow on Earth." But now we will dwell on the true shadow and what it means in Sufi literature:

"When his guide is the shadow of God, it delivers him from every other shadow and delusion.

The shadow of God is that true servant of God, the one who is dead to this world but lives through God.

Lay hold of his skirt without hesitation, so that you may be saved from the destruction of the last days.

Recognize the saints from the verse, 'How He extends the shadow.' They became the sunlight that illuminates the divine path."<sup>63</sup>

The Qur'anic verse that Mevlana quotes from is this: "Have you not considered your Lord - how He extends the shadow, and if He willed, He could have made it stationary? Then We made the sun for it an indication. Then We hold it in hand for a brief grasp."<sup>64</sup>

Hüseyin Top, in his extensive commentary on the *Masnavi*, adds: "The saints, who are God's true caliphs on earth, are the guides that God has brought into the light of

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<sup>62</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2:30

<sup>63</sup> 1:422

<sup>64</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Furqan 25:45-46

the true path. They are nothing more than the reflection of God's light and its manifestation in mankind."<sup>65</sup>

The light of God is reflected on the hearts of the saints. "Oh, strive to find that one with soul who will feed your heart. Go and seek spiritual prosperity from he who is prosperous."<sup>66</sup>

God, who is bound neither by heaven nor earth, enters their hearts. Their hearts then become a kind of Kaaba, the House of God. Rumi is saying that you too must enter that heart – God's home – and join the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Consider this story from the *Masnawi*: Bayazid Bastami, a great Sufi saint, was on a journey to the Kaaba in Mecca to perform the Hajj. On his way, he desperately wished to find the Khidr of his time. In Sufi tradition, al-Khidr is an eternal wayfarer who provides guidance to those in search of God, including Moses. He still wanders the earth today, having drunk from the Water of Life.

While on his quest, Bayazid saw an old man, weak and bent over. When he approached him, the old man said, "Hey, Bayazid. What are you doing over in these parts? Where are you going with all of your luggage?"

"I intend to reach the Kaaba."

"What do you have in the way of provisions?"

"I have 200 dirhams of silver. Look, I sewed them into my cloak."

"Circle around me seven times, and consider this to be as good as the Hajj and the circumambulation of the Kaaba. Oh generous one, give me those dirhams. Know that you have made your pilgrimage and that you have fulfilled your wish. You have also performed the Umrah, the lesser pilgrimage. You have found everlasting life. You have now become pure of heart from running up the Hill of Purity (*As-Safa*). By the truth of God, He has chosen me above His own house. Although the Kaaba is the house of His grace and beneficence, my body is by virtue the house of His mystery. He made His House the supreme Qibla.<sup>67</sup> The heart of the believers has become his own home. Since you have seen me, you have seen the place of circumambulation. It means that you have circled around the Kaaba of Sincerity. To serve me is to worship God. Do not think that God is separate from you or me. Open your eyes and look at me. Man is where the Light of God manifests."

Bayazid Bastami was so moved by the words of the old man that he gave him the dirhams.

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<sup>65</sup> (HT, I, p. 278)

<sup>66</sup> 1:726

<sup>67</sup> The Qibla is the direction towards which all Muslims must pray. It points to the Kaaba in Mecca.

“Through the old man,” says Mevlana, “Complete spiritual prosperity came to Bayazid. Afterwards he attained a station never before imagined.”<sup>68</sup>

Bayazid must have been overjoyed to find such a heart. The legend of Bayazid Bastami has been passed down orally through the ages. There are slight variations here and there, but all the many versions say the same thing: Bayazid naturally hesitated a moment when the old man told him to give him all his Hajj money. The sublime man saw this and said, “Give me them, and circumambulate around me instead of the Kaaba. God has never entered the Kaaba. But he will never leave my heart!”

We must seek out those saintly men whose hearts have become the Kaaba.

If you are having any doubts as to whether such people exist, Rumi has this to say: “They exist.”

“And so in every epoch a saint emerges, and this will continue up until the Day of Resurrection.  
Whoever is of a good disposition is saved; whoever is of frail heart is broken like glass.  
That saint is the living and perpetual imam, whether he is a descendant of Umar or of Ali.  
O seeker of the path! He is the Mahdi as well as the Hadi.<sup>69</sup> He is at once hidden and seated right across from you.  
He is the light, as though Universal Reason serves as his Gabriel. The saint who is below him is the lamp that glows from him.  
The saint then who is lesser than this lamp, though the light comes from that lamp, is our lamp niche. The Light has gradations of intensity.”<sup>70</sup>

Rumi returns to the same subject later in the same volume. If he says such a man exists, then he exists. Look at what it means to seek:

“As there is treasure in the world, deem no ruined place devoid of treasure.”<sup>71</sup>

The world is graced by God’s many manifestations. His reflections are glazed onto the world, as well as on man. Didn’t God say, “I was once a hidden treasure”? Then search every place and every person.

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<sup>68</sup> 2:2251

<sup>69</sup> The Mahdi is “the guided one,” while the Hadi is “the guide.” However, the Mahdi refers specifically to the savior prophesized to come before the Day of Resurrection.

<sup>70</sup> 2:815-820

<sup>71</sup> 2:2153

Was not the old man we encountered in the story of Bastami like a “ruined place”? What exactly is Rumi attempting to convey? He is telling us not to look at the form, for a treasure could turn up in some place you considered a desolation. In other words, do not look down on anybody. If you do not have an eye that can discern such a man, look at everyone as though they could be Him.

Imagine how safe, how nice, how righteous, a world we would live in if we looked at everyone with that eye, and everyone else did the same. Just think of it! Alas, if only there were such an understanding among people.

In any case, I will supply you with the next verse to further clarify the meaning:

“Subject yourself to every dervish, but with caution. When you find the marks of a true saint, you must request that one in earnest. As you were not endowed with the inward-seeing eye, assume always that the treasure could be in everybody.”<sup>72</sup>

Mevlana characterizes perfectly the nature of the quest. It is one of caution and humility. Some misguided seekers approach this delicate matter brashly. In their quest for “the saint,” they lay into a potential candidate with impertinent questions, attempting to size them up and evaluate them by criteria they have yet to understand.

God forbid you treat the friends of God as if they were a watermelon at the market, bouncing them in your hands, smacking their rind, slicing them through the middle to check how red their blood flows. Really, how could you set them on a scale to weigh them?

Believe me, this kind of tactlessness has occurred quite often throughout history. They once summoned Rumi’s son, Sultan Walad, to the *qadi*<sup>73</sup> at the time. There was a matter of dispute. Some of Jalaluddin Rumi’s detractors had brought their grievances before the court. They asked Rumi’s son a question, which the *qadi* himself was unable to answer: “Who reached a higher maqam, Bayazid Bastami or Jalaluddin Rumi?”

Sultan Walad, being the wise man that he was, replied, “Do we even have the scales to measure such things?” With that, he got up and left the council!

The inquest must be polite.

We have now come to another question: Does everyone who seeks find what they were looking for? No, but those who did find were seekers!

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<sup>72</sup> 2:2154-55

<sup>73</sup> A *qadi* is a judge in an Islamic court.

There is a certain hadith that says: "A person knocks on a door, and if he continues knocking, the door will open, and he will enter."<sup>74</sup>

Say you have sought and you have found. Now what will you do? Rumi briefly and clearly instructs you on what to do when fate smiles upon you and you have gotten ahold of that sublime personage:

"Befriend a man of God, and make him your guide. Once you do this, God will aid you in your endeavors."<sup>75</sup>

Now consider the two words that Rumi used: friend and guide. The advantage here is two-fold. You will at once become a friend to that Universal Man, as well as acquire him as your guide.

We live in an age where practically everyone is an acquaintance, yet hardly anyone is a true friend. You are seeking a person who will take good care of your heart. Let's say that you have found that person. How will you win his or her heart and make this person your friend? Building friendships is so difficult that perhaps by the end of your lifetime you will have only a handful of people whom you consider to be true friends. And you would be doing quite well for yourself! Once you establish this intimate friendship, you will set off with that friend on your journey through this world and the next. He or she will serve as your guide.

Just talking about all this wears people out. Think about living it! I keep saying Sufism is difficult. Let me underline this one more time. If you do not have a friend you can depend on in this temporal world, that is, not in the spiritual context, just in your everyday life, think long and hard about what you are lacking, what you are doing wrong.

"Why can't I form lasting relationships with anyone?" you bemoan, "Why don't people befriend me, unless it is for some ulterior motive?" Question yourself! Look in the mirror. If you cannot make even one friend, are others to blame? You may have opened your heart to others, but do they embrace you or do they turn away from you? If Sufi training can make you ponder this just a bit, how better off you will be!

Moreover, "The road of faith is rife with pitfalls and peril. This is not a path for the faint of heart."<sup>76</sup> Perhaps you are afraid of people. You keep wondering when they will turn around and stab you in the back. You are unable to open up to them. You feel anxious that tomorrow they will betray you. Perhaps this is why the twenty-first-century man wears a "mask" in public. What a shame. We live not in a society, but at a masquerade ball!

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<sup>74</sup> TM, VI, p. 1226

<sup>75</sup> 2:23

<sup>76</sup> 6:508



That friend of God is “the ladder by which you ascend.”<sup>77</sup> The friend that protects you against others is the friend that will forgive you for your mistakes.

Intimacy with the friends of God is, as Rumi puts it, akin to touching Khidr. “By the touch of Khidr,” says Rumi, “the cooked fish came back to life and took its home in the sea.”<sup>78</sup>

So it is with that friend you will set out on the path. The key trait we are looking for in a friend is his ability to act as a “guide” to us. Is it so hard to accept this truth?

Oh the hubris of mankind these days! Everyone considers themselves already an expert. These people, who shun advice, confident that they know best, forsake everyone – even if that person happens to be a friend of God – and make themselves their own guide!

The bottom line is, find that friend. Moses too requested a friend, so God sent him Khidr. And what did Khidr say to him? “You won’t be able to stand me! You will question me. You will oppose what I do.” That was the nature of their relationship. Even the Prophet Muhammad would have raised objections to Khidr. What this tells us is that accepting guidance is tough work! Rumi goes on:

“Should the friend come he will guide you on the path. Hence Mohammed said, ‘My Companions are like the stars.’”<sup>79</sup>

The Qur’an emphasizes the same point: “And it is He who placed for you the stars that you may be guided by them through the darkneses of the land and sea.”<sup>80</sup>

On your spiritual voyage, “Like a compass, the star points the way at sea as it does on land. Fix your eye on this star, for he is the guide.”<sup>81</sup>

Rumi continues with his advice on the subject: Seek out a friend of God that can be a guide to you, that when you look into his face you read the Preserved Slate on his brow. Listen to him, for his tongue speaks of divine inspiration. He will explain to you the correct path, just as God taught Adam the names of things. He will show you the truth of things.

“Eureka!” cried one particular scholar. Like Archimedes you too would cry with joy when you find what you were looking for. But does everything end at that moment? Does this path always have a happy end? Put another way, does everyone who finds

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<sup>77</sup> 6:510

<sup>78</sup> 6:2640

<sup>79</sup> 6:2643

<sup>80</sup> The Qur’an, Al-An’am 6:97

<sup>81</sup> 6:2644

Universal Man complete the journey? Do they reach their ultimate goal? Do they overcome the seven stages of their egos and at long last taste the Mi'raj?

The answer to this hard-hitting question is “no.” There is no such thing as “determinism” on this path. If it happens, it happens. But there are many who stumble on the path, take a hard spill even, and get disqualified without ever completing the course.

But don't lose heart! Surely you can manage as well as a tiny ant. There is a famous story about an ant who decided to make the pilgrimage. As it went on his way, those who saw it often asked cynically, “You really think you'll be able to reach Mecca with those tiny steps of yours?” The ant never lost its composure. It always gave the same answer: “Even if I die on the road to Mecca, who cares!”

Do you think the ant dies? It does not. It survives because it drank from the Cupbearer's hand the elixir of everlasting life. Look where God has brought us! We began this conversation with Gilgamesh and we have turned around and wandered back to the same point. That's how it goes. You could say it was a “turn of fate.”

Now I am going to confuse you a little more. Let's say that you have found your murshid. What do you think will change? Let's recite this poem, which at the moment pertains to you. I'll say no more and just let the lyrics do their job:

*“I used to ask for God, had I found Him what then?  
I used to cry everyday, had I laughed what then?  
In the council of saints I was a bouquet of roses red.  
I bloomed and was admired, had I withered what then?  
Listen, Yunus, listen, the mind went mad again.  
Had I dove right into the state of the saints, what then?”*

What exactly is Yunus Emre saying here? Is it so difficult to understand? In fact, it is. If you can fully appreciate this poem, you are already well on your way down the path. For fear of overwhelming you, I'll refrain from going into too much detail about the poem's meaning. We still have so much to talk about. But I will offer you an appetizer, something to whet your curiosity. I want to see if what I'm telling you will pique your appetite for more, or whether a few bites will fill you up before you ever move on to the main course. Sufism is a matter of appetite, as well as a matter of vessel. A person's vessel determines what will happen on the path. The point is to empty that bowl. Empty it so that you can receive a glass of *Kawthar*.

They call *Kawthar* the water of everlasting life. In a sense, that's what it is. But let me tell you the truth of the matter. The truth is that there is poison in this wine the cupbearer has given you. The friends of God are offering you a deadly drink. Why? So that you know “to die before you die.”

Are you surprised? I sure would be. But before you go to pieces, let me first say this: "We first scatter people, then we gather them up." These are not my words, but those of the great saints who have walked the path. The people who do find the Universal Man they had come in search of at the dervish order often have certain expectations for this meeting or visit. I will tell you something interesting, whether you believe it or not, but really these requests for help and guidance are at first never that spiritual in nature. They are mundane, secular. These appeals are directed towards solving temporal problems. Perhaps you have a sick wife, or unpaid bills, or a husband you no longer get along with. It could also be problems of a psychological nature, such as temporary depression, boredom, or discontentment with yourself or with life.

What often times happens is that a person will reach that Universal Man, find a cure for the ailment he or she came in with, and then, after a few séances, say "Goodbye." They depart with a temporary and partial soundness of mind.

The Universal Man's job is to embrace that person – if God wills it of course – and knead him so that the goal he came in with will start to change as he surpasses the various stages on the path.

What he seeks further down the path will be different from what he had sought in the beginning. I won't explain it to you at this stage, but let me express it through this poem by Niyaz-i Misrî, an great friend of God who has tread this path:

*"I used to seek a cure for my woes,  
My woes were a cure for me.  
I used to ask my self for proof  
My self was proof enough for me."*

## 4 FIND!

*O son! The saints too are God's children. He is well aware of them both in their absence and in their presence.<sup>82</sup>*

Welcome back, wayfarer. We left off talking about the quest. If only the work ended there with the seeking. But we must also “find.” We have begun today’s journey with a beautiful verse. “The saints are God’s children,” says Mevlana. The subsequent lines are as follows:

“Do not disparage them for their faults, for He protects them and takes vengeance on their behalf.  
God said, “These saints are My children in exile, estranged from My dominion and glory.  
They are scorned and orphaned for the sake of their trial, but in truth I am their friend and confidant.  
They take refuge under My protection, as though they were My own family.  
These who suffer are My dervishes. They number a hundred thousand yet they are as one body.”<sup>83</sup>

You have to hand it to Rumi. Who else could have described the saints so well, with every word laden with meaning, every line brimming with wisdom, and every verse abounding in countless symbols? Knowing how to interpret these meanings and symbols requires learning. But from whom? From the saints, of course.

Rumi mentions their “faults.” Do they have faults? Superficially, yes.

Impossible, you say? I will remind you later that you said that. Further on down the road, let’s say, and you have been initiated and have made some progress on the path, a time may come when you decide to leave your sheikh. Perhaps you will complain that he had no substance, that there was nothing in him. Careful, these are the kind of traps that await you on the path. You may not yet fully grasp what I am saying at this point, but keep in mind the deceptions that await you. In any case, let’s talk about something more pleasant.

The saints are the chosen minority that God retains under the vault of heaven. The happy few! His exceptional servants.

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<sup>82</sup> 3:79

<sup>83</sup> 3:80-84

God loves the saints so much that, as *Ar-Rahman*, the Exceedingly Compassionate, He envelops them in compassion. Of this we have no doubt. There is a hadith that says, "All people belong to God's family, and God favors best those who most love God's family." Shouldn't this good news be enough for you? Don't you want to join them, to enter their circle of love?

Seeking is fine and well, but how will you possess what you find? In this conversation we will attempt to impart on you the qualities of God's beloved servants so that you can fend off imposters and steer clear of error. Mevlana puts to parchment the criteria most important:

"He lives not for riches, but for God. He dies not from pain and illness, but for God.

His faith is not for Paradise, its trees and its rivers, but for the sake of God and his will.

His abandonment of infidelity too is not out of fear of the fire, but for God."<sup>84</sup>

It is right at this critical juncture that the story of the great saint, Rabia Al-Basri, comes in. Rabia was an eighth-century Sufi saint and mystic who lived in what is now Iraq. One day, she entered a crowded market carrying a torch in one hand and a water jug in the other. The people around her grew alarmed.

"What do you intend to do?!" they asked her. A torch, a jug. Fire and water.

The saint replied, "With the water I will extinguish the fires of hell. With the flame I shall set heaven ablaze."

"But why!?"

"To see how many Muslims fear not hell, nor anticipate heaven."

Extraordinarily thought provoking, is it not?

God's family lives for the sake of God. They cry for God and they rejoice for God. Perhaps Yunus Emre's succinct line says it better: "I am neither glad for existence, nor do I regret non-existence."

As the Qur'an says, "Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve."<sup>85</sup>

They grieve whenever they see the servants whom God embraces as family and then see their own helpless state. When you submit, you will see how those whom God

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<sup>84</sup> 3:1910-12

<sup>85</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2:277. Zakah refers to the obligatory giving of charity.

loves as his own children will flock to people like you. Here is what Rumi says on the topic:

“Take in your hand no other hand but that of the sheikh, for his pure hand is aided by God.

Your aging intellect has grown childish in the midst of your nafs. He remains cloaked behind the veil of worldly pursuits.”<sup>86</sup>

Let’s pause here. What we have read is addressed more to a general audience. You will begin by saving those at the very bottom of society. Not just the destitute, but the morally bankrupt as well. Both guile and virtue dwell within people, but in some the nafs dominates. It is these people that Rumi addresses first. Do not take offense; this is not expressly directed toward you.

The *Masnavi* is not a punitive text, but a corrective one. Sometimes people, whoever they may be, need to realize that their own nafs can drag them down to the lowest levels. We should not think that just because we have a mind we can control our carnal souls. Before God makes a servant err, He first binds the hands of that intellect, arrests its ability to reason. Only after the error has been committed does God return his mind back to him. Only then does regret set in – if you are indeed remorseful. “What have I done?” you will ask. How *did* that happen, anyway? Let’s think about that. Rumi goes on:

“Bond your imperfect intellect with his perfect intellect so you may be delivered from evil habits.

When you place your hand in his, you will escape the hands of the devourers.”<sup>87</sup>

But how do you offer your hand? You give your hand to someone who has taken the hand of another, and you do this as you take the pledge of initiation into the dervish order, binding you to your murshid. This is the hadith in which is said, “Hand in hand, God’s hand on everything.” Rumi also expresses this:

“Your hand will become one among those of the pledged, above whose hands is the Hand of God.

Because you have placed your hand into the hand of the sheikh. The sheikh of wisdom is all-knowing.

He is the prophet of his own time, O disciple, in that the light of the Prophet emanates from him”<sup>88</sup>

The pledge ceremony is inspired by an event that took place in Muhammad’s life around the eleventh year of the Hegira. Muhammad and his followers wanted to

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<sup>86</sup> 5:736-37

<sup>87</sup> 5:738-39

<sup>88</sup> 5:740-42

visit the Kaaba in Mecca. However, when they approached the town of Hudaibiyyah, a few miles outside the holy city, the Meccan aristocracy barred their way. They refused Muhammad passage, even for the peaceful purpose of the Hajj. The believers began to grumble among themselves. "Let's not push our luck," they said, "Let's turn back." But Muhammad wanted his companions who had set off on the path with him to support him once more in Hudaibiyyah, where they faced a dire situation. The ceremony was essentially this: The companions took a pledge affirming their loyalty to Muhammad by placing his hand upon the Prophet's. Therefore, when you give your hand, it is as though you are joining these companions in spirit.

"You are thereby associated with the Companions who took the pledge at Hudaibiyyah.

And therefore you have become like one of the ten Companions whom were granted the glad tidings of heaven, and who have become flawless like pure like gold."<sup>89</sup>

Mevlana reveres this unity. Just think of how great a privilege it would be to become one with the person you love, especially if that person was Muhammad, God's own beloved. Mevlana describes this unity:

"This unity is true and right, for a person is paired with the one he loves."<sup>90</sup>

And this pledged unity extends to the farthest of horizons:

"He is with him in this world as well as in the next. This is what the good-natured Muhammad meant by the hadith, Which said, 'A person will be with whom he loves.' His heart never parts from his object of desire."<sup>91</sup>

In Sufism, this is what is meant by the "path." Companionship is valid in both this world and in the next. Our conversations so far have touched upon how rife with peril this path called life is. So shouldn't a friend of God accompany you on this journey? He ought to be there to warn you of winding turns and deep potholes. Say that you are driving alone along a lonely road in the dark of night and you get a flat. Or your motor dies. In any case you are now stranded. You begin to panic. But then, out of the dark, someone appears. Like a Khidr, this person is here to lend a helping hand, and a great sense of relief washes over you. But do such benevolent souls exist out there? Rumi holds the answer:

"There are lion-hearted people in the world who rush to the aggrieved. They risk their lives to help.

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<sup>89</sup> 5:743-44

<sup>90</sup> 5:745

<sup>91</sup> 5:746-47

When they hear the cries of the downtrodden, they boil over like God's sea of mercy.

They bolster the cracks in the world, these physicians of hidden maladies. They are of pure love, justice and mercy. Like God, they are flawless and incorruptible.

They seek out the suffering and alleviate their desperate hearts."<sup>92</sup>

Got it? Who else besides the friends of God will take you by the hand like that? Who else would sacrifice themselves for the down and out? These saints embody both Khidr and Luqman. They shield you from danger, and act as a lightning rod against whatever may come down upon you. They cheer you up and make you laugh. They empower you. So grab hold of their coattails, or rather, their dervish skirts:

"If you have grasped his skirt tightly, that is by the help of God. Whatever strength comes into you is the result of Him drawing you near. Whatever the soul sows is from the soul of the soul. Know that it was not you who threw that sand when you threw it."<sup>93</sup>

It was He who took your hand. It was by His grace. Pray that your every breath comes always from Him."<sup>94</sup>

Here Mevlana reminds us of God's omnipotence. He is the *Malik-ul-Mulk*, the eternal Owner of All Sovereignty. Everything is by His grace, blessing and favor. The friends of God, just like Muhammad, drink from the same source, that is, from Him. Just like anyone, they require intercession, someone to vouch for them in heaven on the Day of Judgment. Muhammad provides this intercession as a favor to the great travellers on the path. He does it to honor the friends of God, but it is God who has the final word. Remember, God elevates no one to godliness. Know which way the river flows.

If someone asks you what you have found in these friends of God, you can say, "I found that source, God's source." They are not God – far from it – but they are not detached from Him either.

All this talk about sources and rivers reminds me suddenly of another quality Rumi attributes to the murshids:

"They write light into the book of your soul so that His waters may reflect within you."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> 2:1933-37

<sup>93</sup> This is a Qur'anic reference (Al-Anfal, 8:17) referring to the sand that Muhammad cast into the eyes of his enemy at the Battle of Badr.

<sup>94</sup> 2:2529-31

<sup>95</sup> 2:2579



The “light” mentioned above is their source. They prime your heart so that their light may flow into your soul from its original source. They knead your heart, softening it in their hands. Your heart expands, grows, and matures. You may wonder what the transformation of the heart feels like. You will learn through experience. I will explain what this is like to a certain degree later on, as that is our way. But there is one thing we must not forget. Rumi says:

“Like God, the sheikh operates without instrument, giving lessons to his disciples without speaking a word.”<sup>96</sup>

Lessons without words?! How could this be? Well, that’s how it is. In fact, what we mean by “lessons without words” is something like “role modeling” in modern parlance. That is at least partly true. The sheikh is held as the exemplar, but the idea is not to mirror him or copy what he does. Rather, we are talking about inspiration along the lines of how Muhammad’s traditions are followed and observed. Giving silent lessons refers to the sheikh establishing a connection with the murid, and transmitting wisdom and truth into his heart via this connection. Some may call this “telepathy,” for it is a similar kind of transfer. This must be the method Rumi is referring to in the above verse.

Many who are new to Sufism, or in search of a dervish order, are trying to find a murshid. They are out “oracle hunting.” As they clamor to find a master, they think, “Let me study under the master who churns out the most prophecy.” As a matter of fact, a whole “world of Sufism” community has sprung up around this topic, online as well as in real life.

Rumors, legends and countless fictitious stories make their rounds in this community. Taking prophecy as the criterion by which to determine a sheikh’s standing is not just wrong, it’s absurd. If you give credence to such a measurement, then go and see them, for there are a lot of illusionists on the market that will not disappoint. The circle of love, however, is not a talent show.

Does prophecy really occur? It does.

But is it helpful? Yes, it reinforces and binds faith.

Can everyone see this prophecy? Can we readily see it? If what the masters have been saying and doing all along finally becomes so clear that it makes you suddenly exclaim, “Aha!”, then you will understand. You may lament, “Oh my sheikh, I was unable to understand you before. I could not intuit the full depth of your meaning.”

Is prophecy required? Never! The greats have a saying, but let me not repeat it here. That is how they view prophecy. That is why true sheikhs prefer not to exhibit

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<sup>96</sup> 2:1323

prophecy. In fact, they specifically avoid it. If prophecy occurs, however, they go ahead and reveal it, not because they want to, but because that was what God had in store for them. In other words, they recognize that revealing prophecy is quite often out of their control, even if the sheikh desires to do so.

Such spiritual states are reached on this path that the disciple will say to himself, "During our conversation, my sheikh answered the questions I had had in my head." When such a thing happens, it increases the disciple's admiration for the mentor.

But the master may not have even discerned or known about the pupil's questions. It could so have happened that God inspired these topics to bloom inside the sheikh, and guided him towards these subjects. We must not forget who is running the show here. God have mercy on the sheikhs who forget this as they try to wheel and deal in prophecy.

Pay close attention to what I am about to say now: It is not "prophecy," but "direction" that is important. Sufism is a path, right? This is not show business. There is no need to get worked up over such things as ratings. What would be the point of showing off on the path?

The core of this endeavor – the principal duty of the master – is to set the disciple off in the right direction and enable him to complete his journey.

No offense, but every disciple is an inconvenience to the mentor. He will labor over the pupil's every trouble, every spiritual state, every problem. Sometimes the pupil oppresses the sheikh. He burdens the sheikh by asking questions recklessly, behaving in unnecessary ways, and crossing the line of decency. A true master will tolerate all this. Unless he receives a negative sign from God, the murshid puts up with the murid. The pupil may exhaust the mentor, but the mentor cannot dismiss the pupil. They cannot say, "I'm over this, be gone!" The need to take a rest does not fly as an excuse. The murshid's real ordeal begins only after he takes on a disciple, who will be his successor. The murshid's ordeal is the pupil. His pupils. They impel the master.

But this is the path! He won't abandon you. You will walk the path together. As you know, there are some sketchy travel companies that only accept cash from their customers. The vacationers take their trip, but when they arrive at the hotel they find no reservation has been made in their name. The tour operator has disappeared, leaving the poor suckers swindled and in a fix. We see this all too often in the news. True murshids, though, do not leave their pupils stranded halfway down the road. Though we are both sending you on a journey, there ought to be a huge difference between dervish orders and shifty travel agents!

The authentic sheikh is that captain who will deliver you to your destination. Let me say it again: Sufism should not be a travel package. The mentors should not lure you off a cliff like a pied piper. It is therefore imperative to find the real thing. What

more can I do but share with you all the tips we have learned from the great Mevlana?

Many imposters hide the hard truth from the poor folks around them so as to not expose their ruse. We, on the other hand, tell you this up front. Why? Because there is something sinful about a shady demeanor. Our position is courageous. The greatness of the sheikh must be measured by the disciples he trains. That is why the spiritual genealogy of the path – the path’s family tree – is so important. How many of them are counted on the branches of the Tree of Tuba? And do they bear fruit?

This is Sufism; it is not a make-it-what-you-wish world. There are many who think otherwise, but I digress. Criticism does not befit us. Let’s be content to maintain our positive attitude. Come, I will share with you an anecdote.

Ahmed Eflaki (d. 1360) gives us a snapshot of Rumi in his work, *Ariflerin Menkibeleri*.<sup>97</sup>

A strange Sufi barged in the door when Mevlana was in the madrasa. As soon as he entered, he prostrated on the ground and embraced Mevlana’s feet. He rubbed his beard on them and wept.

Mevlana looked favorable upon the dervish, giving him a kind reception. They talked intimately and at length. The dervish kept imploring and trying to prove his faith. The great master could no longer bear this behavior. So he said to him, “Come closer and tell me the truth! How did your sheikh guide you? What did he tell you to do?”

“I served a sheikh in Bagdad for nearly twelve years,” replied the Sufi. “He ordered me to clean the Sufis’ bathrooms for two years. I did this job gladly. I filled the pitchers and set them in front of the cells. For another two years I mended the dervishes’ cloaks. Likewise, I carried all the baskets for two years, all in order to abase my nafs. Then my sheikh kept me in seclusion. I endured ordeals many times and I suffered great pains.”

After listening to all this, Rumi became angry and said, “You did all these things under the orders of the sheikh. And what did this son of a bitch sheikh do for you? That indulgent man, oh the things he has done out of his own belief and misbelief. He is truly an ignorant sheikh, and has therefore accomplished nothing.”

He then recited this verse:

“If you went bankrupt because of unprofitable good deeds/  
Come see how we help hundreds of thousands of cases just like you”

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<sup>97</sup> Eflaki, p. 379-380

All the dervishes present put their heads together at once and gave thanks. Then the great master added, "I swear on my father's pure soul that the real and genuine sheikh completes his pupil's work without him realizing it, delivers him to God without any service or ordeal, and brings him to such a position that the pupil's copper body becomes the elixir to another's copper body. In the end that copper turns to gold and becomes a medicine. This power and strength belongs to those who observe and are faithful to the religion of Muhammad."

This story has it all, doesn't it? Now to unpack it. What does Mevlana mean by "that copper turns to gold." A sheikh is an alchemist. In fact, that Paul Coelho book, *The Alchemist*, was inspired by one of Rumi's stories. In science, can copper become gold? No, but in alchemy it would. The sheikhs would indeed perform this transformation. But here we once again happen upon a common misconception!

Are sheikhs magicians?

God forbid we ever got into magic and sorcery lest the fortune hunters come to us wanting to learn the art of producing gold from copper. We don't have anything to do with money here. It is merely a metaphor.

But what does it symbolize? What does Mevlana mean when he talks about transforming copper into gold?

The answer is abundance! An abundance of material and spiritual sustenance. This is true wealth. Recognizing the abundance of the path while holding course on the spiritual journey – that is the key. The murshid must enable his disciple to do this. You need to find a friend of God who will turn you from copper to gold. Mevlana's intention is to make you into a "person of service" who will help others.

Remember Rumi's words:

"The pupil's copper body becomes the elixir to another's copper body."

Why is the pupil trained this way? To honor God's will by serving fellow servants who are in need. Otherwise, you would have turned copper into gold merely for the purpose of making a statue, which you would place on a pedestal and erect it in some square where the pigeons will soon sully it. Who would that benefit?

This is turning into a lengthy conversation, but a couple of nuances remain in regards to finding the perfect mentor. The first is found in the following words by Rumi:

"O heart, go where they love you, where they act as armor against your afflictions"<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 2:2576

That seems pretty straightforward, right? The second is this: If your heart is made up – notice I did not say “mind” – ask, insist, and wait.

“Will you take me, master?” you begin.

But please, approach with caution the murshid who says, “Of course. Come now, let’s perform your initiation ceremony right away.”

You are not taking out a loan from the bank!

Who knows? God.

Who does He notify? The murshid.

When does He notify? When the time comes! When do we drink the tea? When it is steeped. This decision too has a period of “steeping.” But, obviously the standard varies quite a lot. So much so that some friends of God get notified well in advance. In this case, the mentor will be well prepared.

But sometimes though, the mentor may receive no notification at all. The request comes first. Just because a request is made does not ever mean that it must be accepted in haste. The path has its keepers. The situation will be referred to them, in a sense.

We have mentioned “initiation.” But who is authorized to initiate? Who holds the authority to make that decision? Or any decision for that matter.

It depends on the situation. You cannot just bring a guest to the dervish lodge without asking the permission of the sheikh, who is at that moment, the keeper of the path. As an pupil, you would be overstepping your bounds. You would cross the line of decency. You must submit!

Authorization is required. The mentors must wait until they are given the go-ahead. This permit to start work is transferred from the *batin* to the *zahir* through signs that the murshid interprets. In short, even if you believe you have found what you are looking for, you cannot start your journey without your sheikh getting the memo that he has indeed been found.

On the other hand, such situations do occur. This is what we are talking about, what you have led me to talk about. Look not at who is talking, but at “Who” is making us talk! But back to what I was saying: Sometimes the murshid, a wounded gazelle hunter on his quest for pupils, will come across an upstanding person. He might say to himself, “This person would make a beautiful dervish.” But, he can never tell this person his hope, his request – this time the tables are turned – or even insinuate it. He waits, wondering if indeed he and this dervish candidate are destined to travel

the path together. Meanwhile he appeals to God and prays that the bud will bloom into a flower.

This wish may come true, or it may not. If it was meant to be, this fact permeates the murid. A certain gravitational force begins to draw the pupil toward the mentor, initiating his journey. He has dreams. He goes and has them interpreted. We have a saying, "Become aware!" The dervish should be awake or aware at that stage, just like at the other stages of the spiritual journey. He must be able to comprehend the message, the calling. Praise be if he sees the invite!

Suppose though, that he is unable to see it. He sits waiting until he sees. At some point, though – passed the point of steeping – nothing more is going to happen. As we all know, tea becomes bitter if it steeps too long.

We mentioned hunting. At this point, the arrow has already left the bow. Whatever you do now is in vain! You missed your chance. There's nothing left to do but say goodbye to the parting applicant and send him on his way. Or the unexpected could happen, like what Haji Bektash Veli said to Yunus Emre: "You are not like us. You must go to Taptuk Emre." Haji Bektash Veli was the Sufi master who founded the Bektashi dervish order. He turned away Yunus Emre, but if it were not for this, the great Yunus Emre would not have found his true mentor, Taptuk Emre.

Today's conversation now draws to a close. When you return, I will tell you all about "scent." Another way to find the murshid is by picking up the "scent of his heart." I now bid you a farewell. May your path be open!

But wait, don't go!

As your turned to part, perhaps you asked yourself, "If every dervish goes through such a meticulous process, what is my sheikh doing with all these people who are no good at this kind of business?"

In other words, how do these sorry excuses for dervishes get authorized, having gone through with a fine-tooth comb?

You have every right to ask this question. How?

For one, if God says, "accept," then we accept.

The second answer is what Rumi said when someone asked him what he was doing with all those dervishes that were incomplete, Rumi said; "If they were perfect, why should they need a Mevlana?"

Lastly, there are different kinds of dervishes. I've mentioned such categories of dervish as the incomplete traveller and shameless traveller. If they are not kept on a leash at the sheikh's side, who knows what improper acts they will commit!

Another dervish category is the wretched. They have nowhere to go. There is no door they can squeeze through. At least at the lodge they have found food, work and even a salve to ease their pain.

There is yet another group, the personable dervishes. Among these are the loyal wayfarer, the authentic traveller, and the wayfarer in love. It is these dervishes who will safeguard the order. The path will open up before them and they will become people of service, and possibly the path's spiritual successors. It is out of reverence for them that the true murshid endures the others. They say, "The gardener tends a huge garden for the sake of one rose."

I will leave you with the words of Sultan Walad, Rumi's worthy son. We can credit him with turning his father's teachings into a dervish order. In his *Ibtidâ-nama* he writes the same thing:

"The true disciple is someone who attains, both inwardly and outwardly, his sheikh's spiritual states with God, and his closeness with him, and reaches his sheikh's stations. In appearance, they call him a disciple according to station but in fact, he is a sheikh. We prefer this type of disciple to past saints. But he is not the unformed disciple, that disciple who does not regard his sheikh's path as the true path, who shows no improvement, who is lackluster in his quest, who flees from trouble and inconvenience, who is given over to laziness, who does not wholly sacrifice himself to God, who does not behead his nafs's desires, who does not kill his nafs in battle, who places animal qualities above angelic ones, and who is in fact overcome by the attributes of the angels. As far as names go, they also call this type of person a disciple, but it is a name that is yet to have an owner. The sooner you understand this, the better."<sup>99</sup>

If you want to be a false disciple, let me hand you over the keys to the lodge right now. We will sell you short by telling you that you are now a disciple without even so much as a prayer. But as Sultan Walad says, you must be a "true disciple." A true murid, like Sultan Walad, must be an exemplary pupil.

You may go now if we are on the same page. Goodbye and God bless.

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<sup>99</sup> p. 250

## 5 SCENT!

*“At least take a good draught of this scent, as it may lead you toward your essence.”<sup>100</sup>*

You will know the saints by their scent. As we worked our way through seeking and finding, I have been gradually steering our conversations toward scent.

We will talk today about the secrets concealed within scent. I don't know about you, but I am very sensitive to smell. I cannot tolerate bad smells. I suppose in that regard I'm not that different from everyone else!

Let's start with a tale from the *Masnavi*: There once was a tanner who fainted as soon as entered the bazaar of the perfumers. He lay crumpled in the aisle like a corpse. A crowd soon gathered around him, and various people tried to find a remedy to his affliction. Some felt his heart with their hands, while others sprinkled rosewater on his face in hopes that he may come to.

They made a great effort to help the man, but his condition remained the same. What could be his illness, they wondered. Perhaps he had drunk wine, or smoked hashish or opium. The people could not fathom what was the matter. They finally succeeded in notifying a relative of the man.

The man's brother, who was also a tanner, came running to the perfumers' market. Before entering the bazaar, he had concealed some dog feces in his coat. He then made his way through the crowd to his brother.

He looked at his brother, and thought, “Since he seeks a living from tanning, he works from dawn to dusk in filth. The smell of dog dung has permeated his veins and bones, right down to the marrow.”<sup>101</sup> He knelt down, and trying not to let the people see, he gave his brother a whiff of the dog dirt.

When the unconscious man smelled the dog feces, he began to recover. Soon he was well enough to get to his feet and walk home.

Since the two brothers worked and lived as tanners, they had spent their whole lives surrounded by an awful stench. The Kazlıçeşme neighborhood of Istanbul used to

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<sup>100</sup> 6:86

<sup>101</sup> In those days, animal dung, especially that of dogs, was used in the tanning process.



smell this way. The odor was unbearable to those not accustomed to it. Now imagine passing by the perfumers' stalls at the Spice Bazaar. The fragrance of perfumes and rosewater fills your nostrils. Someone accustomed to the former stench would reel from the pleasant smells of the Spice Bazaar. As the story says, "treat the patient with what he is accustomed to,"<sup>102</sup> as did the brother with the dog dirt.

That foul smell was exactly what the man needed. As he walked away fully recovered, the crowd stared after him. What they saw seemed to them like potent magic. "His breath is truly powerful," they said to one another. His spell has raised the dead!"

Here, Mevlana offers some advice:

"Any one to whom the musk of admonition has not effect becomes accustomed to foul smells.  
Since the polytheists live in the dung of grudge and blasphemy, God has called them unclean.  
Do not look to sweet ambergris, for a worm born in dung will never change its vile nature...  
'You too resemble the wretch who is devoid of that light, inasmuch as you are directing your nose towards foul smells.'"<sup>103</sup>

Let's pray that God keeps us far from filth. That said, I am going to tell you another story about a fetid odor.

This time Mevlana takes us to India where a sage noticed a group of friends had started home from a long trip. The men were tired and hungry and still had a ways to go. "I know you are famished, and it may be tempting, but for the love of God, do not hunt baby elephants."

He even insisted. "Do not forget my advice. Let it be a warning to you."

The "heroes" of this story continued on their way. When they did indeed spy a plump, newborn elephant, "they fell upon it like raging wolves, eating it clean up."<sup>104</sup>

There was one member of the party, though, who did not partake in the feast, as he had remembered the wise man's advice. "Those words hindered him from eating its roasted flesh."<sup>105</sup>

Sleep then overtook them, all but the one who remained hungry. He stood watch. Suddenly he saw an angry elephant approaching. The beast came up to him first.

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<sup>102</sup> 4:276

<sup>103</sup> 4:295-97, 301

<sup>104</sup> 3:145

<sup>105</sup> 3:147

With its long trunk the elephant smelled his mouth. It then turned towards the sleeping men without touching him.

That elephant was the calf's mother. She sought out the content of the men's bellies by smelling their mouths. She would take her revenge on whichever of the men reeked of burnt baby elephant flesh. And she did. She killed them all. She pulverized some with her feet, and some she tossed high into the air. The rest she tore apart, limb by limb. Rumi tells this parable to impart this advice:

"God is the one who smells our breaths. No one but the faithful shall be saved."<sup>106</sup>

As far as God's concerned, you cannot explain away a situation.

"The stench of pride, greed and lust will become obvious, like the smell of onions does while talking...  
That foul smell causes prayers to be rejected, just as the tongue reveals the corrupt heart."<sup>107</sup>

Mevlana captures the subject beautifully, making an elegant connection between prayer and breath: "If you have not a clean breath in prayer, go and beg a prayer from your clean-hearted friends."<sup>108</sup>

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We broached the topic of scent from the negative angle, having explained to you how foul the breath smells of those who have darkened their nafs with sin. If you eat up all the nonsense in life, the smell of your stomach will betray you. You won't be able to conceal that smell, says Rumi. No matter if you apply perfume, chew gum, or eat mint leaves, it will all be in vain. There are people out there in this world who can discern scents, so just as you will be unable to convince God, you won't be able to fool them either. You understand who they are, right?

Here is what Rumi has to offer for those who say, "No, master, I am blameless and pure of heart." He says:

"Know that this battlefield is full of those who can truly discern the scent. Therefore it is no use to go about feigning bravery."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> 3:108

<sup>107</sup> 3:166, 169

<sup>108</sup> 3:179

<sup>109</sup> 4:1774

Now that we went over the bad smells, let's talk about the scents that are clean, sweet, and soothing. Doesn't that sound nice? Despair does not exist on our path. Only hope. We have come to freshen people's breath and nafs.

We Sufis love pleasant smells. That is because Muhammad loved pleasant smells! Perfume, in fact, was among the three things that the Prophet cherished in this world.<sup>110</sup>

But what exactly do we mean by a pleasant smell? There is another hadith that says, "Certainly the Lord had beautiful scents during the days of your time. Wake up and try to receive those scents."

Are you starting to make the connection?

When spring comes, the world of nature awakens and the first flowers bloom, releasing their scent into the air. Those pleasant smells are carried on the wind to all four corners of the world. The earth becomes like heaven.

The beauty of God is that he sends these sweet smelling breezes down to earth for you concealed within the Universal Men. Don't miss out, says Mevlana. Retrieve these scents from their breath. He makes the message especially clear in this verse:

"The pleasant breath came to you, beheld you, and departed. It granted life to whom it wished, and left."<sup>111</sup>

Hüseyin Top offers his interpretation of this verse: "The perfect murshid, the guide on God's true path, comes to us and offers divine messages. The careless listen and go on their way, while awakened hearts receive from him the recipes of eternal happiness."

So how will you recognize those Universal Men? By their scent!

It is well known that the Prophet smelled of roses. Those that stayed behind in Mecca and Medina caught the scent left by Muhammad after he parted. There is a tune we hum: "May we see Muhammad's smiling rosy face in our dreams." They say it is a blessing to see the Prophet smile in a dream. We ought to know that the nightingale's love and unrelenting wail for the rose is not directed at a mere flower, but actually at Muhammad, whom the rose symbolizes.

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<sup>110</sup> There is a famous hadith that says, "Of all that is available in this present life, I am made to love perfume and women, but the thing that gives me the best gratification is prayer"

<sup>111</sup> 1:1953

Muhammad exuded the sweet scent of roses. He was highly attuned to smell. No wonder the smell of roses permeated the first Muslim city of Medina, which was founded by the Prophet.

Perhaps this is what inspired the great saint, Ummi Sinan (d. 1568), the founder of the Sinaniye branch of the Khalvati dervish order, to write: "My journey brought me to a city, whose palace was the rose, the rose / The sultan's crown and throne, his walls and garden, were all the rose, the rose."

His journey of course refers to his spiritual journey. The city he came to was the city of *Ilm al-Ladun* (Knowledge of the Unseen). Another name for Muhammad happens to be "The City of Knowledge." You can see the symbolism. We had to mention these rose-smelling cities – both the temporal and the spiritual – as they come up often in our poetry.

In the ecology of Islam, that's how cities were. They smelled of flowers because their inhabitants smelled of flowers. But now we have cities that reek of the sewer. Unfortunately, we made them smell that way. Objects speak; we should learn to listen and take heed.

Those with halitosis of the spirit sully the environment. Conversely, those of pure spirit keep the environment clean.

Be aware that even ecology is subject to love.

Pleasant-smelling people smell of roses, which is the fragrance of Muhammad and his spiritual heirs. After all, as the poem continues, "They bought roses and sold roses, weighing them on scales made of roses / Roses upon roses, the marketplace and bazaar were all roses, roses."

When people lack such a scale – a scale informed by love – their balance is offset by error or fraud. This imbalance allows their souls to become tainted with impurity, and they in turn soil their surroundings. They don't mind the stench, either. They grow accustomed to it, just as we saw in Rumi's tale of the tanner!

Back to the topic of people who smell like roses, or more specifically, the *Insan al-Kamil*...

One such Universal Man was Hilal, the brother of Bilal Ibn Rabah, the first muezzin. Hilal was a slave, but in name only. He was a treasure buried in clay, as he possessed great spiritual insight. One day, Hilal fell ill. His master did not know about his illness, nor would he have cared; he despised him. Hilal had no choice but to lie his head down in a barn for nine days and suffer. Through divine inspiration, the Prophet Muhammad became aware of his situation, and he came looking for him to see how he was and to cure him.

We will now let Mevlana take it from here so that we may taste the wisdom concealed in his words:

“The stable was dark, foul, and dirty, but all this vanished when the moment of friendship arrived.

That fierce lion scented the Prophet just as Jacob perceived his son Joseph’s smell...

The Prophet’s scent roused Hilal from sleep, and he said, “What is this sweet scent in a stable full of dung?”

Suddenly he saw through the legs of the horses the holy skirt of the Prophet. He sprang out of the corner of the stable and laid his face upon the Prophet’s feet.

The Prophet then laid his face against Hilal’s face and kissed his head, eyes and cheeks.<sup>112</sup>

This is a powerful moment. Tears come to my eyes whenever I think about it. That scent healed Hilal. It cured him in every sense of the word.

It is written in the *Masnavi*, as well as in the *Stories of the Prophets*, that when Jacob smelled Joseph’s shirt and recognized his son’s sent, he rubbed the shirt on his blind eyes and regained his sight. Muhammad already smelled of roses, but since he so loved pleasant scents, he applied other sweet fragrances to himself as well, and recommended his companions do the same. Among the scents mentioned in the literature are aloeswood, musk, and ambergris.

Those who have performed the hajj will be familiar with a certain, special aroma that permeates the air of the holy cities. It is the essence of aloeswood. This aromatic wood, also known as oud, was among Muhammad’s most favorite scents.

I also happen to really like this scent. My friends who visit the Kaaba always bring me back samples of oud as a present. Do you know also that my *misbaha* is made from oud? I rub the sweet essence of aloeswood into my fingers when I begin my dawn prayers.

If you do a quick internet search on aloeswood, you will see how beneficial this scent is. Heaven too smells of oud. When Adam was placed into the Garden of Eden, which according to some sources was in India, he brought with him that scent of heaven, which permeated the trees around him. For this reason, it is said that aloeswood originated in India. Nowadays, they grow it in Saudi Arabia, where it is highly commercialized. Europeans also buy aloeswood from there. In fact, I am noticing that high-end perfume companies in the West are now releasing aloeswood-based fragrances. But let’s return to a certain legend...

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<sup>112</sup> 6:1174-75, 1179-82

When Nimrod cast Abraham into the fire, the branches that were meant to burst into flame were those of the oud tree. But as you know, by the Grace of God, they did not catch fire. Rumi elaborates:

“You are a mine of aloeswood. If they set you aflame, they will fill this world with the life-saving scent of roses and sweet basil.  
You are not the aloeswood that is consumed by fire. You are not that spirit held captive by grief.  
Aloeswood burns, but no harm comes to the mine. What danger does the wind pose to the source of that spiritual light?”<sup>113</sup>

Here, the un-burning aloeswood represents the Universal Man and the scent of his inward qualities. Esin Chelebi, Rumi’s 20<sup>th</sup> great-granddaughter offered me a branch of oud. When I burn it, it truly gives off a beautiful scent without producing much smoke. If you have never smelled aloeswood, it most resembles sandalwood. I highly recommend it.

Having talked about the power of smell, the scents of God, and the curative properties of Muhammad’s fragrance, we now move on to the breath of the saints.

Listen closely:

“The breath of the saints produces a springtime effect. From this breath grows a green garden in the heart and soul.  
Their breath affects the fortunate like the spring rain benefits the trees.”<sup>114</sup>

There is another story of Bayazid Bastami from the *Masnawi*. One day, the “sultan of piety” went out to the country with his disciples. In the hamlet of Rey where they roamed there suddenly came a sweet scent from the direction of Kharakan. Bayazid uttered the lamentable cry of one who is yearning, and drew in the scent off the wind. It was as though that breeze had given him a taste of sweet wine, intoxicating him. When the great saint succumbed to his inebriated state, one of his enlightened disciples came running to him.

“What is this state? Does it bode well?” he asked his master. “You seem to be smelling something, but there are no apparent roses. Surely this is a rose from some hidden garden.”

The disciple made a poetic request of his master: “Let us too have a dram. O you who are wise to the secret, do tell us of this thing so piquant.”

Bayazid Bastami replied, “A wondrous scent has come to me, just like the scent from Yemen that the Prophet caught.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> 2:1872-74

<sup>114</sup> 1:2042-43

“I feel the breath of the Merciful coming from Yemen,” is a well-known hadith. Another version goes, “The scent of God is coming to me from Yemen on the hand of the zephyr.” The subject of this hadith is the great saint Uwais al-Qarani.

Yunus Emre gives Uwais Qarani the briefest of biographies in his sentimental poem that begins, “Uwais Qarani in the provinces of Yemen.” Within ten or so stanzas, Yunus tells of how Uwais, an early follower of Islam, made the three-month journey from Yemen to Medina to meet Muhammad only to find him not at home and how he had to return to Yemen on a promise to his sick and elderly mother, without ever having met the Prophet. The poem also relates how Muhammad sent Uwais his holy mantle, and how he finally died fighting alongside Ali at the Battle of Siffin. In fact, the dervish who receives knowledge of the Unseen directly from the source and puts it to use, has attained the station of “Uwaisness.” And hence we have Muhammad saying, “I smell the scent of Uwais coming from Yemen.”

The breeze became the messenger of lovers, delivering to Muhammad the scent of God in Uwais Qarani, whose heart was filled with love for the Prophet. It is such a beautiful mode of communication that it sends a shiver down your spine.

As everyone knows, coffee also comes from Yemen. It too possesses a pleasant aroma. It is even said that the one who discovered coffee was none other than the great Qarani. Perhaps for this reason there was a certain aura of sanctity around the profession of coffee making. Coffee makers of yore were regarded as sages, so much so that those heading to Mecca on the hajj trusted them to change their money before setting out.

Uwais al-Qarani is well loved throughout the Middle East, especially among us Turks. When the ceasefire was announced at the end of the First World War, the Ottoman troops in Yemen had no desire to surrender, for that would mean they would have to abandon the birthplace of Uwais. We loved Uwais so much that we even built a tomb for him in Siirt, in southeastern Turkey. We believe the saint is entombed there, or at least we convince ourselves that he is.

Despite all kinds of affronts by materialism in this world, there is still an intense love of saints that keeps our religion alive, nourishes our faith, and allows us to go on practicing it.

Indeed, Rumi says, “A strange and wondrous scent from Uwais and the tribe of Qaran made the Prophet drunk and joyous.”<sup>116</sup>

Returning to the story, Bastami had found himself in a similar situation. Bayazid Bastami too caught the “scent of the beloved,” just as the Prophet sensed Uwais

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<sup>115</sup> 4:1825-26

<sup>116</sup> 4:1829

Qarani, and Abdul-Qadir Gilani recognized Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari. He gave his disciples the good news that someone great would come from that village, that the coming of that age's *Insan al-Kamil* was at hand.

“His face will be smiling with roses from the garden of the Lord. He will surpass me in station.”<sup>117</sup>

The disciples asked the name of that saintly man. “Abu al-Hasan,” he answered. He went on to describe him, inside and out. He then added, “You see the form of the rose beneath the nose, but its scent reaches clear to the brain.”<sup>118</sup>

“When the time specified by Bayazid had come, that blessed king was born and played the game of state. Bayazid had departed many years before Abu al-Hasan came into this world.”<sup>119</sup>

It was in fact a century later that Abu al-Hasan al-Kharaqani (963-1033) graced this earth. His shrine is located in Kars, where devotees and the adjacent cultural center keep it well maintained.

Speaking of shrines, during the early days of his life as a Sufi, Abu al-Hasan would visit Bayazid's tomb in Bastam every night. Abu al-Hasan felt an intense spiritual connection with the saint. He set out to pay his respects after performing the evening prayers with the congregation at Kharaqan. When he arrived in Bastam, he always prayed the same prayer: “O God, please grant your humble servant Abu al-Hasan just an iota of the gift you gave to Bayazid and the wisdom you bestowed upon him.” Afterwards, he would turn back, arriving in Kharaqan in time to catch the morning prayer with the congregation. This went on for twelve years!

This period came to an end when a voice came from the tomb. “O Abu al-Hasan, your time of enlightenment has come.”

“O Bayazid. I am illiterate. Grant me *himmat*.”<sup>120</sup>

“O Abu al-Hasan, that which I possessed and what was given to me were made possible only through your abundance.”

“You lived long before me. How is this possible?”

“Yes, this is true. However, when I was passing by Kharaqan I saw a light from that town beaming into the sky. I had a desire that had yet to be fulfilled, even though

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<sup>117</sup> 4:1836

<sup>118</sup> 4:1844

<sup>119</sup> 4:1848-49

<sup>120</sup> *Himmat* is the spiritual grace and favor bestowed by the prophets and saints.



thirty years had already gone by. So when I said, 'O God! Whose light is that?' a voice from the Unseen came. 'It is the light of my pure servant, whom they call Abu al-Hasan. Intercede on behalf of that light so that your wish comes true.'"

And that is how it went.

Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani describes it so: "When I arrived in Kharaqan on the twenty-fourth day, my heart was filled with the knowledge of the Qur'an."

According to another version, Bayazid said, "Begin reading al-Fatiha, the first book of the Qur'an." When Abu al-Hasan arrived back in Kharaqan, he knew the whole Qur'an by heart.

Abu al-Hasan obtained the station of Uwaisness, occupying an important place on the Naqshbandi order's golden lineage. He deeply influenced the great Sufi masters, including Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani, Najm al-Din Razi, and Attar, as well as our Mevlana. Attar of Nishapur makes frequent reference to Abu al-Hasan in his work, *Tazkirat al-Awliya* (Biographies of the Saints). Al-Hasan's disciples collected his sermons, lessons, invocations, and stories into a book entitled *Nur'ul-Ulum* (The Light of Knowledge), the only copy of which is held at the British Museum in London. He lives on through his scent.

Now it's your turn. We must be able to detect that scent. But it is not easy of course. Rumi tells us that only pure hearts will be able to detect the scent of heaven, and that the scent of the Beloved will carry us up to the immortal world just as Buraq carried the Prophet on his night journey.<sup>121</sup>

It must be clear by now that scent is the "guide" in finding the Universal Man.

"The scent is your guide that grants you life; it will lead you to heaven and the river of Kawthar."<sup>122</sup>

Try to hunt out that scent. When we perform our ablutions, we clean out our noses with water. Why do we do that? A well known hadith will answer that question: "O God, let me smell the scent of Paradise."

In Sufism, there is a reason behind every action, wisdom in every ritual. We rinse out our nose so that it can scent that wonderful fragrance. We clean our sensory organ so that it may take us to those Universal Men.

To recap, we learned to steer clear of foul odors and chase after pleasant scents. When we encounter a sweet smelling person, what kind of state will we enter

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<sup>121</sup> 4:551-52. Buraq is the name of the mystical steed that brought Muhammad to the edge of heaven.

<sup>122</sup> 1:1901

according to the stories I just told? If that person opens his heart to you, you will sense that smell, do not forget this.

“Crush musk or ambergris, and a rejuvenating fragrance will intoxicate the whole world.”<sup>123</sup>

The Universal Man’s heart smells of musk. Musk is derived from the glandular sac of a gazelle. It is for this reason that the gazelle, which appears so often in Sufi literature, is considered sacred. The sac contains wisdom, for its owner is none other than the gazelle, the Universal Man. Those who want to find the path give pursuit to this sublime animal. Mevlana says the same:

“The Sufi is like the hunter who follows the tracks of a gazelle to pursue his prey.  
At first it is the hoof prints of that beautiful creature that serve as his guide.  
But later, it is the scent of musk that shows him the way.  
If he gives thanks and continues the pursuit, he will gladly hit his mark.”<sup>124</sup>

Let’s hope we find that gazelle, obtain its musk, and rub its scent not onto our bodies but into our souls.

“Rub the musk not on your skin but into your heart. Understand that the musk is the name of our Glorious God.”<sup>125</sup>

We also say to enter that heart which smells of musk. Win the heart of that saint, enter his heart, and see what happens.

There was once one among us whom we called Gül Baba, Father of the Roses. He was a short, elderly man, who wanted us to call him everyday, and to visit often. Even though we would do just that, we would still get scolded.

For whatever reason, he called us one day. That is, with a normal telephone. They did not have cellphones back then. Gül Baba was quite cheerful. He was clearly in a state of ecstasy. “Okay,” he said. “Give my regards to my daughter (he meant my wife). I am sending you a gift.”

At that moment the room began to fill with the scent of roses. If it was only I who had smelled it, you could say I was making the whole thing up. But my wife also witnessed it. We always describe it like this: The scent of roses filled the room, as though the phone receiver was spritzing it out like a bottle of perfume!

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<sup>123</sup> 3:4500

<sup>124</sup> 2:161-63

<sup>125</sup> 2:267

You will in fact perceive these smells on your spiritual journey. When your heart dives into love, a pleasant fragrance will all of a sudden reach your nose. Perhaps it will come on a visit to a shrine or when you are deep into the prayer beads. It is a divine gift. At that moment you must give thanks.

You need not be alone to experience this. These gifts can also come when you are in a group. Even tourists in attendance at the Mevlevi lodge in Istanbul have told me that they caught the whiff of roses while the dervishes whirled in the circle of love. Or when we have finished the ceremony and we dervishes, drenched in sweat, form a ring, the smell of roses permeates the air then too. What could be the reason? Come find out. These are the states we are talking about.

The lodges also burn incense as a reminder of the importance of scents. In the Sufi world, concepts are often shown through concrete examples, but most of the time people look at things without seeing the true meaning in them.

Here the burning of incense speaks with clear symbolism!

We have taken to heart the advice, "Objects speak, listen and take heed!" We must not let these things elude us. We have got to see them.

Does everyone have this potential? To put it bluntly, no. Does everyone fancy the same smell? Factors such as a person's disposition, character – even age and occupation – influence that person's scent preference.

Different strokes for different folks, to say the least.

Scent is like that. Some folks are satisfied with foul smells, like the tanner brothers. Others pursue sweet smells, scenting the musk and ambergris of gazelles. Life is like that!

Have we come full circle? Hopefully I got my points across. I do have one other thing to say, and that is, a fine smell is like divine wisdom. It is priceless. It is not offered to everybody. Not everyone would understand or appreciate it, and it would be lost on them. Waste displeases the gazelle:

"The gazelle replied, 'My musk bears me witness. It does a great favor even to aloeswood and ambergris.

But only he who has a sense of smell will perceive this. It is off limits to those who worship filth.

How can I offer musk to such a lowly creature as the donkey, which smells nothing but donkey excrement?"

Hence the Prophet, the Beloved of Allah, uttered the words, 'Islam is a stranger in this world.'

Though the angels are in harmony with him, his own relations flee from him.

People view his outward form to be like theirs, but they do not perceive in him that spiritual fragrance.”<sup>126</sup>

Mevlana ends the wounded gazelle story with the above lines. In the tale, the strange gazelle falls captive and ends up in a donkey stable. The donkeys mock the stranger and even defecate on him.

For dervishes, the world is a donkey’s stable. O estranged, lonely, and wounded gazelles, if you wish to join our club, just give us a knock!

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<sup>126</sup> 5:922-27

## 6 LISTEN!

*"The spoken word is as meaningless as dust.  
Make a habit of being silent for a moment."<sup>127</sup>*

I am delighted you're back. For this conversation I'll remain quiet. You explain and I'll listen. How does that sound?

You seem confused by what I am telling you, as no words are coming out of your mouth. Instead, you are listening, trying to grasp what I mean. Well done; the topic of the day is "listening." I suppose that in an age where everybody – knowingly and unknowingly – talks, yet no one listens, opening a conversation with "Listen!" is both a tall order as well as an apt warning.

People come to us. Events happen in their lives and they take a step towards dervishhood. When they come to us, the first thing we want from them is "repentance." That much should be clear. After repentance, there are two essential promises we expect the disciple to keep in regards to staying clear of certain behavior. We say to our prospective disciples, "Even if you think that perhaps one day you might break them, you better not join us now." I am saying this because abstaining from these two forbiddances – I don't care for the word "forbidden" but – are really difficult oaths to keep. Do you know what they are? The first is that there is no "pretense" on the path. The second is that you will not criticize anyone else. Sufism does not alleviate these two weaknesses.

The great Rumi declares: "If there is no benefit in your speech, do not speak; and if there is, refrain from criticism and swell with gratitude."<sup>128</sup> Look, our two pieces of advice squeezed into one verse!

Rumi reemphasizes this elsewhere in the *Masnavi*: "Do not think evil of others!"<sup>129</sup>

Even if our religions consider gossip to be tantamount to eating raw human flesh, we as a people unfortunately have a weakness to do so. When two people get together and can't find anything meaningful to talk about, they either resort to talking politics, which in itself is rife with falsehoods and pretense, or cutting to pieces a third person who is not present to defend his or herself.

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<sup>127</sup> 1:577

<sup>128</sup> 1:1524

<sup>129</sup> 4:1914

When you encounter such a scenario out there in the world, either keep quiet, pretend you are sleeping, or subtly extricate yourself from the situation by finding some excuse. Do not defile yourself with trash talk and gossip.

In the past I'd find myself in such situations. Someone would usually start off by bringing up someone's name for the purpose of criticizing them, as in "Do you know so and so?" The intent here is to bait you into a so-called dialogue – notice I did not say conversation – in order to bad-mouth that person. I always saw it coming. In order to derail this train of thought, I would counter right away with, "Yes, I know that person. I like him a lot. He is a really good person." My response usually elicited an awkward "Really!" from the initiator of the trash talk session. And just like that the subject was dropped. Don't get sucked in to this kind of needless gossip, because it does not behoove us to criticize others. God will not let us off the hook. Somewhere down the line He will give us a taste of our own medicine. And there is not way to reverse the situation, so hold your tongue.

"For the Universal Man everything is permissible to eat and speak. As for you, you are not perfect; therefore you may only bite your tongue. You are the ear, and He is the tongue. God said to the ears, 'Be silent.'"<sup>130</sup>

Which brings us to another story, this one about the four Indians who went into a mosque to pray. When they stepped inside, they each performed the *takbir*<sup>131</sup> with intent in their hearts so that they could pray in reverence to God. When the muezzin entered, the oldest among them asked, "Have you recited the call to prayer yet?" The second Indian said to the first, "You spoke! Therefore your prayers are void," even though he, too, was in the middle of prayer. Then the third Indian chimed in, "Don't get cross with him, look at yourself!" All three friends had bickered with each other, thus ruining their prayers. The fourth Indian then said aloud, "Thanks be to God that I didn't speak as they did." In the end, all of their prayers had been annulled.

Mevlana seizes the occasion to impart this pearl of wisdom:

"The one who finds faults in others undoubtedly strays from the path. Happy is he who sees his own faults, and in seeing faults in others, eagerly wishes to find that fault within himself. Because half of man pertains to the obscene and the other half to the Unseen."<sup>132</sup>

How clever a description of that creature called man, half of whom is subject to the profanities of this world, while the other half belongs to the ethereal realm.

Humankind can be this crude, but can we be that deep?

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<sup>130</sup> 1:1621-22

<sup>131</sup> The name given to the phrase, "Allahu Akbar," meaning "God is the Greatest."

<sup>132</sup> 2:3033-35

Oftentimes the source of our profane half is our tongue. Awful things spill from our mouths. We see the harm they do, and we usually regret it.

I have another story. An emir is passing by on horseback when he sees in the distance a snake about to enter into the mouth a man sleeping under a tree. But before he can even spur his horse into a full gallop, the snake slithers down the man's throat. So what does the emir do? He approaches the poor man, and with mace in hand, delivers him a few sharp blows. He then forces him to eat a pile of rotten apples off the ground under the tree.

The man protests his harsh treatment, unleashing a string of obscenities at his assailant, wishing nothing but ill upon him. The emir utters not a word. He forces the man into a run under punishment of the whip. He drives him relentlessly across the fields. The man who swallowed the snake is in an absolute state of misery and pain. He whimpers and cries, but there is nothing he can do beneath the whip save obey the emir. At long last, the man vomits. As he expels all the bile and the rotten apples, out comes the vile snake.

When the poor man realizes that he has disgorged a snake, he falls to his knees and thanks the emir profusely. He then apologizes, "I have spoken foolishly, behaved arrogantly, and have said a good many foul words."

The emir sympathizes with the poor man and forgives him. The man who ate the snake then says, "Ah, if I was aware at all of the situation, I would not have said anything close to what I just did."

The emir responds, "If I had made you aware of the snake, you would have died of fright before the venom had had a chance to take effect."

Here Rumi reminds us of an important hadith: "If I correctly described to you the enemy within your souls, the gall bladders of even the most courageous men would burst."<sup>133</sup>

It makes me squirm just thinking about it. Oh how the snake inside us slinks from the heart to the tongue, poisoning us along its way!

What truths come to light when you put yourself in that poor man's place, taking the snake as your nafs and the emir as your murshid, the lesson being we should not speak before knowing all the facts. Truth be told, we should not speak at all. We should keep quiet.

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<sup>133</sup> 2:1878-1912

This is why in Sufism we recommend that our dervishes periodically withdraw to a place of “seclusion” where they abstain from speaking to others. We do this ourselves.

This is not the same thing, however, as when the prophets went up to the mountain and sequestered themselves in caves, escaping the distractions of daily life, to speak face to face with God.

The initiate’s seclusion allows him, in a sense, to attend to his thoughts. That is, if he can stand to not speak to someone for any length of time. Kidding aside, at this stage your ear is not refined enough to hear the wisdom that is beaming down into your heart. But stop and have a look at the world. Listen. Notice how all of creation – mineral, plant, animal – alludes to God.

Seclusion, from another standpoint, is a chance to listen to yourself. We cannot see ourselves when we are criticizing, condemning and gossiping about others. Stop! Be silent and listen to yourself! Beginning with your limbs, ask whether the components that make you you are satisfied with you, their supposed master. Well, are they? What about your hand, your heart, your conscience?

All of them will bear witness to you on the day of reckoning. They will tally up your actions. Listen and see what they think of their master. Are they content with the duties you give them, with the jobs you task them with?

For example, if you used the hand to harm instead of help, don’t you think your hand will come out against you? Listen to them before it’s too late. Sit down and have a heart to heart with yourself, in private. Conversation takes precedence in the Sufi educational system. And when we say conversation, we are referring to *suhbat*, the intimate, spiritual communion between master and disciple. In the first volume of his opus, Mevlana preaches the importance of conversation, taking as a point of entry this hadith:

Muhammad said to Ali, “Everyone wants to get close to God by means of some devotional act. Now converse with His wise and chosen servants so that you may become nearer to Him than anyone else.”

Give pause to this hadith. Muhammad shared this knowledge with none other than Ali, the door to unseen knowledge. The great teachers of the way founded their methods of guidance on the principle of conversation. This is the tradition. Let us “listen” to the value Mevlana places on conversation:

“Difficulties are solved through conversation. Even a grape sprouts from the earth by means of conversation.

When the seed, packed with matter, befriended the earth and engaged it in private conversation, it purified itself.



It effaced itself entirely in the earth, so that it no longer had color or scent, yellow or red.  
After its self-erasure, the seed's constriction ceased. It opened its wings and moved forward.  
When it reached perfection in its essence, its form departed, revealing its true essence."<sup>134</sup>

I keep repeating this point, but I do so for a reason. The benefits derived from conversation will transport you along the path from one station to the next.

Each time I read the *Masnavi*, I discover yet another beautiful detail, and my admiration for the great poet surges. In these lines Rumi reveals how conversation will pluck you from your outer form and deliver you to your inner essence. It implies the Mi'raj, going back to that ultimate union. What more can we say to emphasize the vital function of conversation? All that's left for us to do is open our ears and listen.

"Open the ear of earlessness."<sup>135</sup>

The saints say that on the Sufi path "the ear" must be developed before all else. If Sufism is the refinement of perception and the transformation of that refinement into perfection, then it follows that we should begin with the ear.

Rumi too subscribes to this method. The priority of this vital quality is embodied in the very first line of the *Masnavi*:

"Listen to the ney, for it tells a tale, and bewails of separations."<sup>136</sup>

What an opener!

But what is this separation? And why does Rumi use it in the plural? There is a wail there, a groan, a lament. What kind of anguish is this? Who is the plaintiff, and of whom? There is something to be told in the essence of that woeful appeal. Deep inside it, apart from lament, rests a secret. Wisdom and clues are given concerning that secret, but by whom? A ney, a reed flute. How it finds its tongue and speaks! "Listen to the ney..." says Rumi. "*Bishnav!*" That is, "Listen!" in the original Persian. Yes, the *Masnavi* begins with the letter "*bā*." Recall the *Basmala*!

We must open our ears and listen, but to whom? To the ney. Who is the ney? The ney, of course, is the Universal Man. In this case it is Rumi himself. Friends of God all talk and behave in a like manner. In order to listen to them – if you can find them – you must partake in their *suhbat*.

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<sup>134</sup> 3:2066-70

<sup>135</sup> 3:4686

<sup>136</sup> 1:1

Let me to take a moment to explain how the *suhbat* goes. It begins with the master and disciple seated facing one another, hands on their knees. You, the disciple, are listening to your mentor in silence. Just listening. Do not interrupt. Even if some idea or question suddenly comes to you mind while your mentor is explaining something to you, keep silent. Do not cut in, even if you begin with a polite, "Pardon me, may I say something?" You will disrupt the flow. That narration comes via a direct line from the source. Any unnecessary interference breaks up that connection.

That connection may come on line again, maybe not, but the aura of the *suhbat* has been lost, and there is nothing you can do about it.

My master once told me, "For forty years I sat before my master as if I were a corpse on a coffin rest." We must do the same. At least while in *suhbat*.

There are of course times and places where you will meet with your mentor in private, and these are different. These are personal conversations.

Let's say that during *suhbat* the master does in fact ask you a question. What should you do then? I will admit, when this happened to me, I was racked with fear and excitement.

Here comes Rumi to the rescue:

"If he orders you to 'speak!', speak gladly, but speak to the point, not at length!"

So if your mentor commands you to speak, make it nice and elegant, but keep it short.

"And if he says, 'Elaborate a bit,' obey the order, but speak timidly!"<sup>137</sup>

Avni Konuk paraphrases this verse thusly: "When in the presence of the sultan, even if you feel embarrassed and timid, thinking, 'Oh please let me get this right,' speak and obey his order! That is to say, act according to the hadith, 'I have been given words that are concise but comprehensive in meaning.'"<sup>138</sup>

Rumi adds:

"I am now doing the same in this delightful work of enchantment for Husamuddin, who is the Radiance of God."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> 4:2073-74

<sup>138</sup> Konuk, VIII, p. 69

<sup>139</sup> 4:2075

Here, Mevlana is referring to Husameddin Chelebi, the disciple who transcribed the *Masnavi* and became his successor. The deep respect and politeness the two showed for one another should be an example to us all.

So are we clear? Don't ask questions. Save them for another time. In general, dervishes observe these conditions. But sometimes situations arise, such as when a guest shows up at the lodge or during a conference when someone among the audience will for whatever reason feel the need to ask a question, whether it is out of a sincere interest, or an impertinent call for attention, or to confirm what the speaker is saying. This happens at every symposium or conference, but such an interruption is unnecessary in a Sufi *suhbat*.

Should the person ask the question with a malicious intent, we leave it unanswered. We pretend we did not hear because if we were to acknowledge and answer it, that person would be unable to handle the answer, let alone accept it.

Moreover, the main point is that not everything can be spoken anywhere, anytime, even if it happens to be true. The master speaks according to the listener's mental maturity, level of conscience, and experience of heart. The murshid must be cautious and deliberate.

At a recent conference a young man took the mic and asked me, "What does *terk-i terk* (relinquishing relinquishment) mean?" Just like that, out of nowhere! This is a pretty advanced Sufi concept. So I said, "First understand what relinquishment is, then I will explain to what it means to relinquish it!"

You won't be able to pick up knowledge that is too heavy for you to handle. Mentors perform a veritable feat of engineering when it comes to instilling knowledge in their listeners.

So listen! You may not understand now, but don't worry. Give it some time. Somewhere down the road your murshid will repeat the same lesson in one form or another, and one of these days the penny will drop. Meanwhile, there will be those who see you associating with us and give you a hard time about it. Or they may grill you when a Sufi matter comes up. In these cases, refrain from speaking so much. The ill-intentioned are numerous, "So you must be keep quiet against them, because silence is the correct answer to give to fools."<sup>140</sup>

Here, a fool is someone who won't understand no matter how hard you try to explain it to them. They are the heirs of Abu Jahl, the Meccan polytheist who refused to listen to Muhammad's message. To the unbelievers of Mecca he was known as Abu al-Hakam, the father of wisdom, but Muhammad bestowed upon him the name Abu Jahl, the father of ignorance.

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<sup>140</sup> 4:3297

The mentioning of Abu Jahl brings to mind the early days of Islam. Let's take a trip back to the Holy Land, to the first years of Uthman's caliphate, when he climbed the pulpit for the first time and addressed the people. The Prophet, in his day, had rarely climbed those steps. Since it was clearly impossible for anyone to even come close to emulating Muhammad, or to speaking as he did, Uthman found himself in a bit of a bind. What could Uthman, the third caliph, do? He climbed the pulpit and remained just so. Silent!

“Afterwards, that caliph, whom even the angels were jealous of, kept silent until it was time for the afternoon prayer.

As he sat there saying nothing, no one dared address him or leave the mosque.

The people were held in awe, for the Light of God filled the mosque inside and out!

Whoever possessed sight saw that light. Even the blind felt the light of that sun.”<sup>141</sup>

Speaking serves to enlighten. Whoever has an ear hears. The murshids also speak by keeping quiet. The goal here is guidance on the path, right? Uthman's majestic gaze alone had been enough to fill the mosque with light. Those who had eyes – in the spiritual sense – saw that light. We will discuss later what it means to be able to see. After all, this is the final destination to which this path will lead you.

What use is there in speaking when you can open people's eyes with a gaze! Mevlana calls this “a conversation without words,” or more literally, “a conversation without tongues and lips.” Somehow the message gets through – so much for words!

When Rumi and his spiritual mentor, Shams Tebrizi, sequestered themselves in a room together, days passed, weeks even, before they resurfaced. Everyone wondered what they were doing in there. They were dying to know what matters were the two sages were working out in this spiritual conversation, in their abode of felicity.

The people peered in through the cracks in the door. The two mystics uttered not a sound. They were just sitting there facing each other! Everyone was astounded. But the pair were indeed conversing with each other. They were enwrapped in a deep exchange, their hearts in communion. Their souls were speaking.

“When the believer becomes a mirror to the believer...” O the gems that have poured out from that conversation!

The dervish ceremony begins with a circumambulation called *Devr-i Veled*. Following the sheikh, the dervishes circle the floor and come face to face with one

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<sup>141</sup> 4:496-99

another in silent acknowledgement. This is that form of communication call conversation without words.

They say that one day Rumi went out to the market with his disciples where he met one of Konya's preeminent teachers. He too was out with his disciples. The two great men greeted one other, and coming eye to eye, stayed that way. Who knows, maybe minutes went by before they broke their stare and parted. As everyone went their own way, Rumi turned to the disciple next to him and said, "What a conversation!"

Speaking is not only about making sounds. Take for example hunting whistles. Some transmit a message that falls outside the range of human perception, yet are audible to dogs. The disciple therefore must transform "listening" into a skill that goes beyond merely hearing sound. Didn't we mention in one of our first conversations how the saints yell out with their hearts, "Come!" but that this call dissipates into the air if the aspirants on the path cannot hear it?

That's how the great masters operate. Hearing is key. If you cannot hear, how do you expect to listen?

Sometimes the Universal Men keep extraordinarily quiet. This silence may surprise you, distress you, or even bore you. Mevlana provides us an explanation:

"Every silent master who bores you is in fact shouting out shrieks of love in that other world.

You say, 'I wonder why he is silent.' He says, 'I wonder where his ear is?'"<sup>142</sup>

You are waiting for him to speak outwardly (*zahir*), but he has been resounding in that inner world (*batin*); you are simply not hearing him. It is not so easy to enter into conversation with a Universal Man. As Rumi says, "He is neither silent nor speaking, but a marvel. There is no word to express his state."<sup>143</sup> Understand that when he is silent, it is possible that his listeners will misunderstand him. A mix-up of this nature can sometimes cause a disturbance. The "Ana 'l-Haqq" story comes to mind about the misunderstanding of one Mansur al-Hallaj. "Ana 'l-Haqq" means "I am the Truth!" In this context, of course, "The Truth" means "God." Al-Hallaj shouted out this phrase in a moment of sublime ecstasy, provoking the authorities to execute him for heresy. If only he had said, "I am *batin*!" instead. But alas he became a martyr. Those who prosecuted him stated, "Mansur uttered 'I am the Truth.' It is the word 'Truth' that is in question. Mansur has said this word in an ecstatic state of self-annihilation, and now the community at large will annihilate *him*. He shall be put to death."

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<sup>142</sup> 6:4625-26

<sup>143</sup> 6:4631

We already expect “composure” from the Universal Men who have set out on the path to be a guide. But we expect composure from the disciples as well! It wasn’t for nothing that the great Haji Bektash Veli said, “You shall be master over your hand, body and tongue!”

Ah, tongue, it is not so easy to restrain you.

“O tongue, you are at once an endless treasure as well as a cureless disease... You are both mankind’s darkness and ingratitude, and the friends’ guide and reassurance.”<sup>144</sup>

Somewhere along this path they will give you the license to use that tongue. Speak sparingly until you reach that point of maturity.

“Do not speak at length, even if your words are true, for the correct words quickly go out of true. You can no longer control them once you open your mouth. Murky utterances soon cloud the flow of pure words. But he who has the purity of divine revelation has the right to speak, as everything he says is pure and right.”<sup>145</sup>

Let’s take a closer look at this last line. Did you make the connection to Mansur al-Hallaj’s exclamation, “*Ana ’l-Haqq*”? Don’t you see? Do not look at him who said it, but at Him who made him say it.

So if at first the words of a holy man come across as a bit odd –even blasphemous– to you or your community, it’s best you give his remarks a good and thorough listen before passing judgment. Listen so that you can hear who really is speaking those words. Condemning someone before you have the chance to hear or listen to the true speaker is not enough to declare somebody an unbeliever. Mansur al-Hallaj’s accusers lacked this insight and so put the saint to death.

The *Masnawi* tells another remarkable story of Bayazid Bastami. Echoing al-Hallaj, Bayazid exclaimed to his disciples one night while rapt in ecstasy, “I am God!”

In the morning, when that state had passed, his disciples came to him and warned him, “You spoke words that were untrue!”

“Really?” said Bastami. “If I say it again, come at me with knives and stab my body! God transcends life and flesh. But me, I am human. If I say such a thing again, I deserve to be killed.”

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<sup>144</sup> 1:1699, 1702

<sup>145</sup> 6:1599-1601

When this great lover of God once again fell under His shadow and entered an ecstatic trance, he shouted, “In my frock there is none other than God! Seek no further on earth or in the heavens.” At hearing this, the disciples drew their daggers and fell upon their master...

“However, on each disciple who stabbed the sheikh there appeared a corresponding wound his body!  
Yet there was no trace of a wound left on Bayazid’s body. The disciples, on the other hand, were drowning in blood...  
The gnostics among them, who knew the sheikh, did not dare to harm him. Their lives were spared.”<sup>146</sup>

The next morning there were still some who remained with the sheikh. “If you were flesh, human flesh,” they said, “your body would have been torn to shreds from those knife wounds.” Had their sheikh not warned them all of this? The others had not listened. They did not understand. And so they destroyed themselves.

At this juncture, Mevlana writes, “When the discourse reached this point, the lips clamped shut. When the pen reached this point, it shattered into pieces.” He adds:

“Close your lips. Though you possess eloquence, do not speak. God best knows the truth.”<sup>147</sup>

Let us too be silent at this stage. When we arrive at this subject during our *Masnavi* readings, my listeners urge the dervish to take one more step forward.

And what does Mevlana say? “When you attain union with the Beloved, consider that delightful moment to be the edge of the roof!”<sup>148</sup>

Is it possible to stop yourself at that moment? You are no longer aware of yourself at that moment. Let’s leave it at that for now.

In those moments, even the mystics do not know which way is up. They know not what they say. In the language of Sufism, they call these momentary outbursts of ebullition *shathiyat*, or theopathic locutions. When we witness this, we must agree to keep quiet, rather than to draw swords, lest we become like those disciples, cutting our master’s throat for fear we will catch what has overcome him. Are you with me so far? Let’s go back to the subject of “listening.”

Listening entails another aspect as well. When you listen to me, do you learn from what you have heard? Or does it go in one ear and out the other? Ask yourself this.

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<sup>146</sup> 4:2128-29, 2132

<sup>147</sup> 4:2144-45

<sup>148</sup> 4:2147

In the meantime, here is another tale: During the Abbasid Caliphate, there was a sultan named Harun ar-Rashid who had a brother, Behlul-ad Dana. He was one of the great saints, but a little off.

One day the people saw him in a cemetery opening graves and taking out the skulls. Using a hammer and rod, he would strike the skulls on the temple. "This one's good," or "This one's worthless," he muttered as he tested all the skulls. The people could not bear it. They complained to the caliph. Harun ar-Rashid took Behlul ad-Dana aside and asked him, "What are you doing, holy man?"

"It's quite simple," said the mystic. "I'm whacking their ears to see whether the rod goes out the other side. If it goes through, it means the person was unable to internalize the wisdom he had heard during his time on this earth. It went in one ear and out the other. But when I ram the rod into this other skull's ear, it does not go in. That means that this fellow didn't hear God's wisdom at all. It didn't even enter his ear in the first place. Then I jammed the rod into this other skull, and it went through one ear, but did not pass through to the other side. So that time, I said, 'Aha!' Wisdom had penetrated this person and it stuck. This is the good one. He's all right. The others were scoundrels. They lived their whole lives in vain."

As crazy as this sounds, there is truth in it. So what about our ears?

The job of the murshid is to explain. These superb friends of God explain and explain without ever growing weary. But are we able to listen to them and then turn around and act on what we have heard? This is that second aspect of listening. Can we bring that knowledge to fruition? Are we bringing it to fruition?

People come to us. They listen and are put at ease. But then later they leave the lodge and resume their old ways. That's not what it's about!

Dervish lodges do serve as therapy centers. A lot of people go to Pilates studios, weight loss centers, spas and the like, but to what end? They aim to get healthy, but more often than not people fail to change their everyday behaviors that prevent them from achieving this goal. For example, people pay good money to sweat out their toxins in a sauna. Yet afterwards, they sit in the lounge area and order a beer. Or they eat fast food for dinner.

We give our dervishes duties, which is a way for them to stay on the path. These are your daily lessons. Don't be afraid to ask for mercy. If you cannot do it, tell us, and let us finish the work for you. Do you really think every one who comes to us can fulfill all of their daily duties? Out of embarrassment, they neglect to tell us. As if we wouldn't find out!

Then later they expect to advance on the path. And since they are not moving ahead, they heap the blame on us. We are not peddling some magic pill. You have to do the work. And that begins with listening.



You can continue listening even when we are not in *suhbat*. Your soul yearns to listen, to hear the message, but with which lovely words will you please it?

Listen to Sufi music. Listen to the lyrics. They always say the same things, but in different ways. The words express the poets' experiences, the stages they have transcended, and the states they have entered.

The Mevlevi way continually emphasizes the importance and power of music as a method of guidance. Of course different orders hold different opinions on this matter.

Rumi has this to say:

“The reason the Sultan listened to the rebab’s<sup>149</sup> sound was, like lovers of God, to bring to mind the voice of the Lord.  
If you listen closely, the noise of the drum and the zurna flute evoke the final trumpet call on the Day of Judgment.  
Hence philosophers have said that we received these melodies from the rotation of the firmament.  
These melodies the people play with the tanbur<sup>150</sup> and sing with their throats are the sounds of the turning heavens.  
But the true believers say that the power of heaven makes every ugly sound beautiful.  
For we all have been parts of Adam, and have heard those melodies in heaven...  
Therefore sama music is the food of lovers; in it you can imagine the ultimate union.  
Through these melodies the fantasies within man gather strength and even take form.  
The fire of love is stoked by melodies, as was the ardor of the man who dropped walnuts into the water.<sup>151</sup>”

As the great Mevlana says, even when there is no conversation, at least there is music. Have a listen. Does it carry you away? Invoke Him, and if the music transports you further, get up for the sama.

You already know that the sama is built upon the basic philosophy of the Mi'raj. When you participate in the dervish ceremony, you are “listening” with your ears as well as your eyes. After all, the root of the word sama is “listening.”

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<sup>149</sup> A rebab is a bowed string instrument.

<sup>150</sup> A tanbur is a long-necked string instrument.

<sup>151</sup> 4:731-36, 742-44

As the dervishes whirl and chant, "Allah! Allah!" you should hear how their destinies turn to the same melody. As the musicians play through the ceremony, you should sense how the reed laments and grieves over separation. And under the dome of the lodge, as you transcend your existence on your journey toward Him, you should feel you have attained the station of Alast and hear the cry, "Am I not your Lord?"

In order to hear, you must be quiet. Put yourself in park, turn off the engine, and take the keys out of the ignition. Deactivate yourself so that you can fully sense what is happening to you. It is at that moment too, at the end of the fourth salaam, that the musicians go silent. The only sound you hear is the flutter emanating from their tunics as they spin. It is this ethereal rustle that makes your hair stand on end. It induces in you a feeling that you have come from a long, narrow path and are now landing on the ground in calm weather via some celestial parachute.

You will never experience this, though, if throughout the ceremony you concentrate on anything but God. You must eschew all worldly things. We must be only with God in worship. Everything else must be pushed aside. You must pray as though God sees you, so to speak, to be able to attain that "beneficence."

It is therefore said, "So when the Qur'an is recited, then listen to it and pay attention that you may receive mercy."<sup>152</sup>

The mystics are the "Speaking Qur'an," just as Ali called himself at the Battle of Siffin. They speak the Qur'an, that is, they make it speak. The Qur'an speaks through them.

Rumi says this: "As long as I am alive, I will be a servant of the Qur'an. I am the earth beneath the feet of Muhammad, the Chosen One. If anyone quotes from me anything but this I will take issue with him and with those words of his."<sup>153</sup>

In this enough for now? Shall we call it a day?

"Muhammad emerged from conversation / Without Muhammad, what is conversation?" as the saying goes.

Just one more thing: Not every form of discourse can be called a conversation. You hear people talk in public on their cell phones or even in person. They divulge all kinds of information at the top of their lungs. But what are they really saying? The worst part is that they call this idle chitchat and gossip a conversation. It depresses me so! Especially since we dervishes often use this term interchangeably with *suhbat*, that spiritual communion between mentor and disciple. In any case, let's stop talking.

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<sup>152</sup> The Qur'an, Al-A'raf 7:204

<sup>153</sup> Rumi's Quatrain No. 1173

If the discourse is based on God's love, the love of the Prophet, and the longing of the mystics, we can never get our fill of listening. But then again, I don't want to overburden you.

As you part, may this hymn of supplication accompany you. It is the one associated with the sama ceremony that begins, "Listen to my words, I will speak from a different world." Let's recite it together:

*"O Sufi! Our communion is salve for your soul.  
Sup a sip of our elixir and see a cure for your ills.  
The sama is the pre-eternal covenant we made with Him.  
It is bliss, food for the spirit and for the soul medicine."*

## 7 INVOKE!

*“Their invocation makes the heart tremble.  
Their actions are the Qibla for our actions.”<sup>154</sup>*

The subject of today’s conversation is “*dhikr*.” To perform *dhikr* means to invoke, to remember, to mention or to allude to God.

The Qur’an says, “Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him.”<sup>155</sup>

“And there is not a thing except that it exalts [ Allah ] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting.”<sup>156</sup>

All things remember God, and exalt Him, though we may be unaware of it. It is for this reason that we delved into the importance of the ear and the necessity of listening in our previous conversation. We had also mentioned that those who cannot hear are the descendants of Abu Jahl.

Here is a story that illustrates this: One day Abu Jahl picked up some gravel and, concealing it in his fist, asked Muhammad, “What is in my hand? Quick, tell me.” What gall had he to question the Prophet!

“You give us the news from the heavens,” he continued. “If you are indeed a prophet tell me what I have in my fist!”

By the presence of God, Muhammad answered him, “Would you like me to tell you what you have, or shall I have the contents of your hand prove to you that I am real?”

Abu Jahl replied, “The second is more extraordinary.”

Muhammad said, “God is capable of that.”

Just then the gravel in Abu Jahl’s hand began to recite the *Shahada*: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

The accursed Abu Jahl threw the stones on the ground in disgust when he heard these words. “You are an exceptional sorcerer!” he shouted. “The king of them all!”

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<sup>154</sup> 4:1143

<sup>155</sup> The Qur’an, Al-Hashr 59:24

<sup>156</sup> The Qur’an, Al-Isra 17:44

Rumi concludes this tale of Abu Jahl thusly: “May his head remain covered in dirt, that blind wretch. His eyes, like those of Satan, could only see dust.”<sup>157</sup>

Returning to the Qur’anic verses above, all of creation, from the angels in the sky to the fish in the sea, invokes God in its own particular language. Everything glorifies Him in a different way for a different intent, but the authority they reach out to is the same. This lesson must be learned. The universe, including everything in it that we call inanimate – rocks, dust, trees – attest to God’s greatness and oneness, and to Muhammad being the servant and messenger of that Great Being.

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Now let me tell you the story of the Moaning Pillar: The mosque that Muhammad built in Medina, the Masjid an-Nabawi, was first constructed without a pulpit. While he gave his sermons, Muhammad would lean up against a date palm, known as the pillar of *Hannane*. The Prophet’s companions who stood in the back would complain, “Oh Messenger, it is very difficult to see your saintly face.” So they built for him a pulpit. However, the pillar became upset by this new arrangement. It was hurt and began to moan.

During prayer meetings, the believers kept hearing the pillar as it wept passionately. The audible moaning took Muhammad’s companions by surprise. Muhammad then asked, “O pillar! What is the matter?” The pillar responded, “I was your support, but now the pulpit has become your place.” Acknowledging this touching appeal, Muhammad replied, “O tree! If you wish, become the most distinguished date palm of all so that the whole world will want to gather fruit from you. Or shall God turn you into a beautiful cypress, so that you will remain ever green in eternity?”

The pillar said, “I would like to be made everlasting,” and so He granted the tree eternal paradise.

Mevlana hereby admonishes us: “Listen, o careless one. Do not be lower than a piece of wood!”<sup>158</sup>

“Know that God relieves every beloved servant of the duties of the temporal world once He calls them back to Him.  
Whoever relies on God for sustenance finds his earnings in that everlasting world.”<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, O wayfarer, do not disparage the ground you step on by calling it dust. If you consider for a moment that everything in the world – including inanimate

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<sup>157</sup> 1:2154-60. The last verse, which does not appear in all English versions of the *Masnavi*, refers to when Satan could not see Adam as anything more than mere dust.

<sup>158</sup> 1:2118

<sup>159</sup> 1:2120-21

objects – is in a state of invocation, how can you dare pollute the environment? Sufis are trueborn environmentalists!

Once you know this, you will no longer be able to even pluck a flower. One day, the great saint Sümbül Sinan asked his disciples to pick some flowers in order to liven up the lodge. They all scrambled to please their master, returning with vibrant bouquets of colorful, sweet-smelling flowers. Then they looked and saw that one among them, Musa Muslihuddin (1463-1551), held in his hand a drooping, withered hyacinth (*sümbül* in Turkish)! Everyone chided him, saying, “Do you think this dead hyacinth is worthy of our master?”

“Did you find it?” Sümbül Sinan asked his disciple, who would later become the great saint known as Merkez Effendi.

Musa Muslihuddin’s answer drives the point home: “Master, of course my heart wanted to bring you something better. The fields and meadows were teeming with beautiful flowers. Yet whenever I approached a flower to snatch it from its stem or uproot it from the earth, I looked, and each one was in a state of glorification, an act of remembrance. I could not bring myself to kill it. Looking around I saw only this. It had already died. So I brought it back. Please accept my apologies.”

Apologies? Sümbül Sinan took Merkez Effendi and kissed on the forehead, impressed by his disciple’s sensitivity. Mevlana says, “Man denies the glorification uttered by inanimate objects, but those inanimate objects are in fact masters at worship.”<sup>160</sup>

We must have a trained heart to hear this glorification. Hence Mevlana says, “If I am unaware of the glorification uttered by those who speak, how then could my heart detect the glorification performed by those that do not?”<sup>161</sup>

So succinct does Rumi express every Sufi term that it makes a person’s heart begin to pulse to a different beat. I don’t know if I should call it the rhythm of love or the rhythm of the heavens. But in any case, let’ hear from Rumi again, this time revisiting the topic of dust:

“The dust that breathes life into your dust is aware of both the apparent as well as the hidden.”<sup>162</sup>

Dust that brings dust to life? But who is this dust? Let me give you a clue. Do you know why Muhammad – that City of Knowledge – called Ali “Abu Turab” (father of the dust)? Our bodies are molded from clay – dust and water. In order to usher springtide into our bodies, we need three things: unseen knowledge, masters of this

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<sup>160</sup> 3:1497

<sup>161</sup> 3:1500

<sup>162</sup> 3:1011

knowledge, and a door to the path. Ali is that door. The live-giving dust, then, is the Universal Man.

You will now hear in the verses below how those masters breathe life into their disciples:

“On this side they are lifeless. On that side they are alive. Here they are silent, there they talk.”<sup>163</sup>

Shall I cite the subsequent lines?

“The mountains echo the voice of David, iron becomes like wax in his hand.  
The wind bears Solomon upon his throne, the sea converses with Moses.  
The moon splits in two at the behest of Muhammad, the fire becomes a rose garden for Abraham.  
The ground swallows Korah like a snake, the Moaning Pillar becomes conscience and sentient.  
The stone greets the Prophet Muhammad, the mountain sends news to John the Baptist.  
They say, ‘We can see and hear. To you, the uninitiated, we appear inanimate, but in fact we are quite aware.’  
...You may say, ‘The intent behind glorification is not visible glorification. After all, is sight the same as blindness?’  
But in fact, if you are aware of their glorification, and consider its significance, then you are glorifying God.  
For this contemplation that reminds you to glorify God is indeed the same glorification they desire.”<sup>164</sup>

The last two verses hold the key. Based on this wisdom, the newly inducted wayfarer receives homework lessons immediately following his initiation ceremony. This is the most significant gift in the “dervish’s dowry.” Invocations and glorification. The moment you cross the threshold and change into the dervish mantle, they hand you a *tasbihat*, your handbook of recitations.

Included in the *tasbihat* are Qur’anic verses, hadith, prayers of supplication and the Beautiful Names of God. You can look at it as a “prayer review,” one in which the keepers of the path (and you too once your sheikh deems you ready) edit, regulate, and assess.

As for now, if they hand you this prayer review, you accept it without questioning its number and volume. Everything has a reason, which you will come to understand later. Some “intelligent” people want an immediate scientific explanation for

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<sup>163</sup> 3:1012

<sup>164</sup> 3:1014-19, 1024-26

invocation. Well, there is one, and there isn't. On this path, the point is to leave form aside and move towards meaning. In fact, this is the first lesson!

*Dhikrullah*, the invocation of God, is a broad topic. Invocation exists on both an individual level, performed alone, as well as on a collective level, where it is carried out en masse. It can be done in silence, or out loud. The style of invocation varies from order to order according to taste. However, the preparations that must be done before performing invocations, the customs during invocation, and the procedures following invocation are of upmost importance. You will learn all of this in detail once you are initiated. The masters are highly meticulous on this matter. If there are rules of the road, then this "road" too has its own unique traffic laws.

People do enjoy performing dhikr. At first, they dread stepping into the circle, but after a while they become exuberant. There was one person who came who never wanted to leave the lodge again. He brought in all his friends. "If only you would do this more often..." he would recommend. No wonder Yunus Emre writes, "I fell in love with the name of God, the Great / I cannot get enough of its sweet taste." It goes on:

*"Don't you know poor Yunus's state?  
He invokes the Beloved night and day.  
If only I could see God's radiant face.  
I need Him whom this world cannot compensate.  
No base thrills, my heart desires only to commemorate."*

In short, there is a special charm in invocation, namely "intimacy." From what I have explained so far, you must have guessed that dhikr brings a person closer to God. Hence, this hadith: "God Almighty says, 'I am closer to my servant than his supposition of which he keeps of me. And when my servant invokes me, I am with him. If he invokes me privately in his heart, I invoke him likewise in me. If he invokes me in company, I mention him in better company. If he draws a foot closer to me, I draw a yard closer to him. If he draws a yard closer to me, I draw a fathom closer to him. If he comes walking towards me, I go running towards him.'" <sup>165</sup>

The whole of this hadith contains many more great tidings, which we will get into as we move forward.

God says in other hadiths that he loves His servants who invoke Him, that he will turn their dhikr circle into a Garden of Eden, and bring peace upon them. He also promises to proudly present his servants to the angels and command the universe to submit to their demands.

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<sup>165</sup> Bukhari



Konuk, one of the *Masnavi*'s most influential commentators, writes, "God is the friend of anyone who invokes him, and the one who is a friend is seen, and not lost. Therefore, the invoker's witness is God Almighty."<sup>166</sup>

Mevlana later reiterates this point: "Hence the disciple fortunate enough to bring his burden to a blessed saint becomes a friend of God."<sup>167</sup> This verse refers to the hadith, "He who wishes to sit with God should sit with the people who invoke God. I am the friend of those who invoke me." Now consider in this context Mevlana's verse: "When the soul has been united with God, to invoke God is to invoke the soul, and to invoke the soul is to invoke God."<sup>168</sup>

Konuk interprets this line thusly: "In other words, when the soul is united with God, the nominal separation disappears and the soul that invoked becomes one with the Beloved, who has been invoked. Hence, the invocation of one is the invocation of the other and vice versa."<sup>169</sup> And so, in another verse, Rumi says:

"Before I had known the veil existed and had not yet pulled it back, I used to think that I was an invoker of You and a rumble to You in the material world. Then the dawn broke, and I had stayed up all night seeing with certainty who You are, the one who is remembered and who remembers."

Yet, I must highlight a crucial point of this conversation on dhikr. We must not think of invocation as the silent or audible repetition of the names of Allah. Dhikr is a more comprehensive "remembrance." It is you remembering God on every occasion.

In any case, God has set the standards: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], 'Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire.'"<sup>170</sup>

The idea is to invoke your Creator at all times with every ounce of your body. In Sufism, they call this "*dhikr-i daim*" (perpetual dhikr). This is what Niyaz al-Misri implies in his poem, "The soul once again becomes a nightingale," when he writes,

*"I entered into sustained invocation  
My limbs have become tongues."*

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<sup>166</sup> Konuk, VII, p. 140, commentary on *Masnavi* verse 4:440.

<sup>167</sup> 6:1302

<sup>168</sup> 6:4040

<sup>169</sup> Konuk XIII, p. 51

<sup>170</sup> The Qur'an, Ali 'Imran 3:190-91

In this conversation we will not dwell on the litanies of the Mevlevi order, as it is quite extensive. If something relevant comes up, we can refer to the collection of litanies published by M. Celaleddin Bakır and Hüseyin Top. We will, however, talk about the general edicts regarding dhikr that Rumi emphasizes in the *Masnavi*.

Generally speaking, what is the benefit of dhikr?

“Do like the angel and make the glorification of God your food, so that like the angels you may be delivered from affliction.”<sup>171</sup>

Here is Konuk’s interpretation of this verse:

“O wayfarer, turn away from corporeality and towards spirituality! Sustain your spirit with God’s glorification, so that you will enter a state of grace like the angels, and so you may be spared, like the angels, from the corporeal body’s need to eat and drink, and from such afflictions as defecation and myriad lusts.”<sup>172</sup>

What a superfood dhikr is! What restorative properties there are in mouthful of dhikr! Dhikr on the breath benefits both you and those who breathe the air around you.

“This breath, day and night, little by little, sets our souls free from the dungeon of this world. These invocations and prayers of supplication ascend to God. Good practices exalt their owners.”<sup>173</sup>

“The reputation of one who wishes to be of good habit,” says Rumi, “depends on his invocations to God.” Dhikr cleanses you and those around you, like the water from the Well of Zamzam in Mecca or from the Pool of Kawthar in heaven.

“The water is God’s remembrance, while at this moment the bee is the remembrance of this woman or that man. Hold your breath in the water of dhikr, enduring it until you drown the last of your misgivings. After that, you will have completely assumed the temperament of that pure water, from head to toe. And that nasty bee shall flee from the water and steer clear of you. Then if you wish, leave the water, as you have deep within you the disposition of that water.

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<sup>171</sup> 5:298

<sup>172</sup> Konuk IX, p. 111

<sup>173</sup> 1:881-82

All those people then who have passed from this world have not perished, but have been absorbed in God's divine attributes. Just as the stars disappear in the light of the sun, they are hidden within the attributes of God. If you demand a citation from the Qur'an, here it is: 'And indeed, all of them will yet be brought present before Us.' How can those who are 'brought present before Us' be lost? Know well the everlasting life of spirits."<sup>174</sup>

In the *Masnavi*, Rumi considers "*dua*" to be a kind of dhikr. A dua is a prayer of supplication, a way of asking God for something by invoking His name. Dua is essential, but performing it requires a certain amount of decorum. Improper or indecent duas may border on blasphemy. We must be careful to avoid blasphemy, as it will turn around and come back to haunt us. Blasphemy is at the discretion of God. You must reach a certain level before you can mediate blasphemy.

Let's take a minute to talk about dua. Every Muslim performs these prayers of supplication. It comes as second nature to us. People of other faiths do the same. Sometimes these prayers are for serious matters, such as an ill relative. Sometimes they are for trivial matters, like passing an exam. It comes so naturally that even a thief will pray to God before he commits a robbery: "Please God, let me get away with this..."

We oftentimes see God's uninformed servants turn this supplication into a veritable shopping list. It's embarrassing. This is not a supermarket! While you can, of course, ask God for anything, you must observe a certain level of propriety when doing it.

Rumi considers a dua to be a petition – a letter – written to God. If that letter is fit for a king, send it off. Otherwise...

"If it is unworthy, rip it up! Make good on it by writing another letter."<sup>175</sup>

If the letter comes from your nafs, tear it up and throw it away. But if it comes from your soul, send it. This is not child's play. We must know how to ask God for His help. First things first, sincerity.

We have already said as much, but let's not forget that if a dua comes from the heart, do not disapprove of it, and don't condemn God's sincere servants who perform that dua.

This is what we mean: Moses saw a shepherd on the road. He was praying, "O Lord, O God! Let me serve you. Let me stitch your sandals and comb your hair. Let me wash your clothes and prepare your milk. Let me kiss your hand, rub your feet, and

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<sup>174</sup> 4:437-45

<sup>175</sup> 4:1566

make your bed. Let my sheep be sacrificed for you..." Moses rebuked the shepherd, saying, "God is absolved of everything you have said. Prevent your tongue from saying such things."

"O Moses," cried the shepherd. "Bind my mouth." Suddenly the shepherd regretted all the words he had said to God. He wept and moaned and tore his clothes. Heartbroken, he marched off into the desert. Just then, a revelation came to Moses. "You have separated My servant from Me. Why did you alienate when you are expected to unite?" God continued, "Don't think that I look at the tongue and the words. I look at the heart and the spiritual state. If there is reverence in the heart, I look at that, and also if there is not. Know this, O Moses! Those who are civilized are one thing. Those who are hurting or who are of simple temperament are another."

God loves those whose hearts are broken; He stands with them. Just like the Wounded Gazelle Club I keep talking about. God's heart is the friend of the burned lover. In the desert and the wasteland, God is a refuge:

"Lovers are burning at every breath. Tax and tithe are not imposed on a ruined village.  
Even if he the lover's words are wrong, do not fault him. If the martyr is bathed in blood, do not wash him."<sup>176</sup>

Lovers are the martyrs of God.

"Water never trumps the blood of martyrs. A hundred correct words spoken by others go no further than these improper words uttered by him.  
...The religion of love is different from all other religions. For lovers, the only religion and sect is God."<sup>177</sup>

This time Moses was in the wrong. He went after the shepherd and caught up to him. "Good news," he said. "God has given permission. Decorum and proper words are not necessary for you. Say whatever your heart desires."

The shepherd bowed his head in respect and said:

"O Moses, I have passed beyond those words. I am now doused in the blood of my soul.  
I have travelled for a hundred thousand years, venturing beyond the Lote Tree of heaven.  
Your whip roused my horse, and we bounded beyond the sky.  
You sent me from the material world into the eternal world. Blessings upon your hand and arm!"<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> 2:1765-66

<sup>177</sup> 2:1767, 1770

<sup>178</sup> 2:1787-90

Moses's words spurred the shepherd to go on and experience the Mi'raj. While we are talking about Moses, here is another conversation he had with God:

"God said, 'O Moses, call unto Me for protection with a sinless mouth.'  
Moses said, 'I have no such mouth.' God replied, 'Then reach Me through the mouths of others.'"<sup>179</sup>

So you can go about dua in one of two ways. The first is to keep your own mouth pure, and thus seek God's help on your own. But if this is not possible, you can get a sinless believer to pray on your behalf. This is also acceptable. The bottom line is that we need a dua from someone whose mouth is remembered by God.

There is a certain way to perform dua. However the saints and holy men, especially the Prophet Muhammad, lifted their hands to God and supplicated is how we do it. In our state of awareness, we dervishes take the Prophet as our model, and we follow his tradition to a T.

Here is another story. Keep in mind that every parable contains a lesson.

One of the Prophet's companions had fallen ill. The poor man grew weaker and weaker until he became thin and frail. Muhammad went to ask after the man's condition. Once in his presence he tried to console the sick man. Through his connection the Unseen world, the Prophet explains right away why the companion has digressed into this state. "It seems you have performed dua, but the poison of ignorance has caused you to fall ill. Do you remember how you prayed?"

"I fell into great despair thinking about the day of reckoning," said the ill companion. "I became terrified. So I said, 'God, let me suffer the pain of my punishment in the afterlife while I am here on earth so that I may be completely comfortable in the everlasting world.'" It was at that moment the man had become sick. The Prophet warned the ailing man, "Do not ever pray like that again."

The frail man became remorseful. He said, "If this prayer has caused Your wrath, O Lord, do teach us how to pray." Muhammad, the Beloved of God, then said to the man, "Begin your prayer of supplication like this: 'O Lord! Bestow upon us goodness in this world, as well as in the next. Make our path be gardens and vineyards. Make our final destination be close to You.'"<sup>180</sup>

This is but a brief summary of the story, but you can read the full story in the *Masnavi* if you want the details.

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<sup>179</sup> 3:180-81

<sup>180</sup> 2:2141-55, 2:2456-553

There are many who pray to God, yet reap no results and therefore give up on prayer altogether. Some even go so far as to curse God. But there is a special “allotment” reserved for those who do that.

In another parable from the *Masnavi*, there was a man who cried out to God every night. “O Lord!” he beseeched. Satan then came along to tempt him, filling his heart with apprehension. “He is not answering you. When will you stop praying?” said the devil.

The man became heartbroken. He took Satan’s words to heart and fell asleep. In his dream he saw Khidr among the verdure.

“Hasten and invoke God’s name,” said Khidr. “Why have you given up on praying?”

“The answer, ‘Here I am,’ never came,” said the man. I am afraid of being refused at the door.”

Khidr replied:

“God has said, ‘Your invocation, “O Lord,” is my reply, “Here I am.” The moment you invoke my name, I accept your invocation and engage it. Your engagement in dhikr is My messenger. Your imploring and beseeching to find relief is a sign that I am pulling you towards Me. Your fear and love allows you to reach us. Behind every “O Lord” of yours is a “Here I am” of mine.’”<sup>181</sup>

So you understand we must be persistent in praying. Wait and see what gifts He will grant you. There is evil where you see good, and good where you see evil. The masters are privy to this. Every work has a hidden inner meaning. Try to understand this. There are some peculiar saints who never pray or ask God for anything. “Why?” you may ask. Rumi will tell you why:

“There is another class of saints whose mouths are closed to invocation. They who possess grace have consented to God’s discretion and so for them to avert fate is unlawful.”<sup>182</sup>

In short, they abstain from “touching *gayretullah*,” that is, they steer clear of any action that may incite God to interfere. So for them, there is no protection. In Sufi literature they call this “*iskat-ı tedbir*,” the forfeiture of precaution. But one must first reach that station. Even Job was ordered to perform dua. Who are we to stop performing dua? A trust in God is a must. For us humble servants, trusting God and imploring his help is a necessity.

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<sup>181</sup> 3:188-97

<sup>182</sup> 3:1880-81

Now is a good time to introduce Sheikh Daquqi, whose tale in the *Masnavi* is long.

Daquqi was a noble saint capable of prophesy. In the words of Rumi, “His eyes were open, he saw the Lord.” Despite this, his heart kept wanting to seek the company of other friends of God. To this end, he searched high and low. Daquqi spent his life on the path, experiencing different manifestations of God at every stage. In one of his visions, he saw seven candles on the shore. Those seven candles became one candle, which then turned into seven green trees.

Unfortunately we do not have the time to discuss at length all the symbolism here, so I will quickly jump ahead to the part that immediately concerns us, the seven trees. Those trees were hidden from the eyes of the people. Then, just like the candle, those seven trees became one tree. That one tree then turned into seven men, Daquqi’s fellow holy men. Through a sign from above, Daquqi went before them to become their imam. While Daquqi was in the middle of leading the ritual prayers, he heard cries aboard a ship that was on the verge of sinking. He interceded on the sailors’ behalf with a dua.

“The more the tears came flowing from his eyes, the higher his prayers climbed up to the heavens.  
Because that unconscious invocation is different. That invocation is not from him, but from God.  
Now as the man becomes effaced, the one making that invocation is God, so both the dua and the acceptance come from Him.”<sup>183</sup>

Daquqi saved the sailors, but as he performed the intercession, the company suddenly disappeared from his view. Daquqi was amazed that the seven saints had stepped behind the veil of the Unseen. Why did they abandon him? Daquqi had angered them, because, according to those saints, he had interfered with matters that did not concern him, and with the work of the Almighty. Fate, *gayretullah* and dua – this story contains many nuances.

Mevlana works this story from every angle, but does so without overexposing the issues. He leaves us something to think about.

Is this enough for now? Shall we leave it at that, this topic of invocation, of dhikr? I can see that you are not yet ready to go. Very well. Know that what we accomplished through this conversation is also dhikr. Let me tell you a secret. Do want to be a good person? Take for example two people who run into each other on the street. What do they say to one another? “How are you?” The other may respond, “I’m good.” Every time I say or hear these words, I ask myself whether I am really “good.” Am I a good person? More importantly, does God consider me “good”? I told my son the same thing, and he replied, “Dad, do you think I’m a good person?” There is a very basic trick for this. It is amazingly simple.

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<sup>183</sup> 3:2218-20

I said to him, "Think about how many times a day someone says to you, 'God bless you!' If no one is saying this to you, think about it twice!" The phrase, "God bless you" is in fact a dua. Try to hear it often. Be someone who invokes God, of course, but we must also be someone who "receives" duas. This is something along the lines of "look not at the one saying it, but at whom makes him say it."

How happy you shall be if you receive a dua from someone adept in dhikr, that is, from a sheikh or mentor. Falling short of that, any friend of God works as well, which brings us to the tale of the Egyptian's dua.

An accursed Egyptian came in dire thirst to the house of an Israelite. He told the Israelite of his problem. "The Nile water," he said, "flows pure for the Children of Israel. However, for us, the Egyptians, it has become like blood. We are dying of thirst. We are finished. Since the water is pure for you, have a heart and do a friend a good turn by filling your cup so that I may drink of it."<sup>184</sup>

The Egyptian man then asked another Israelite for a dua. "Pray for me, because my soul is black, and I do not have a mouth suitable for prayer."

They say a person boosted by dua becomes better, and that the devil inside him morphs into an angel. And so the Israelite prostrated and implored God:

"Your servant shall lift his hand to no one other than You. Both the prayer and its acceptance are from you.  
You give the desire to pray, as well as the reward for praying."<sup>185</sup>

While the Israelite prayed, a loud cry resounded from deep within the Egyptian's heart. The lock on his heart really was pried open. When he reached this state of ecstasy, he turned to the Israelite and said:

"Praise be to God! The prosperity of your friendship has saved me at last. O honorable friend, your company was an elixir for me. May you never leave the house of my heart!"<sup>186</sup>

The two verses I just quoted bear much significance in regards to what we have been talking about today. It is indeed wonderful to receive a dua from a Universal Man, and of course, in this story the Universal Man appears in the guise of the Israelite. You have no idea how much Universal Men intervene on behalf of their disciples, invoking them, mentioning their names to God, and giving thought to their wellbeing.

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<sup>184</sup> 4:3421-36

<sup>185</sup> 4:3499-3500

<sup>186</sup> 4:3507-08



They establish a rapport with you and other disciples like you, releasing the fire of love in your soul and opening your silent heart. As Rumi says, "Dhikr brings movement to thought. Make dhikr the sun to this frozen thought."<sup>187</sup>

Konuk interprets this verse to mean, "Invoking God brings thoughts into action. Make that invocation be the sun to those frozen, dormant thoughts so that, by mentioning *Al-Jami'*, God the Gatherer, those carnal desires and anxious suspicions will vanish from your heart, thawing that icebound thought."<sup>188</sup>

Of course, we must never forget that it is God who acts. He also prompts others to act. God is responsible for everything; therefore do not sever your communication with Him.

God says, "And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind."<sup>189</sup>

This verse also brings up the issue of "seeing" as opposed to "blindness." This is a crucial point that we will also talk about, but at another time. First we must talk about drinking and intoxication.

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<sup>187</sup> 6:1476

<sup>188</sup> Konuk, XI, p. 485

<sup>189</sup> The Qur'an, Taha 20:124

## 8 IMBIBE!

*When he becomes drunk on the wine of divine love, he attains  
perfection in discernment and is delivered from man.<sup>190</sup>*

Every week in Istanbul the Ottoman military marching band gives a concert at the Military Museum. I have loved going ever since I was young. The last time I went they played several “civilian” pieces. One of these was a song called “*Gül Yüzlülerin Şevkine Gel*” (partake in the joy of these rosy faces) written by an eighteenth-century Turkish composer named Tab-i Mustafa Effendi. I loved the performance so much that I went out and bought the album.

*“Partake in the joy of these rosy faces, let’s drink wine  
Let’s get drunk with the friend, now is the time  
It is the carafe who speaks to the glass, but what does it say?”*

What does it say, o wayfarer? It says, “Imbibe!” does it not? In this conversation we will take a moment to discuss what it means to imbibe, to drink of that wine. We will also talk about inebriation. “What are you talking about?” you may be asking, “What does drunkenness have to do with Sufism?”

Everything. We can’t even talk about Sufism without mentioning it. The term “*sukr*” occupies a critical place in the Sufi lexicon. *Sukr* refers to a state of intoxication, or ecstasy.

Upon initiation, we make the wayfarer perform dhikr. We went over this in our previous conversation. Invoking God enraptures people. The murshids expect this to happen, and, as a necessary spiritual state, encourage the disciples to experience this ecstasy. Does this surprise you? As for me, I don’t find it the least bit strange. It is only natural. But there are many ill-intentioned detractors out there who misinterpret the Sufi terminology and use it to paint an unsavory picture of Sufism. They take our praise of *sukr*, and our terms like wine, tavern, and goblet, out of context, and that we hold alcohol in high esteem and condone drinking. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We have encountered these sorts of misperceptions and hostilities throughout our entire history. Mevlana too was well aware of this issue of “inebriation,” as evidenced in this tale about some tavern patrons who fell upon a murid and berated him. “Come on, doesn’t your master drink?” they jeered. “We hear he does!” The taunts seared the heart of the initiate, who felt completely out of place among the bar crowd. He arrived back at the lodge, confused and uncertain. As soon as he

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<sup>190</sup> 6:2768

stepped through the door, what did the poor disciple see? His master with a full glass in his hand! "O sheikh! You have deceived me. You have become sullied with sin. Yet, was it not you who told us that Satan piddles in the wine glass?"

The sheikh retained his composure. He answered, "They have filled my goblet so full that not even a single rue seed could fit." The poor disciple did not understand. He still failed to comprehend that the goblet is the sheikh's corporeal body, and within that body is the wine of God's love. And so Rumi says, "O fool," the sheikh's body "is full to the brim with the light of God. The goblet of flesh has broken, becoming the Absolute Light!"<sup>191</sup>

The sheikh then reproached his disciple, addressing that denier who had fallen for the erroneous words of the tavern patrons:

"O denier, come have a look!"

The content of the goblet was but pure honey sharbat. The doubtful man grew red with shame. The sheikh did not stop here. He said to the pupil, "I am offended. Now go to that tavern where they gossip about me and bring me back a bottle of wine."

What else could the disciple do? He raced down to the tavern. He tasted the contents of every earthen wine vessel, but none contained wine. He then sought out other taverns and wine cellars, but did not find wine in any of them either. All the vessels were full of honey. Surprised and confused, he said, "Hey, you crooks! What's going on here? I can't find wine in any of these vessels!"

When all the drunkards in the bar saw that the wine had turned to honey, they came running to the dervish lodge, beating their heads with their fists.

"O wise sheikh, you came to the tavern, and by your coming, all the wines have become honey! You have transformed the wine from foulness, now purify our souls from defilement!"<sup>192</sup>

The sheikh then told them about the pure wine of heaven. As you can see from the story, Sufism is intertwined with such symbols. Those who do not know this language of metaphor cannot see things as they are.

During the reign of Sultan Murad IV (1623-40), there lived in Istanbul's Balat neighborhood a friend of God. He was one of those eccentric saints whom the people do not know what to make of. This holy man continually bought liquor from the shop and invited all the neighborhood prostitutes over to his house. His pious wife too complained of this behavior. The residents of the neighborhood looked at the

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<sup>191</sup> 2:3410

<sup>192</sup> 2:33421-22

mystic and condemned him for all the booze he bought. This condemnation, in fact, bordered on harassment, but the saint paid them no mind.

His pious wife cried, "If you carry on like this, we will not be able to find a man in this neighborhood to hold a funeral for you when the time comes."

The friend of God tried to ease his wife's concerns. "Don't worry," he said, "that's what the sultan and the grand vizier are for."

And just like that, the holy man gave up the ghost and joined God. On the surface, his wife was right. There was no one who would carry his coffin. The imam was nowhere to be found and all the residents had slammed their doors shut. The man lay where he died. Heaving sobs emanated from the woman's house.

Sultan Murad IV was known to disguise himself as a civilian and wander about his kingdom incognito. That day, through the grace of God, the sultan and his grand vizier happened to pass by her home. He heard her cries of distress and ran into the house.

There the sultan learned what had happened. "Our dear man would buy booze and bring it home," she began. "He would then pour it down the drain so that it would not bring harm to anyone. He would round up all the prostitutes to give them advice and pray for them. He prayed that they would no longer resort to this path of perdition. No one in the neighborhood understood this. Now, his time to be buried has come and not a soul is around."

"Consider it done," said the sultan in disguise, and with that he and his grand vizier began to undress the man to give him his last rights.

"Who are you?" asked the woman.

"I am Sultan Murad, and this is my grand vizier!"

The holy man's wife became dizzy. "It's a miracle! He spoke of this!"

When the people saw the great personage of the sultan carrying the "drunkard's" body to the mosque, they finally understood their folly. They filled the courtyard and in a great crowd carried the holy man's coffin.

The earthly sultan, representing the heavenly one, sees past the holy man's outward form and appreciates his essence. Do not succumb to appearances! In the Sufi context, this age-old axiom takes on a deeper meaning. And it is this moral that forms the basis of *Layla and Majnun*, a classic Persian love poem. Mevlana retells a portion of this tale: Majnun's relatives say to him, "The beauty of Layla is not so great. Let's find you a bride much fairer than she."

Majnun replied, "The outward form is a jug, but the beauty is the wine contained within. From her form, God offers me wine. But He has given you vinegar from her jug, lest you fall in love with her carnal form. Out of the same jug the hand of God Almighty pours everyone out of the same jug either poison or honey. You see the jug, but the wine does not show itself to the unfit eye. Spiritual pleasure has eyes only for its true love. It does not reveal itself to the unworthy. That wine is like a woman who does not look at anyone but her husband, and that jug is like the veil... The wine belongs to the Unseen world, and the jug to this one. The jug is visible, the wine is not."<sup>193</sup>

Do not be angry with those who drink. Try instead to relieve them of this need. First let's learn why they drink. If they drink out of suffering, find a remedy for their pain. If they drink for pleasure, let's show them the true meaning of intoxication so they will no longer have a use for alcohol.

Another holy man was wandering around the marketplace with his disciples when they passed by a tavern. One of the disciples looked at the drunkards with disgust and said to his sheikh, "O master, if only you would curse them."

First the sheikh looked at his disciple. Then he turned his head to the tavern patrons. "O saints," he said, "May God grant you this much pleasure in the afterlife!"

At once they all stood up from their bar stools and threw their wine glasses to the ground, shattering them to pieces. They took the sheikh's hand and said, "Forgive us, never again shall we drink!" They left the tavern, never to return.

The "hex" of a saint can do that. We will get into this topic later, but for now let's stick to the drinking issue and see what flows from my heart. Pay close attention.

Yes, alcohol is bad. What do we want with that kind of wine? What use to us is that nominal inebriation, temporal and false as it is?

Of all the highs in this life – real or false – which to venerate? Mankind is always going astray, getting drunk on ego, wealth, power, and social standing. Yet we dervishes get drunk too. Our intoxicant, however, is of a different kind. We lose ourselves in the ney, that reed flute which sings of separations. What a big difference there is between them!

Listen to Rumi's words:

"Cut yourself off, as I did, from the intoxication of lust. Just look at the intoxication of lust in the camel.

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<sup>193</sup> 5:3287-93, 3305

Be aware that this lustful inebriation in the temporal world is but a trifling next to the intoxication experienced by the angels.”<sup>194</sup>

Likewise, Rumi also says, “As long as your *nafs* is intoxicated with wine and delicacies, know that your spirit has not beheld the vineyard of the Unseen.”<sup>195</sup>

When our *nafs* becomes drunk on worldly pleasures, all of these vulgarities become a veil over our eyes, preventing them from seeing the fruits of divine love that the saints offer us. Those who cannot see them won’t accept them, even if we offer it.

We pity the spiritually blind. They are still addicted to barley, that grain given to animals as feed! Be careful not to confuse their drunkenness with our state of inebriation. Don’t be deceived and fall in with that bunch.

“O heart,” says Mevlana, “Do not be deceived by every intoxication. Jesus is intoxicated with God, whereas the ass is intoxicated with barley.”<sup>196</sup> There are intoxicants, and then there are intoxicants. Some are pure and some are vulgar. Those who are drunk on the pure wine, the wine of love, are among the saved, while the others are, in the words of Konuk, “Delinquents in beast form.”<sup>197</sup>

The intoxication of their *nafs al-ammarah* prevents them from overcoming their animality. The *nafs al-ammarah*, or the commanding self, is our base animal soul. It is the first of the seven stages of the *nafs*, and is easily given over to the pleasures and intoxicants of the temporal world.

Instead ask for the wine of truth from the master’s jug. But here Rumi cautions us on whose jug we fill our cup from. Pay close attention to this verse:

“Every lover is a brimming jug, but one is full of dregs, while the other is as pure as pearls.”<sup>198</sup>

In other words, not every sheikh is a genuine lover. You must find one who is truly possessed by love. There are many imposters out there that put on a good show of saintliness. They will try to steal your heart by pulling the wool over your eyes with the whole “drunk on God’s love” number. But their jugs are filled with the dregs of compulsion. Run to those who stock the “pure” wine.

Sufism is tough business. You will come to know the scent and recognize it in the true friends of God. You will become familiar with drink and find the pure one. Your tongue will taste it. God forbid having a mouth that cannot taste!

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<sup>194</sup> 3:819-20

<sup>195</sup> 5:2446

<sup>196</sup> 4:2691

<sup>197</sup> Konuk, VIII, p. 261

<sup>198</sup> 4:2693

There is only one wine that our palate and mind yearn for. Mevlana aptly describes this wine: "For lovers wine is their heart's blood. Their eyes are on the path and on the destination."<sup>199</sup>

Our wine is divine love. Lovers may drink to their heart's content, never to become full. That wine is the blood that flows from their wounded hearts. That blood drips from the hearts of the burned out of their love for God. The eyes of those lovers remain transfixed on the divine desire. Their path is towards the Sufi sama. Their final destination is to see God in that ultimate union. Unlike earthly trips, this journey cannot be undertaken sober. But inebriation on this path resembles no any other kind of drunkenness: "The intoxication brought on by the scent of the Almighty does to the head and brain what a hundred vats of wine could never do."<sup>200</sup>

Catch my drift? Talking is one thing, tasting quite another. You cannot understand the taste without partaking. "I am a slave of the God drunks,"<sup>201</sup> says Rumi. The God drunks, those saints who lose themselves in the wine of God's love, is most likely a reference to the following hadith:

"When they drink this wine they become intoxicated, and as they become intoxicated they are purified, and as they are purified they become lighter, and as they become lighter they fly, and as they fly they become happy. Then they involuntarily rise and they look carefully and see, and as they see, they attain, and as they attain they become everlasting, and as they become everlasting – in the presence of the omnipotent King – they become kings."<sup>202</sup>

That hadith in turn extrapolates on a Qur'anic verse:

"Upon the inhabitants will be green garments of fine silk and brocade. And they will be adorned with bracelets of silver, and their Lord will give them a purifying drink."<sup>203</sup>

Rumi says that you too must "endeavor through non-existence to attain existence. Become intoxicated on God's wine."

Mevlana overflows with exuberance as he speaks of intoxication. This same degree of passion spurts from the pages of his earlier work, the *Divan-i Kabir* (the great work), which took shape in his earlier years as he burned with love. That work reaches its climax at the state of "intoxication," whereas the *Masnavi*, written in a period when his religious fervor was at a relative calm, takes a more deliberate tone

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<sup>199</sup> 5:3485

<sup>200</sup> 3:673

<sup>201</sup> 5:4109

<sup>202</sup> Rumi gives us part of this Hadith in the heading preceding 6:643

<sup>203</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Insan 76:21

with a focus on guidance. Despite this, the enthusiasm in the *Masnavi* gives such flight to man that when you lose yourself to its magic, you in fact become drunk not by drinking but by reading.

You not only read the *Masnavi*, you quaff it. You gulp down glass after glass (verse after verse) of divine love from the carafe of that exalted cupbearer, who has imbibed of the wine of God.

Do me a favor and try to taste these words. Taste how Rumi describes these “God drunks,” among which he includes himself:

“Our day breaks with your light. In the morning we are drinking the wine of Mansur al-Hallaj.

It is the abundance of your light that intoxicates us so. Who is this wine that has brought me such exuberance?

Fermenting wine begs for our exuberance while destiny begs of our catalyzing mind.

The wine became intoxicated with us, not we from it... Water and clay took shape from us.”<sup>204</sup>

No doubt Rumi is referring to the light of God present in that divine wine, that light which perfects man, who was wrought from clay.

“Wine became intoxicated with us.” What an idea! Elsewhere Rumi says of those drunk on God, “even before the creation of grapes, they drunk the wine and became intoxicated.”<sup>205</sup> They came drunk from the pre-eternal. “Our intoxication is from time immemorial.”

Here we should think of intoxication as intense adoration. But what do we mean by this?

I once met a saintly sheikh named Mehmed Dumlu. He said to me, “Some people come into this world as animals, and leave as animals. Others come into this world as animals and leave as devotees. And there is a very small portion that come as devotees and leave as devotees.”

Did you get the reference? The lovers of God became intoxicated by the glory, majesty, and beauty of the Almighty when, in the World of Spirits, before they were poured into their bodies – before the creation of vessels even – they heard that great voice from the Unseen and responded to the Creator’s question, “Am I not your Lord?”

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<sup>204</sup> 1:1809-13

<sup>205</sup> 2:180



In the words of Rumi, “When the Cupbearer of Alast pours out a drop,” the beloved servants of God reel in their cups with the love of the divine and the ecstasy of the compassionate; they immediately lose themselves in the great intoxicant. That intoxication stays with them as they are sent into the world, to their homes in new lands. And under the same influence, they return to God, or are made to return to Him. This Wine of Mansur is also known as the Wine of Alast. You get it, I see, but let me reiterate. So why is that wine so intoxicating? Because:

“The radiance of the Cupbearer is concealed within the wine. The wine fermented, danced and bubbled over.”<sup>206</sup>

You see, it is the Cupbearer that holds the secret! This is the state of *sukr* that I mentioned earlier. In Sufi literature, this state is likened to ecstasy and rapture. When people can no longer contain themselves, they overflow. We know from various sources how Rumi, in a state of ecstasy, performed the first sama, spinning and whirling for hours. It is this understanding that forms the backbone of the Mevlevi dervish ceremony, the *Mukabele*. Everything that we have told you about this state comes directly from Rumi, who speaks at length about it in the final verses of the fifth volume of the *Masnavi*.

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Mevlana calls out to God in a state of exuberance. Look what he says of the God drunks like himself:

“Their intoxication comes not from fortune and riches, but from Your wine O Sultan of sweet works.  
O King, they are made drunk by Your oneness. O Pardoner, pardon he who is drunk on you.  
When You address them, the intoxication imparted on them by the taste of your attention cannot be matched by a hundred jugs of wine.  
...Inflict a penalty only when I become sober. For I shall never again be sober!  
Whoever has drunk from your glass, O Lord of bounty and grace, is forever saved from self-consciousness and punishment.  
Their intoxication lasts forever in a state of self-unconsciousness. There is no sobering up for the one who annihilates himself with your love.  
Those who drink the Water of Life never perish, yet compared with your water the Water of Life is death.  
The Water of Life is the grail of those who take pleasure from life. Gardens and vineyards grow verdant by this water.  
But those who drink of death are alive through His love. They could care less for life or its water.  
The Water of Life serves us no purpose now that we are one with the water of Your love.

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<sup>206</sup> 3:4746

Every living being draws strength from the Water of Life, but its source flows direct from You.<sup>207</sup>

We began our third conversation with man's search for the elixir of everlasting life. Look how far we have come from the Gilgamesh myth. Have we found the true Water of Life? When we say, "imbibe," you understand what we mean. The main point is the issue of intoxication. We have seen how carried away Rumi becomes when he describes the God drunks. Think about Chelebi Hüsameddin, who recorded all of these verses; what states he must have witnessed!

The rivers of heaven bend toward the saints who have imbibed the Wine of God. Of the God drunks, Mevlana writes, "The rivers of heaven flow at your command," referring to the four rivers of heaven, which are mentioned in the Muhammad Surah of the Qur'an: "...the description of Paradise, which the righteous are promised," says that there "...are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey."<sup>208</sup>

After Muhammad's Night Journey, the archangel Gabriel offered him libations taken from those rivers. One was a glass of heavenly wine and the other a glass of milk.

Muhammad chose the milk, and Gabriel declared, "The Prophet has chosen prosperity."

Then the angel brought a vessel of water and a vessel of honey. Muhammad accepted them both. This time Gabriel said, "Honey is a sign that your people will exist until the Day of Resurrection, and water a sign that your sins will be washed clean."

Mevlana says the heavenly rivers will flow on earth as the saints command them to. The rivers are connected to their wishes. Here he reveals the symbolism behind these rivers the holy men command:

"Your perseverance becomes a river in Paradise, your love a wellspring of heavenly milk.  
The delight in worship flows as a river of honey, and the ecstasy of servitude a stream of wine."<sup>209</sup>

Exquisite! Rumi is saying that the murshid nurtures the wayfarers' maturation by offering them food he has gathered from the four heavenly rivers.

But why do they offer them the pure wine?

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<sup>207</sup> 5:4199-4201, 4203-05, 4218-22

<sup>208</sup> The Qur'an, Muhammad 47:15

<sup>209</sup> 3:3461-62

The short answer: Wine, beginning with the throat, burns your insides. What is that burning? It is the wayfarer's sins set aflame by God's divine attributes. This is followed by the burning of his earthly desires and impulses. Purification...

That's not all. That burning also performs a second function that allows the heart to transform for the better. The more the wayfarer drinks, the more his heart burns from the wine. His heart burns with "love." The love of God enters that heart with a burning sensation. It envelops the heart, igniting it and searing it.

Is this mandatory? It is indeed. The mind carries you on this path as far as the furthest tree, before the world ends and heaven begins. From there on out, love must carry you. But to fall in love, you must imbibe! The mind, by all means, is necessary, but it keeps you pinned at that critical threshold, preventing you from transcending. It slows you down. At that step, you must drive your conscience from your head so as to not waste your time on temporal questions, thoughts and anxieties. This will also happen to you when you drink the wine of divine love.

"O friend! When the lover feasts of the pure wine within him, the mind there becomes lost, lost!"<sup>210</sup>

We will process this concept in our next conversation. We will see how to advance on the path through love, through annihilation in the Beloved. And afterwards? The arc of transcendence also has a return trajectory. What goes up must come down. And upon your return, we have certain expectations of you. Do you know what the masters expect from you when you rejoin us here in our group?

Allow the *Masnavi* to answer this question: "Pass beyond intoxication and be the one who bestows intoxication on others. Go from instability to permanence."<sup>211</sup>

The nature of the journey has now changed, to a certain extent. Rumi clearly states what your duty entails once you have returned from a visit with God: "Be an intoxicant!"

In other words, be drunk no longer. Push aside for just a while the fervor, that state of openness. As we began our conversation, we touched upon the concept of "*sukr*." In the Sufi lexicon, *sukr* also has a twin opposite. The converse of *sukr* is *sahw*, which means to abstain from spiritual intoxication. It is the state of being sober, collected, at peace, and conscious.

In my student days, friends of mine would drink. I didn't partake in alcohol, so I don't know if it was because I was sociable or what, but they always invited me along. And I would accompany them anyway, even though I did not care for

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<sup>210</sup> 1:1981

<sup>211</sup> 6:630

drinking. I stuck around out of a distinct feeling of responsibility, making sure that they would not get so drunk that they would end up harming themselves or the people around them.

This quality exists in the relationship between murshid and murid. The initiate becomes familiar with the pure wine. But to supervise this, to regulate how many glassfuls he will drink, is a responsibility that falls on the consciousness of a chaperon.

So when the disciples, lovers, dervishes begin their dhikr, we keep an eye on them so they do not go completely off the rails. We disapprove of gratuitous zeal and especially of feigned exuberance or intoxication. You have been warned.

This is why in dhikr circles the murshids are obliged to remain aware. They act as mountains. They shake with fervor from within, but you will not see them tremble. Actually, this is what we expect of Sufis at this stage in their career. If you ask a murshid, he may admit he sometimes yearns for his early days of dervishhood when he could lose himself in the circle. But alas he cannot. He must not!

The mentor stands watch should the disciple be tempted to overdose on that wine. If the disciple surrenders himself completely to ecstasy, his mad temperament may become permanent. His adoration will veer towards derangement and he may never return to us again.

Both the state of *sukr* and of *sahw* must be considered together at the heart of the matter. Recall the *Mukabele*, the ceremony of the whirling dervishes. They are indeed in a state of *sukr* but at the same time they cannot forget about *sahw*. Think about it. As the dervish turns, he deftly pivots on this left foot. But if that dervish should lose himself completely, he will also lose the rhythm of his movements, to a point even that he may collapse in the middle of the floor. This simply would not do. Perhaps you are beginning to comprehend what a delicate exercise the sama is.

We opened our conversation with the Ottoman marching band, and with that we will close it. Just what did it say in that song?

“Partake in the joy of these rosy faces ...” Those rosy faces are of course those of the saints, the holy men and the heirs of Muhammad. After all, Muhammad is the original rosy-faced one. Remember that tune from a previous conversation, “May we see Muhammad’s smiling rosy face in our dreams.”

“Partaking in the joy” is the seeking of *sukr*. It is the imbibing of the Cupbearer’s wine. It is to drink from the fountain of abundance of divine love. This is a spiritual libation. Let us drink it so we may unite with the Friend. This is the drink of drinks. Lift up your glass – no, your carafe. The carafe is the vessel into which this wine is poured. The carafe is our body.

When that carafe froths over with the Water of Life, what does it say? What does it invoke? What rolls off the tongue?

Who does the tongue seek in both the mouth and in the heart? What does it say? "God! God!" it exclaims. What else would it say? At that moment of intoxication is there any other being left but Him?

What else can the wayfarers in the "tavern" of the Lord say to the glass?

Don't they say, "Here, you too partake. This wine is of a different sort. Those who drink it know"?

Because after all, just as Rumi emphasizes in the *Divan-i Kabir*, "The body that drinks this lawful wine of the sama, and the heart that becomes intoxicated by it, roasts in the fire of separation, where it cooks to the point of perfection."<sup>212</sup>

That should be all for now.

I can no longer hold back. Just mentioning the word wine carries me away from myself. Let me at least transport myself back to its Owner. I cannot bear it any longer. I am rising for the sama. Join me if you are sufficiently intoxicated.

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<sup>212</sup> Can, II, p. 366

## 9 BURN!

*"O the Beloved, who has made our hearts His home  
and abode, will His heart be pleased unless I burn?"<sup>213</sup>*

You will burn! You will burn! You will burn!

So why have we begun today's conversation by striking fear into your heart? Isn't that what the fire and brimstone set say to put the fear of God into you? But fear not, we mean something else entirely. You will see.

Should we fear God? Indeed we should! But our first duty is to love Him. Because as *Al-Wadud* (the One Who Loves), He created us to love, and he wanted us to love Him.

Sufis do talk of "burning." Some fervent adherents will scare believers by telling them they will burn. We, on the other hand, command you to burn. We tell everyone who comes to us that they must burn. We then add, "You will love this burning, believe us." There is indeed a difference between the two kinds of burning. After this conversation, you will think differently about it. After all, Rumi dedicates the first 18 lines of the *Masnawi* to the subject of burning. Don't think it was for nothing!

*"The sound of the reed is fire. Do not think it is wind. Pity on he who does not  
have this fire within him.*

*The power of the reed stems from the fire of love, from the ebullition of love  
present in the wine."<sup>214</sup>*

To understand this, we must hark back to our previous conversation. The wine has taken hold of us. Today we go from the burning wine to the fire of the reed. The reed's fire is kindled by love.

These connections would be easier to understand if you happened to be Yunus Emre, for he lived it. In a poem not so well known, Yunus says:

*"I drank the wine from a cup-bearer  
Whose tavern is beyond on high.  
Off that cupbearer we are drunk  
For our souls, as His goblet, did comply.*

*Love turns to light the body of those  
Who burn in the fire of love.*

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<sup>213</sup> 6:617

<sup>214</sup> 1:9-10

*That fire resembles not this fire  
Revealing no flames to the eye."*

Yunus has summed up today's conversation in two quatrains! Of course, we can't stop here; we must unpack the subject.

People fear the punishment that may await them in hell. We are afraid we will burn in the lake of fire, that we will become like logs tossed in the fireplace. The ignorant assume hell has a good stockpile of wood. But in fact, it is the sinner that brings those logs there.

Consider the story of Abu Lahab's infidel wife, who had persecuted Muhammad. Her name was Umm Jamil. She is mentioned in the Qur'an: "And his wife [as well] - the carrier of firewood. Around her neck is a rope of twisted fiber."<sup>215</sup> No one besides the Prophet Muhammad saw her carry the firewood, but when he called her the "wood carrier," the name stuck. Rumi invokes her name as he warns us not to stray from the path: "Lest you become like the wife of Abu Lahab, a carrier of firewood in both worlds."<sup>216</sup>

When wood burns it turns to fire. It has been made clear that those who are deserving of that aftermath are the People of the Fire or those who follow them. The People of the Fire of course refer to Satan and his followers. When God created man He commanded the angels to bow before Adam. Satan refused to obey. "Man is made from dirt. I am made from fire," he said. "Fire is superior to dirt, therefore I will not prostrate before this lowly creature." This response sent him into condemnation.

Why did we go there, to Satan and the first days of man? We will use it as a point of entry to explain fire. On the surface, Satan was right. Fire is primary, clay secondary. At the time of Creation, God first created fire. When it became extinguished, it gave rise to clay. Now here is where Satan erred, as he could not see the true essence of man. The Creator conferred to man a holy covenant, which Satan could not comprehend. He could not grasp that God had created man to be a being deserving respect.

Mevlana too delves into this for a reason. For the sake of comparison, let's look at God's reaction to Satan with a quote from the *Masnavi*:

"God said, 'No, there shall be no familial lineage; the only path to virtue is piety and abstinence from dubious activities.'"<sup>217</sup>

It goes on:

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<sup>215</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Masad 111:4-5

<sup>216</sup> 5:1099

<sup>217</sup> 1:3399

“The child of clay became illumined like the moon. You are the child of fire. Be gone with your face blackened with shame!”<sup>218</sup>

Adam, who was born of clay, is like the moon by virtue of his humility; he reflects light. Satan, on the other hand, has been burned by the heat of his own fire. We know that fire is the enemy of water. And so the devil, a creature of fire, is the enemy of man, who is wrought from water and clay. But remember that water extinguishes fire.

So where’s the rub?

Let me tell you, Satan’s fire penetrates man’s soul. This fire, if we take into consideration its broad definition, is the fire of lust.

Alas, Satan resides within us! He has come to run us off the road to righteousness, to derail us from the track of decency. He has come to pave our way to hell and drag us into the fires. O Rumi, show us the antidote to this poison!

“What is the remedy for the fire of lust? The light of religion. Your light snuffs out the infidels’ flame.”<sup>219</sup>

Hence, the light of faith extinguishes the fire of lust. This hadith should clarify the matter: “On the Day of Resurrection, the hellfire will say, ‘O believer, pass over me quickly, for your light has extinguished my flame.’”

We have come to a critical crossroads. Just before we put this crossroads in our rearview mirror, let me propose a second meaning to the expression, “fire is the enemy of water.” Water refers to the Universal Man, that mentor who has attained a pure state before God. This was Adam’s state before the fall. And those with spirits of fire are their enemies. The enemies of the saints are legion.

The People of the Fire harbor enmity towards the saints, and in turn are the enemies of God. In the words of God Almighty, “Whoever harbors enmity against my people has in fact waged war against me.”<sup>220</sup>

The saints wrest people from the fires of hell by imbuing them with divine light. Why then, O heedless ones, do you hold such animosity toward these holy men? Just as Rumi says, “You are not His enemy, you are your own enemy. What does the fire care that you have become firewood?”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> 1:3403

<sup>219</sup> 1:3700

<sup>220</sup> Hadith qudsi

<sup>221</sup> 3:3630



O heedless one, your enemy resides within you. If a holy man should set you aflame, thank him, for he has purified your desires. His fire of light extinguishes the fire that you, as a piece of cordwood, will succumb to in the pits of hell. Come to your senses. No matter how much you struggle against it, no harm will come to a fire like that. But what happens to you happens, because you are the firewood.

Now let's touch on the difference between fire and light, or in Arabic, *an-nar* and *an-nur*. While they do have similarities – aside from their names, they both give off a kind of heat – their differences are stark. Light does not burn, as it comes from God's attribute of *Al-Latif* (the Gentle) whereas fire does, for it comes from His attribute of *Al-Qahhar* (the Subduer). Mevlana says as much:

“For the light of the saint is not like the fire; the seeker of the light is in fact the antithesis of the fire.”<sup>222</sup>

The occurrence of light burning the disciple is another matter, which we will comment on later. But first give special consideration to this: On the spiritual journey, fire is turned to light. By divine permission, of course. Would you like confirmation? “Little by little douse that fire with water, so that God may transform your fire to light.” How can we disagree with Mevlana's prayer?

“O Lord! Give us that clean water of abundance so the fire of this world becomes nothing but light.  
The sea, the land, the water, the fire, all of them are under your command. If you so desire, fire becomes water.  
And sweet water becomes fire, if You so wish it.”<sup>223</sup>

It is on you to either transform the light of Muhammad, which God has breathed into your heart, into fire, or take the fire of your nafs and turn that into the light of your soul. The decision is yours. Indeed, tell me, O mortal man, would you like to sink into the lowest of the low or rise to the state most beautiful? Is that your final answer? To keep from burning in the other world, we must make arrangements in this world. Hence the Fatih Koca lyric: “Come, come, let my soul burn in the fire of love / Let me catch aflame...”

There is another poem in the same vein, which my daughter and I would read together often. The words belong to the modern Sufi poet, Tevfik Çapacıoğlu. Interestingly enough, by some divine coincidence, as if God had preordained it, who should attend his funeral prayer but yours truly. And with whom? With no other than Hüseyin Top, that great *Masnavi* commentator. Without further ado, let me share his words with you:

*“Make my heart burn with the fire*

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<sup>222</sup> 4:2713

<sup>223</sup> 1:1333, 1335-37

*Of your love day in and day out  
Because it was on the Day of Alast  
That to you I became devout."*

This is the lover surrendering to the fire willingly. You see, that fire burns not us, but the other "things" inside of us.

"May the fire of our grace be kindled so that no sin great or small will remain. It will be such a fire that even a stray spark will burn our sins, urges, and free will."<sup>224</sup>

There is actually a lot of truth hidden in those two verses. Let's proceed step by step.

The last verse leaves off at the burning of sins. Let's say that our transgressions have been pardoned. But the devil inside us, in unholy alliance with the chimera that is our nafs, provokes us into committing new ones.

So we must therefore embark on the "great jihad," as they say. This is the holy war we wage within ourselves, within our souls. We will observe asceticism, abstinence and everything else Sufism demands of us, and we will, as some zealous adherents say, "kill our nafs."

So far we have been establishing the connection between burning and death, with our nafs as our target. But our purpose of burning our nafs is actually not to kill it. The nafs is your steed; without it you would be unable to travel from one station to another. You need your nafs, but if you are not a talented rider, and if you have not properly trained your animal, you will get burned. As an equestrian, I should know. I had little struggle in the saddle of my Arabian purebred! But if you too become skilled with your steed, you will become one with that noble animal. If your bodies stay in harmony and rhythm, communicating through light touches, you will reach your destination on four hooves. The joy of that kind of ride is something else! You will do the same with your nafs. You will not kill it nor will you inflict cruelty upon it. You will transform it into a honed galloping machine.

That training consists of asceticism, self-denial and struggle. Start with the soul. Pour out your sweat and blood laboring in the fires, and you will temper your nafs.

"Your nafs will never be tamed without the glowing heat of the fire. So do not beat the iron until it has turned to hot cinders."<sup>225</sup>

But the conversation does not end here. We have not yet opened up the inner, *batin* aspect. We have only just cracked it ajar. We have not yet burned! Nor have we died!

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<sup>224</sup> 5:1848-49

<sup>225</sup> 4:3622

Mevlana states:

“The idea is to burn like a furnace with love. Anyone who fails to do this is not a true lover.”<sup>226</sup>

“His least fault is generosity and helping those in need. For the grace of God, he would go so far as to lay down his life.”<sup>227</sup>

In the sixth volume of the *Masnavi*, Mevlana reminds us of the hadith, “Die before you die,” and discusses it at length. This hadith, which Sufis cite often, emphasizes the path’s indispensable and most important principle. Tasting voluntary death is one of the stops a dervish must pass through before arriving at the mandatory death. It goes beyond tempering the nafs. This is a passageway to nonexistence.

“Choose not the death that sends you to the grave, but the death that perfects you, that brings you into the light,”<sup>228</sup> says Rumi. Death is put before us as a concept that describes annihilation through burning.

Speaking through Rumi, Ali announces that:

“The death of deathlessness is permissible, for sacrifice is a provision of love. This outward death is in fact life. What at first appears as nonexistence is really everlastingness.  
...O youth, the life of lovers lies with death. How long is the stay in this land of separation?  
If my stay here was not a separation, then it would not say in the Qur’an, ‘Certainly we are returning to Him.’  
The return is to reach the city we are estranged from, and to attain unity and deliverance from the torments of time.”<sup>229</sup>

Sufism mentions the turning spiral of the worlds. It refers to the rise from depravity to grace, from multiplicity to oneness, which is both anticipated and desired. At each step of this journey there is a death, with each death joyously announcing a new birth. This concept brings us now to the doorstep of the “perfection theory,” which constitutes the heart of Sufi thought.

Why don’t we give that door a knock? Sufism must also include the ascent of the spirit. Put another way, two main paths are available to the Sufi as he strives to become a Universal Man. The first is the asceticism of devotion. The second is the perfection of the spirit. In fact, Hüseyin Top explains it thusly, “These two paths are like the two wings that give flight to the dervish, and they are essentially one path,

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<sup>226</sup> 2:1377

<sup>227</sup> 2:891

<sup>228</sup> 6:739

<sup>229</sup> 1:3927-28, 3935-37

the same path. These two paths intertwine and the many fine nuances present them as two.”<sup>230</sup>

Mevlana explains the perfection theory using the “arc of ascension,” which follows the trajectory from mineral to plant to animal, and then from there up to man and the angels. To get ever closer to God, there must be a voluntary death or annihilation at every stage. Let’s look at the following verses in a way that will provide an example of this:

“O gracious friends! The cow must be slaughtered if we intend for our souls to be gathered up.  
When I was an inanimate thing, I matured and became a plant. When I died as a plant I appeared in the form of an animal.  
When I died as an animal I became a man. So why would I be afraid of dying and becoming nonexistent?  
For through death human qualities depart. For me, it shall be possible to fall into the company of the angels.  
And then we must cast off the qualities of the angel. ‘Everything shall parish except His face.’”<sup>231</sup>

In the lines that immediately follow, Mevlana calls out to mankind, telling us to not stay here, but to act now and advance, to annihilate ourselves and surpass even the spiritual rank of the angels. He even gives us the name of the springboard that will propel us to these lofty places: love.

“O frigid lover, clad in the cloak of shame! You are fleeing from your Beloved out of fear of losing your life.  
Do not flee the sword of the Beloved’s love. Annihilate yourself in the joy of thousands of souls clapping their hands.”<sup>232</sup>

We will delve deeper into this element of “love” in our next conversation. I assume you have noticed by now that in Sufism every lesson and concept is interconnected with one other. We must acknowledge that and accept it. But for now, we will stick with the topic of “burning.”

Going back to where we left off, Rumi has just told to mankind – in particular those who have chosen the Sufi path – that, “We must cast off the qualities of the angel.” But why did he say that? Surely he has a reason. To grasp this reason we must once again recall the Mi’raj.

The Mi’raj is so vital to Sufism that we have taken almost all of our tenets, exercises, and examples from this spiritual journey. So what connection can we make between

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<sup>230</sup> Top, I, p. 35

<sup>231</sup> 3:3900-04

<sup>232</sup> 3:3910-11

the angels and the Mi'raj? Was it not the archangel Gabriel who accompanied Muhammad on his Night Journey? Now we are getting somewhere. When they arrived at the Sidrat al-Muntaha, that heavenly Lote Tree on the edge of Paradise, the great angel said, "O Ahmad! If I take one more step, I shall burn." Notice how Mevlana elegantly weaves this concept throughout the *Masnavi*.

Gabriel adds:

"O sultan of the soul, leave me and go forth from here alone. This is my limit."<sup>233</sup>

The archangel refused to cross that border and burn (even if it was a ruse), but did Muhammad hesitate? Did he give even a moment's thought about what would happen to him should he cross it? Not at all. He immediately stepped forward to be burned in God's fire!

Rumi is specifically trying to emphasize that man's potential superiority over the angels comes from this courageous act. To God Almighty, courage is borne in a heart willing to self-annihilate itself. The source of that courage is not found in the angels. Rumi uses Muhammad's Night Journey to get this point across. He puts before us the words the Prophet addressed to Gabriel as he passed beyond the Lote Tree:

"O Gabriel, though you are noble and mighty, you are neither the moth nor the candle.  
When the candle shines bright, we beckon the moth, and the soul of the moth does not shy from being burned."<sup>234</sup>

We will return later to the symbolism of the candle and the moth, as well as the Lote Tree. But for now, we will stick to the subject of burning.

The Mi'raj illuminates Muhammad's self-effacement in the Almighty. It demonstrates that Muhammad's only need was God and that he harbored in his heart no other being but Him. Sufism characterizes the state of annihilation in God's eternity as "*faqr*," or poverty.

"He who wraps himself in spiritual poverty becomes shadowless like the Prophet.  
Non-existence adorns he who has uttered the hadith, 'Poverty is my pride.'  
See how the candle's flame is without shadow."<sup>235</sup>

One of Muhammad's miracles was that he cast no shadow. No matter what time of day it was, his shadow never fell on the ground. God would not permit it. Mevlana is

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<sup>233</sup> 1:1066-67

<sup>234</sup> 4:3807

<sup>235</sup> 5:672-73

referring here to this peculiarity. Look what he says to those who aspire to non-existence:

“God’s workshop as well as His treasure manifests from non-existence. One who knows only existence does not understand what non-existence is!”<sup>236</sup>

Little by little we are beginning to put into words the wisdom and reason – from the Sufi point of view – behind killing yourself in this world, behind plunging into non-existence and attaining self-annihilation.

If you prefer, I won’t draw it out any longer. Let me just blurt it out:

“Such is the light of God’s manifestation that everything is effaced in His light. Although that union with God is immortality within immortality, it is first contingent on self-annihilation.”<sup>237</sup>

We have reached the light, thank God. On this journey from fire to light, the final destination is union.

But what exactly is meant by annihilation? Let’s take a look at how one achieves this state:

“This is the end of free will even. It is here that his free will disappears.”<sup>238</sup>

The dervish, through complete submission, relinquishes his free will to the command of God. He ceases to be his own decision maker. He adopts indecisiveness. He becomes resolute in his irresoluteness.

The dervish thereby takes on the form of an “empty vessel,” a common expression among Sufis. The dervish must bring himself to the point of being an empty vessel so that he is in the perfect state to receive God’s manifestations. After all, God did declare, “For my loyal servant, I am his foot that walks, his hand that toils, and his tongue that speaks.”<sup>239</sup>

To illustrate this point with a visualization, think of a blacksmith. The blacksmith pinches the horseshoe between a long pair of tongs and thrusts it into the flames of the forge. Sparks scatter as the horseshoe meets the embers. As the blacksmith keeps the horseshoe in the forge, it begins to take on the color of the fire. It reddens to the point where it can no longer be distinguished from the flames. It disappears in the fire. If we were to eavesdrop on the conversation between the iron, the fire and the blacksmith, here’s what we would hear:

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<sup>236</sup> 3:4516

<sup>237</sup> 3:4658-59

<sup>238</sup> 4:402

<sup>239</sup> Hadith

“The iron has become glorified by the color and nature of the fire. It declares, ‘I am fire, I am fire!’”<sup>240</sup>

In the fire, the iron (the horseshoe) takes on the redness of the fire, both in color and in nature. So it announces its fieriness. “I am fire!” it cries. If the horseshoe was indeed melting in the heat of that fire, what else could it have said! If it had a tongue that could talk, that’s what we would hear. But the horseshoe expresses itself through the language of its state.

If the fire of love should bathe the Universal Man from head to foot in God’s reflections, would he not at that moment cry out, “I am the Truth!”? He would! And he did! Recall the case of Mansur al-Hallaj. In the same way that the iron takes on the color of fire and assumes its redness, the human attributes of the friend of God disappear in the presence of the Creator. He is left with only the true essence of man, that original spirit or light that God exhaled during creation.

That is why Rumi says, “When Man received light from God, the angels bowed before him because he had been chosen.”<sup>241</sup> He uses the examples of iron and fire to explain the Universal Man’s self-annihilation in God. There is no mistake in making comparisons, as they say, but we must be careful not to go too far, as Rumi warns us when he says, “Saying ‘I am the vat,’ means the same as, ‘I am the Truth.’ He who has taken on the color of fire is still iron.”<sup>242</sup>

Allow me to shed some light on the above verse. The vat Rumi is talking about is the dyeing vat. Just as iron turns red in the fire, the Universal Man too takes on the color of God (*sibghatullah*) when the ecstasy of love envelops his body in flames. When Al-Hallaj and those like him are dipped into the vat of God’s color, they come out the same hue as that vat, and exclaim, “I am the vat!” which is the same as declaring, “I am the Truth!” However, it should not be assumed that by this phrase the servant has become God. The Universal Man is still a worshipper and servant. Even if the iron becomes lost in the fire, the iron is still iron.

I don’t know about you, but everything now seems to be falling into place. So do I need to elaborate further? I do, I do! I won’t be able to rest easy if we overlook the “issue of the dervish’s self-annihilation and perpetuity,” as Rumi puts it.

Mevlana returns once again to the dynamic between God and saint through the metaphor of fire and burning:

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<sup>240</sup> 2:1349

<sup>241</sup> 2:1353

<sup>242</sup> 2:1347

“The flame of a candle is non-existent in the presence of the sun, yet in form it exists. To prove its existence, hold a piece of cotton to the flame and it will burst into flames.

But since the candle gives off no light, it is not there, for the sun cancels out its light.<sup>243</sup>

Mevlana reiterates this topic numerous times in order to hammer it home. When we sort the verses according to topic and view them side by side, as we are doing here, you can see how Sufism functions as a whole.

Indeed, after we consider iron and fire, we are better equipped to interpret the candle and sun analogy. Now, while we are conceptualizing these examples, let’s look at what Mevlana says immediately prior to the verses above:

“The speaker said, ‘There is really no dervish in the world, and if there were a dervish, that dervish would be non-existent.’

Even if he exists in terms of his essence, his attributes have become effaced in God’s attributes.”<sup>244</sup>

The above verses are a favorite among Sufi mystics. I love every verse, but pay close attention to this one and what it is saying. Do dervishes exist or not? That is the question. So, what is a dervish’s end goal? Annihilation. Annihilation drives the process of spiritual perfection along the path. The golden chain they place before the dervish reads something like, “So and so dervish, annihilated before his sheikh, annihilated before Mevlana, annihilated before Ali, annihilated before the Prophet, annihilated before God.” You will dissolve yourself at the various stations of the path, beginning with your own mentor. You *must* dissolve, they say. And you will annihilate yourself. You will no longer remain of you. You will become one – in this way – with your sheikh. You will attain unity. That is how you will soar.

So if you attain annihilation at the last stage and – observing the difference between fire and iron – you exclaim like Mansur al-Hallaj, “Nothing remains within me, but a single Truth,” would you be saying something wrong or devious? The answer would be no, right?

This means, though, that if a part of you still did remain at that last stage, you would have said something false. In other words, you would be faking it. Rumi stresses this point in the verse. If the dervish is *still* there, meaning he has not annihilated himself, then essentially he was never a dervish. Dervish and existence are polar opposites. In fact, non-existence is the dervish’s defining characteristic.

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<sup>243</sup> 3:3671-74

<sup>244</sup> 3:3669-70



The nuances in the original language affect the meaning. For instance, Konuk translates the same two verses from the Persian, which in turn have been rendered into English, as this:

“The speaker says, ‘There is no dervish in the world, and if there is, he is not a dervish.’  
He exists only through his *baqaa* (permanency). His attributes have become effaced in the attributes of God.”

Here, one can place emphasis the dervish’s permanency, meaning an existence or subsistence in God, a state that comes after self-annihilation. These are heavy topics in Sufism. They exhaust even me. I bring this up merely to show the subtleties and complexities of Sufism and the perils of translation.

Let’s get back to you and the other bright gems on the Sufi path. What will you do? You should find a friend of God, and cast yourself into the flame like moths to a candle!

Here is a beautiful Sufi devotional hymn: “I reduced my body to a moth before the candle of your soul / I placed the pages of my tongue on the fires of longing / While I was only a drop I offered myself to the sea / I cannot describe the passion and pain deep within me / If you love God, don’t make me speak, for I have such grief.”

Undoubtedly we must do the same. And you will. You will actually feel a heat inside you merely by being in the presence of those friends of God. This is not something I can explain to you; you must experience it yourself. Then hopefully you will start to burn for real.

My master would always sit directly in front of me. He fixed his eyes between my two eyebrows, and did the whole *suhbat* conversation like that. He set me ablaze in the process, and that would be that. I felt as though I had dissolved, melted away. It was too intense. “Please let me avoid this in the next session,” I would pray. “Let me crouch down and hide in the back.” But he was not through with me yet. He would immediately summon me and make me sit in the exact same place. The more he went on, the more tired I became. It was like my body had collapsed at the tips of my feet. My eyes would close, the darkness would invade, and with his voice in my ear, my soul would be pulled toward the heavens as if in a dream.

During my first days of dervishhood, I would get sleepy, from exhaustion. I would nap in the afternoons, but no matter what I did, it was no use! It was as though he was taking my soul out of my body and beating it clean like a rug. My master understood my situation. “Are you okay?” he would ask, but the ordeal went on. You see, that’s what it is to burn!

Then the day came. Instead of my regular seat in front of him, my master suddenly sat me down to his right. He wanted me to move my seat so that we were in

touching distance of each other. While he talked, he would take my arm, pat me on my back, or give my head a rub. The vibe changed after that. But believe me, I kept yearning for that time and place when he would set me on fire. Recalling those days I am once again moved to tears. My wife gets annoyed at me for being such a crybaby. But this path does this to you. You feel a burning inside of you, on and on, and you burn even more, constantly burning and smoldering without end. Your only relief is your tears, which put out that fire. You see, fire and light, flame and water, burning and tears...

The moth throwing itself into the fire is a common motif in Sufi songs and poetry. After all, these poems describe what it is to be a dervish. The beauty of these songs is that they were all lived. As the dervishes pass through the various states, they cry out their experiences in song. When the fresh, tender-footed initiate hears these, he should lament aloud, "Oh, how I would like to someday enjoy that state, God willing!"

For example, the song "*Erler Demine Destur Alalim*" (Let us get permission to be to wise) still gets me going: "Look at the lesson of the moth and learn / Come to the fire of love and burn." You see, the moth (murid) sets himself on fire in the flame of the candle (murshid). This is what we have been explaining all along! This is what we are teaching. First:

"Whoever should burn a wing on the candle of victory shall receive from that candle eighty graceful wings."<sup>245</sup>

Second: The candle is what is essentially burning. The moth flies away with its newly affixed wings to the new world. But, the sheikh, who has made the moth fly, burns out, just like a candle does. He ignites himself for their sake and then eventually becomes depleted.

There is a saying: "The sheikh does not fly. His disciples make him fly." But everyone knows that it really means, "The sheikh does not fly. He makes his disciples fly." In other words, it is not the sheikh who flies. The true sheikh is the one who takes his fledglings, raises them, and teaches them to fly with their own wings.

Third: Throw yourself into the fire. Fear not, for you will not burn. You will not burn in the fire that Pharaoh built. You will be like Abraham because favor will be upon you. Did Anas's napkin burn?

Who is this Anas, you may ask, and what is his story?

Anas was a companion of the Prophet. One evening he had guests over for dinner. When they finished their meal, Anas saw that the fine napkin had become sullied with food. So he said to his servant, "Take this cloth and cast it into the fire." Without

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<sup>245</sup> 5:341

hesitation she cast it into the fireplace. But lo and behold! The napkin did not burn! Not a thread caught fire. When he fetched it from the fire soon after, it was clean as new. The guests were astonished and asked how this could be. Anas replied, "Muhammad had used this to wipe his hands and face."

Listen to how Mevlana brings God's love into words:

"O you who fear the fire and torment! Fall in with such a hand and mouth as that!  
This hand and mouth that so honored a lifeless object, think what countless graces they shall bestow upon the lover!  
The Prophet kissed the brick and mortar of the Kaaba, and thus it became the focal point. Before the saints you too try to be like that clay.  
Afterwards they said to the servant, 'Will you not tell us your position on this? While you were not aware of its secret, why did you so quickly throw the napkin into the fire? You tossed a napkin as valuable as this into the fire without hesitation!'  
She answered, 'The generous are trustworthy and so I trust in generosity. What is a mere dinner napkin? If he told me to cast myself into the fire I would do so immediately, as I have great confidence in the generous ones who know the secret.'"<sup>246</sup>

That is where it's at! We can make the assumption here that the master throwing his servant into the fire is a metaphor for your master subjecting you to an ordeal. And there are ordeals indeed. The masters match your ordeal to your strength and ability to overcome it. In the olden days, they would lock the dervishes in their cells. That does not happen much anymore. There is no need. This world is already an ordeal for a dervish! We suffer enough already in this world!

They asked one of the great masters, "Please tell us something that we do not have in this world."

"That's easy!" he said. "I don't even have to think about it."

"Well, what is it?"

"Peace and quiet!"

Become a Sufi or don't. Join a Sufi order or don't. This world is already an ordeal. People assume that only through Sufism will they be subjected to ordeal. They are wrong. There is already ordeal and suffering in the world around us. Sufism gives you the patience to overcome it, the strength to transcend it.

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<sup>246</sup> 3:3118-27

For some, a dervish's ordeal means the lessons, dhikr, and daily duties. Oh please!  
This is a delight! You will enjoy the burning that comes from devotion. You will see.

Now let's end our conversation with Rumi's "Prayer of Light":

"My Lord, give my heart light, give my tongue light, give my eyes light, give my ears light, give my right side light, give my left side light, give my topside light, give my bottom side light. Give my nafs light. Magnify my light and let it shine brighter."

## 10 LOVE!

*"I am submerged in a love so deep that the first loves  
as well as the last ones are drowned in it."*<sup>247</sup>

The dervish starts to burn from the moment he begins dhikr. First he feels a hot twinge in his soul. That twinge spreads outward from a small point on his heart, gradually encompassing the entire heart. It feels like a pinprick at first. The acrid twinge then quickly fans out, filling his entire chest. The friends of God invariably mention this burning state in all the poems and songs of Sufi literature. The name of this pain is "love."

From this point on the dervish burns with "love." Affection, passion, adoration, and love – these are all responses to the same feeling, but in different dosages. In our conversation today, we will use the English word "love" to correspond with the Turkish *aşk*, the Persian *eshgh*, and the Arabic *ishq*, all of which connote the strongest degree of love. The word is originally Arabic, coming from a verb meaning to adhere or become entwined with, the root of which stems from *ashaqa*, a type of ivy. So let love cleave to our hearts like a vine, and become interwoven with our souls!

We would be hard-pressed to find anyone better than Rumi to describe love. When we hear the name Rumi, love comes to mind, and when we hear the word love, we think of Rumi. He is that synonymous with love! So cling to his skirts and let's embark on our journey!

Rumi's first work, *Divan-i Kabir*, is entirely about love. But to the discerning reader, all the references to love in the *Masnavi*, which is twice the size of the earlier book in sheer volume of verses, contain a difference dimension and nuance.

From time to time Mevlana would say, "If it appears as though love is born of me, do not believe it; the truth of the matter is this: 'Love was not born of me; love gave birth to me. I am a child of love.'" One day he exclaimed, "I am a testament to love!" The next, he declared, "I merged with love and became so entwined that I became love, and love became me also." Come, let's delve into this matter of love.

It was Shams Tabrizi who introduced Rumi to love. The fire that he set off turned Rumi the scholar into Mevlana the master, the focal point of lovers. Dervishes today, who belong to orders in which love plays a central role, pass through this same process.

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<sup>247</sup> 1:1757

Those who take their *misbaha* in hand begin to burn as if by some magical touch. This is because they have taken their place in the circle of oneness, which extends to the very highest realm. Is it at all possible for anyone to be a part of such a network without feeling the warmth of that love?

How we will offer that feeling – that experience – of love within the scope of this conversation, I have no idea. There is so much material at our disposal! Believe me, love is the most talked about topic in the *Masnavi*. I suppose we will have to express what comes to mind or moves the heart.

The first 18 lines more or less provide us with a summary of the *Masnavi*, an outline even. Love greets us at the door and pulls us in. Listen to Mevlana's voice, the way he screams out to love: "O love! You are the physician for all our ills. The cure for our pride and arrogance, you are our Plato and our Galen."<sup>248</sup>

We all know who Plato is, but in case your classical education is a bit rusty, Galen was a famous Greek physician. The line that immediately follows gives us a clue as to the "reason" behind love:

"Through love the body made of earth soared to the heavens. Love made even the mountain get up and dance."<sup>249</sup>

Jumping ahead to the 31<sup>st</sup> verse:

"Whoever is not enflamed by love is left flightless, like a bird without wings."<sup>250</sup>

He speaks the truth, I swear! We cannot get anywhere without love. This is true in our day-to-day lives as well. When I find myself in a situation, an argument maybe, and everyone is talking at once and yelling over one another, I yell out, "Where is the love?" Because, what are we doing in a place without love? Where do we hope to go from there?

In the above verse, Mevlana warns the people politely, but later he speaks more direct and stern: "Even if he is a Plato, if his pulse does not beat with love, consider him an ass."<sup>251</sup> That sounds about right to me.

Whatever work you do, you need a certain quantity of love to carry it out. But people don't realize that you need love. Even if you're a rocket scientist, you need love. This is especially true of Sufism, which is nothing without love! A more apt

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<sup>248</sup> 1:23-24

<sup>249</sup> 1:25

<sup>250</sup> 1:31

<sup>251</sup> 4:1923

name for Sufism would be “the discipline of love.” And Sufi lodges are the institutions that teach love. They are universities of love.

Love is the most important – and indispensable – key to understanding Sufism. It is the compass that points the way to God. “Love is the astrolabe to God’s mysteries.”<sup>252</sup> Love is the dervish’s travel companion and guide. But the ass does not understand this.

Hence this verse:

“The mind has no business explaining love. In doing so, it becomes like an ass mired in the mud. Only love can speak for love.”<sup>253</sup>

The mind, or intellect, cannot explain love, because it does not understand it. And without love, the mind cannot reach God.

The mind is good, don’t get me wrong. But let’s not forget that its scientific vapidness lends it the potential to be a hotbed of uneasiness, doubt and anxiety. Though the mind may deny this, there is certainly a room within the house of the intellect in which Satan has taken up residence. A mind so inclined impedes the path to love with its seditious tendencies. Therefore on the spiritual journey we have to circumvent the mind until it changes its ways. In the meantime, we must deactivate it.

We are obligated to shut down the mind because, “Nothing else but love can gag the mouth of apprehension. Otherwise everyone would be able to overcome these anxieties and misgivings.”<sup>254</sup>

Rumi adds: “Those of sound mind know that cleverness is the province of Satan, while love is that of Adam.”<sup>255</sup>

Do not assume I have renounced the mind. We will return to it in our next conversation. But, the mind we will discuss is of a different sort. You shall see. For now, pay close attention, for Mevlana has said, “Those of sound mind...” The intellect that brings forth that mind is love.

Now listen to this:

“Love is a ship for the saintly elect. Rarely does it encounter disaster; almost always does it deliver one to safety.”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> 1:110

<sup>253</sup> 1:115

<sup>254</sup> 5:3230

<sup>255</sup> 4:1402

<sup>256</sup> 4:1406

Overthinking can lead to ruin, as they say. But what follows is also important:

“Trade your cleverness for wonderment. Cleverness and intellect foster doubt, whereas adoration is direct vision.”

Sacrifice your mind on Muhammad’s path, and be satisfied with ‘God is enough for me.’”<sup>257</sup>

Mevlana brings together the most vital concepts with clarity and conciseness. We see in those verses wonderment and adoration. Take note of this. He then mentions the sacrifice of the mind on the path of Muhammad (the Mi’raj again). Store that away, too, in the back of your “mind.” All this will fall into place at a certain point in our conversation. But for now, “The Beloved eludes the cerebral mind.”<sup>258</sup>

Muhammad is also elusive in that way. He is the “Universal Mind.” Before reaching the Universal Mind, how can you brag and boast of an intellect – an intellect you don’t have?

This misplaced emphasis on intellect has led to bouts of teasing between the adherents, who are people of intellect and rationality, and the gnostics, who are people of love.

I do not mean to offend anyone, but I also cannot neglect to mention this:

“Intellectual adherents retreat in fear. Lovers, however, are propelled forward with their wings at the speed of lightning.

In the face of love, fear amounts to nothing more than a human hair.

Everyone sacrifices themselves in the religion of love.

Certainly you have read in the Qur’an the phrase, ‘They love God.’ It is rejoined with the words, ‘God loves them.’

Hence affection and love are attributes of God. Fear, on the other hand, is certainly not.”<sup>259</sup>

Rumi reaffirms here that love is one of God’s attributes. After all, one of His beautiful names is *Al-Wadud*, the Loving One. According to Sufis, God is Love. In fact the secret to creation originates from love.

Don’t think that I am exaggerating. It is true what Fuzuli said, “All that is in the world is love.” God created the universe in order “to be known and loved,” and so set into motion the spinning of the universe.

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<sup>257</sup> 4:1407-08

<sup>258</sup> Yunus Emre

<sup>259</sup> 5:2183-87



God created this universe to be loved by Muhammad, that supreme Universal Man, whose light he created before anything else. God declared, "Were it not for you, I would not have created the universe."

There is a Sufi song we always sing that contains the line, "God created the universe for the love of Muhammad." Another name for the Prophet, after all, is Habibullah, the Beloved of God.

As far as I'm concerned, just thinking about the origin of love ought to be enough to enamor mankind to God. If Mevlana's verses on this topic do not kindle man's love for God, I don't know what would:

"Sacred love radiated from Muhammad, for God had said to him, 'Were it not for you.'

Muhammad was the end-all be-all of love. He alone was therefore chosen from among the other prophets.

'Know that if it were not for the purpose of pure love, I would not have created the heavens.'

'I have elevated the heavens so that you may grasp the sublimity of love.'"<sup>260</sup>

We must comprehend the sublimity of love, but who fully understood it? Once again, Muhammad! I shall explain, but where to begin? The Mi'raj, naturally. When the angel Gabriel collected the Prophet to deliver him to the Beloved, Muhammad's body was torn asunder by the sight of the angel, becoming like foam. "But," describes Rumi, "his sea surged with that foam of love."<sup>261</sup> The sea represents his soul, and the foam, of course, is the love welling up within it.

We have already stated the following, but it is worth repeating. Muhammad and Gabriel ascended to a certain point together, and that point was the Lote Tree. "I cannot go beyond here," said the angel, "for I will burn." Muhammad, however, crossed that fiery threshold without hesitation.

Sufi literature describes Gabriel as the rational angel. The mind, you see, only takes you so far. It stops at that point. The Prophet did not recoil from self-annihilation, for he was a lover. Mevlana is telling us that you can pass beyond the Lote Tree only in the company of love.

Mevlana puts forth the idea that mankind's superiority over the angels stems from man's obligation to safeguard within himself the sacred object of God's love. The scope of divine love, unbeknownst to Gabriel, was programmed into the "software" of mankind. There is more to it, but you can guess the rest.

Look, listen and learn:

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<sup>260</sup> 5:2737-40

<sup>261</sup> 4:3798

“These stories are one astonishment after another. When the pure servants of God see the states reached by those even more pure, they lose their senses.”<sup>262</sup>

Let’s ask ourselves what we are still waiting for. Nowadays it is relatively easy to be a lover. But think about the days when the fires of Islam were still being kindled. Would the same fate that befell Bilal befall us? Could that even happen today? I am always moved to tears by the scene in *The Message*, that classic film portraying the early days of Islam, when the Abyssinian slave Bilal, at the behest of Muhammad, climbs atop the Kaaba and recites the first call to prayer in Mecca. I do not know how many times I have seen that movie, but believe me, I can never seem to prevent the waterworks.

Bilal’s conversion to Islam made his (earthly) master uneasy. When he refused to renounce his faith, his owner dragged him into the heat of the Arabian Desert, laid him down on the burning sand, and placed a heavy stone on his chest to torture him. But the first muezzin of Islam remained steadfast. “God is one, God is one,” he moaned. His one-time master grew increasingly disturbed. He then began to beat him with a branch of thorns. Bilal persisted. “God is one!” he shouted. The Prophet had warned him to hide his faith for fear that this would happen. But, as Rumi says of the episode:

“Love came and carried away his penitence...  
‘O Messenger of God, your love fills my whole body and all of my veins. How can there be any more room left for penitence?’”<sup>263</sup>

This is the power of that love. Bilal goes on:

“Love is the subduer, and I am subdued by love.... Whether I am Bilal or the *hلال* (crescent moon), I am beholden to your (Muhammad’s) sun.”<sup>264</sup>

“Divine love is the sun of perfection; like shadows, all of creation is under the spell of its light.”<sup>265</sup>

Bilal’s ordeal of love lasts until Abu Bakr – on Muhammad’s order – comes and buys his freedom from his owner.

Love always endured in those early days, in the Era of Felicity. However, when Muhammad left this earth, that esteemed muezzin stood down from his duties. “Without him,” said Bilal, “how can I recite the call to prayer?” His ordeal had now

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<sup>262</sup> 4:3805

<sup>263</sup> 6:897, 6:900

<sup>264</sup> 6:902, 6:904

<sup>265</sup> 6:983

taken on a new dimension. “Without the Prophet, I cannot stay in Medina,” he said, and immigrated to another land... That is until Muhammad appeared to him in a dream. Bilal then returned to the land of the Messenger, where Hasan and Husayn, the Prophet’s grandsons, greeted him with open arms. Word spread to Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima, who then requested that Bilal resume his duties as her father’s muezzin. He could not refuse her appeal.

The call to prayer once again rang out in Medina. The words affected Fatimah so intensely that she fainted, causing Bilal to stop halfway. This went down in Islamic history as the “half-recited call to prayer.” We will never know what exactly caused Fatimah to collapse, but we can surmise that she was in some way overpowered by intense feelings of love. How could she not be so moved by Bilal’s sweet voice and his great love for the Prophet?

O love, the world was built on love. So don’t you think the world would put its adoration into words? Oh, but it does! One only needs to glance at Mevlana’s *Divan-i Kabir* to see that we are honored with such a conscious, perceptive world. Every single thing exerts effort towards being united with the Beloved.

“If the sky were not enrapt in love, would its bosom be so pure, clean, and blue?  
If the sun too were not in love, then its face would not shine with light!  
Were the meadows and the mountains not touched by love, then not a single herb would spring up in our fields!  
If the sea were unaware of love, if it had no concept of it, would it exert so much effort? Would it foam up as it does?”<sup>266</sup>

For Rumi, all things in existence lose themselves to God’s love. They become intoxicated. Every atom in the universe is drunk! The water is drunk, the wind is drunk, the earth is drunk, the fire is drunk! This is the “circle of love” that Rumi talks about. It is the “hidden treasure” mentioned by God!

Let’s look at that universe we call the animal kingdom. Mevlana does not let them be forgotten:

“Seeing as the lion, the bear and even the wolf comprehend love, the person who abstains from love is lower than a dog.  
For if dogs were not endowed with the vein of love, why then would the dog of the Seven Sleepers protect them so?”<sup>267</sup>

We should not overlook “man’s best friend.” If only we were so faithful to lovers and to love!

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<sup>266</sup> *Divan-i Kabir*

<sup>267</sup> 5:2008-09

And so the thought, “O human, what are you waiting for, become a lover!” passes through me. What’s more is that contrary to what you may think, you are “the great kingdom.” The universe folds inside you. If Adam is the embodiment of the universe, then prove yourself and show us how you have fallen in love. Follow after Muhammad on the path of the Mi’raj. Let the universe see the lover. Let the angels be jealous of you. God has blown his breath into your soul, filling you with the light of Muhammad. O human, do what is befitting to you and what is expected of you. Become a lover. Become human! Above all, show your affinity to the Universal Spirit.

My students get cross with me. “There is love. There is!” they say. “What are you talking about, teacher? Our lives are already filled with love.” If they only heard my reproaches!

“What shortage of love are you talking about,” they ask me, “when people everywhere are constantly proclaiming their love for one another in the streets and on social media, and bookstore shelves are overflowing with self-help books and novels about love?” I would then respond, “What kind of love are *you* talking about? I am talking about divine love. Love cleansed with divine light!”

I am not bringing this up for nothing. This distinction is important, because in the dervish’s logbook there is a one-to-one correlation between divine light and love.

And so, the dervish who is devoid of love will remain untouched by divine light. In other words, the light that is bestowed upon the dervish will appear – and shine – in direct proportion to the love he has. Are we clear on that? Love is one and the same as the divine manifestation that renders God’s existence as something tangible within man.

However, there are two categories of love: figurative and divine. The first is artificial, imaginary, temporal, partial, incidental, etc. The other is the essential love, genuine love. This is also the ethical and aesthetic love.

In these conversations of ours, we are talking about the second one, God’s love. This aesthetic love has already taken root in your heart, and it will encircle and pervade everything, as does God’s mercy and compassion. So despair not!

Mevlana warns us. He says, “Save yourself from the love of form,” meaning do not fall for outward appearances and superficiality. After all, “The Beloved is hidden from view, but both worlds are filled with His love.”<sup>268</sup>

Mevlana then sums up our attitude on this matter:

“...I am in love with You and Your ability. Only infidels fall in love with that which you have wrought.”<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> 2:701

Do not forget that “Pursuit of the vulgar is like giving chase to a wild pig. The trouble knows no bounds and it is forbidden to eat a bite of it!”<sup>270</sup>

Do not chase after forbidden love or lustful passions. Believe me, these do not count as love.

“Only love is worth hunting, but not everyone’s trap can contain it.”<sup>271</sup>

You are a wounded gazelle. Go pursue the kohl-eyed gazelle and obtain the musk pod concealed within. Focus on the hunt and set yourself loose on its path. Lose yourself in the woods as you try to catch that gazelle. As you do this, what will love whisper in your ear? If you were Ibrahim ibn Adham, it would murmur, “It is better to be hunted than to be the hunter.” When Ibrahim ibn Adham was a worldly prince, he set out into the forest to hunt. A gazelle confronted him on the hunt and imparted those words on him. Though he set out to be the hunter Ibrahim became the hunted. This is the story of his conversion. Ibrahim ibn Adham abandoned his throne and became one of the earliest Sufi saints. So what we are saying is this: Be prey to that gazelle, the *ihsan al-kamil*. Let him make you experience genuine love.

Like I have said before, the dervish lodges serve as a wounded gazelle club. It has always been that way and always will. So, “Be the lover of those unseen lovers. Forget these flighty five-day lovers.”<sup>272</sup>

The unseen lovers are the “alchemists.” They turn the copper of their lover into gold. They sweeten their pain.

“Love clears the murky water. Pain finds its cure through the abundance of love.

Love revives the dead and makes the king a slave.

This love is the result of knowledge. The fool enjoys no such tranquility.”<sup>273</sup>

Turn and run towards real love, to love divine! And in case we are not clear on this, let me repeat what we already noted at the beginning our *Masnavi* readings:

“Do not say, ‘We have no access to that King.’ Dealing with the generous is not difficult.”<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> 3:1360

<sup>270</sup> 5:408

<sup>271</sup> 5:409

<sup>272</sup> 5:3203

<sup>273</sup> 2:1530-32

<sup>274</sup> 1:221

That King is love. Come to the everlasting love, come. The tranquility of your soul depends on it. This is the deathless love. All the prophets and saints knew that this love was the elixir itself. If God so grants it, every mortal will taste its flavor.

Mevlana beautifully puts this concept to paper:

“No lover can seek union without his beloved seeking him.  
For when the love of the lover begins to burn in the soul, this love pierces the heart of his beloved.  
If in your heart you have love for God, then doubtless God has love for you.  
No hand claps alone. No sound comes from one hand clapping without the other.  
The thirsty seek fresh water and the water seeks the thirsty.  
This thirst in us is the water beckoning to us. It cries out for us and we cry out for it.”<sup>275</sup>

Remember, love goes from great to small. God’s immense love for his servants is self-evident. Should you join the company of His most beloved servants, you too will experience that love. Following your initiation, you will direct that fire of love burning inside you towards your mentor. You will want to see him, speak with him, listen to his words. But in fact, he will love you more than you will love him. Know that he will even prefer you to his own child. These are the wiles of the path.

Mevlana expresses the same sentiment:

“Love with all your heart every perfect saint and rightly serve all those whose soul is pure.”<sup>276</sup>

So on this spiritual journey let your love be your Gabriel, let it be your “Burak,” carrying you upwards towards the heavens. Love is what enables us to transcend our earthly existence. It serves as the basic vehicle that takes us to the sama, to Him. As Fuzuli puts it in his famous poem, “*Su Kasidesi*” (Eulogy of Water), love sets us swiftly flowing down the mountains like a rush of water, towards our very essence. On this path, love is a “friend” to you, carrying you through your ordeal. Rumi cites another example:

“God occupied Joseph with love so that he may not succumb to the pain of imprisonment.  
God’s friendship so intoxicated him that he experienced neither the dungeon nor the darkness of that place.”<sup>277</sup>

Again, keep in mind that this love is not offered like this to everyone. The masters observe the dervish candidate, asking themselves, “Can he endure?” Rumi is right, in that “Love is not the pursuit for the spoiled and delicate who fear suffering and pain.

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<sup>275</sup> 3:4393, 3:4395-99

<sup>276</sup> 1:723

<sup>277</sup> 6:3414-15

O son! It is the business of wrestlers, of the brave heroes in whom love triumphs over desire.” Rumi goes on, saying to us, “What a brave hero you would be if you too were a lover like me.” That is, if you spent all your days in madness and all your nights in lament. If you went crazy with love, cleaving yourself to Him. If you completely surrendered to God!

Love requires strength, because love – in the words of Rumi – ravages you.

Love will consume you. “Love is that flame that, when it flares up, it torches everything but the Beloved.” Now listen well, wayfarer, we have arrived at the most important stop on the subject of love. Hear it from the reed flute. Understand what it says:

“The sword of *La* cuts down everything but God. Consider whether anything survives *La*?

All that remains is God; everything else has perished. That mighty love has set polytheism ablaze, consuming it whole.”<sup>278</sup>

This verse takes some explaining. Here Mevlana is making a reference to the *Shahada*, which in Arabic reads, “*La ilaha illa-llah.*” The English translation, of course, is “There is no god but God.” The “*la*” that appears in Mevlana’s verse is the Arabic word, “no,” which in this context is rejecting the existence of any god but God. The warrior who wields the sword is the lover. He swings at everything that is not God, and when his sword comes down, only God remains. All multiplicities have vanished, burned by the love that is God’s fire. When this fire kindles in the heart of the dervish, it burns away everything but Him, leaving only oneness.

The first part of the *Shahada* is “negation,” while the second part is “affirmation.” “No god” rejects temporality, while “but God” affirms that you recognize no other deity but God Almighty. Love, then, is your sword in negation and your reed flute in affirmation. You are expected to be at once the hand that wields the sword and the lips that blow into the reed. To be both a warrior and a saint is a lot to ask, but you will do it.

Love ravages you, sets you on fire and in the end annihilates you. You are subsumed in the Beloved!

“Both the lover as well as the Beloved have vanished. Both they themselves, as well as their love, were nothing anyway!”<sup>279</sup>

This verse is a bit difficult to grasp. Perhaps the meaning will become clearer once I provide the verse that immediately follows it:

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<sup>278</sup> 5:588-90

<sup>279</sup> 5:1205

“He is such a god that He exerts control over nothingness, making non-existence fall in love with non-existence.”<sup>280</sup>

It is our belief that when the lover, the Beloved, and love itself become one, when they become effaced within each other, they vanish into oneness, into God!

The ecstasy of the experience cannot compare to any earthly pleasure, so say the saints. It is worth everything. It is worth losing yourself. It is worth dying before dying! This is the return you get back on religion. Take it from Rumi:

“The gains of religion are love and inner rapture, O tenacious one. Understand that it is the ability to receive God’s light.”<sup>281</sup>

Love will “kill” you. I have said as much, and it is true, but I have left something out. You may be surprised. Sufism incorporates the balance of opposites. So prepare yourself to hear what I am about to say: Love renders the dervish deathless!

Mevlana considers a life spent without love to be no life at all. According to him, whoever does not feel that secret pang of love lacks both a heart and a soul, even if that person appears alive. They are as good as the walking dead. For love is the “water of life.” It is the pool of abundance. It renders man everlasting.

I cannot help but share a passage well known among Sufis:

“Those who drank the water of life in the spirit world on the Day of Alast die differently.

Those who are aware of the beyond, who unite and gather strength in God’s love, are set apart from the masses!

The lovers of God, by His grace, have surpassed even the angels!

Therefore, dying is not like it is for others; it is far and remote from them!

Do you really think that lions perish outside the gate like dogs?

Should the lovers of God die on the path of love, they will be greeted by the Sultan of their souls!

The lovers of God are cut from the same spirit and know they carry the same soul and the same covenant, and thus die in their mutual love.

Lovers soar to the sky while deniers throw their souls into the pits of hell!

When the lovers of God die, the eye of their soul open and they see beyond to the world of the Unseen! The others die blind and deaf in the fear of death.

Those who spend their nights in worship and sleep without the fear of God die a peaceful death when their time comes!

Those who go astray in this world, die huddled together like animals!

Those who wish to stay in God’s sight while living, who search for his gaze, give their love happily and pleasantly under that gaze!

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<sup>280</sup> 5:1206

<sup>281</sup> 2:2601



The King of the soul takes them into his gracious embrace. They do not die a low and contemptible death!

Those whose morals emulate those of Muhammad die like Abu Bakr and Umar!

Death indeed remains far from the lovers of God! They neither die nor disappear! I have said these words, 'If they must die, they should die like this!'"

These lines come from the *Divan-i Kabir*. In the *Masnavi*, Mevlana says that nobody is as mad as the lovers of God. But this is a madness particular to them. If this insanity were to befall a physician, says Mevlana, he would become obsessed with his illness, and out of his pleasure for it, he would scrub out his medical books with his own blood.<sup>282</sup>

Don't let me intimidate you. When you start to ascend on this spiritual journey you will experience many states – from fear to astonishment, from astonishment to obsessive infatuation – as the beauty of God reveals itself. The more you experience, the more your love will increase. Your sheikh is your travel companion. He will observe and stand watch over each one of your states.

The duty of these perfect mentors is first and foremost that of regulator. They regulate the voltage of love's electricity. If you are in a state of *sukr* they return you to *sahw*. They stand vigilant. They have no intention of making you go crazy. On the contrary, they give you the fuel for love that is proportionate to the size of your gas tank, to put it in layman's terms. It is imperative that first of all the car run on the correct fuel. Secondly, they must take that fuel (love) and channel it through the pipelines to where it is needed.

This is the reason we say that the Sufi path cannot be undertaken without a guide! This is not a journey traveled alone.

Have we left anything unsaid? We have! When God establishes himself in your soul, His love will dominate your heart, leaving no room for any other love. But there is something else we often forget.

The love of God causes your heart to expand, and His manifestations install in your heart the codes and dimensions of love. Through this divine "formatting" you will have learned what, who, and how much you must love.

You will love for the sake of God. You will still love your spouse, your children, your friends, your work, your country too, but as Yunus Emre said, "I love what has been created, but on account of the Creator." Therein lies the magic. Attain this state, and love. That will suffice. Spread that positive energy called love. Let those ripples of love fan out in waves. Then just maybe the world will become a more livable place.

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<sup>282</sup> 6:1979-81

So let us enliven God's domain. After all, was that not God's wish at the time of Creation?

A person filled with love is a "guardian angel" in my book.

I hope that when mankind rights itself, the system will also right itself. Social scientists insist change begins with the individual, but they never say how love will be injected into his heart in order to perfect him. Inserting ethics courses into the school curricula does little to alleviate this shortcoming. This is stage then at which Sufism steps in to teach mankind how to love.

Someone who knows how to love is a true servant and devotee. This dervish lovingly performs his duties to God. Rumi gives us a glimpse showing what kind of love and servitude this is:

"I am completely smitten by his grace as well as his destructive capability. Extraordinary how I can be in love with these two opposites!"<sup>283</sup>

Could a person who can reconcile within a holistic system such differences – opposites even – ever be able to bring themselves to "other" others? Everything has a purpose, of which only God knows. So why do people who don't question the Creator, question His creations, who, through love, have surrendered to Him?

"For those invigorated by love, anything short of devout servitude is blasphemy."<sup>284</sup>

As I have been saying, God loves those who are in love with Him, because, "Though the daily ritual prayers are performed five times a day, lovers are in a perpetual state of prayer."<sup>285</sup> They perform "perpetual *dhikr*" not out of duty, but out of intense love.

Mevlana has coined for us dervishes a wonderful nickname: "Community of Love." Listen closely to the verse that follows this coinage:

"O lovers, drink the elixir of life! You are now everlasting; eternity is yours.  
O empty hearts, fall in love. Breathe in the scent of Joseph!  
O Solomon, master of birdsong, sing the language of every bird!"<sup>286</sup>

Notice how in the above verses the concepts we have been discussing throughout our conversations come together and compliment one another. Drink, scent, speak! I

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<sup>283</sup> 1:1570

<sup>284</sup> 5:1866

<sup>285</sup> 6:2669

<sup>286</sup> 4:849-51

think we will soon crack the language of the *Masnawi*, don't you? Once you burn with the fire of the Compassionate, the rest is easy.

All this love we have talked about today deserves a poem. All Sufi poems have been basted with love, but for some reason my heart took me to this anonymous work:

*"I became hooked by this love  
I became cooked in its fires  
I burned and I burned  
I became the furnace  
Hû<sup>287</sup>*

*I am churning in Your love  
I am burning like a furnace  
I am imploring God on high  
Hû*

*So bind me and chain me  
And find me on the True path  
I have fallen in love with God  
Hû."*

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<sup>287</sup> Hû literally means "he," and in the Sufi context, refers to God. Some Sufis believe it is the most beautiful of God's names. It is also the sheik's affirmative answer when asking permission to enter or leave.

## 11 THINK!

*“The thought is that which brings a person to the path.  
The path is that whose traveller becomes a king.”<sup>288</sup>*

We have been together for while now, wayfarer, and we have passed through quite a few stations.

Perhaps you have noticed that the stations in the “dervish’s logbook” have been indexing the different stages of the nafs, the process of tempering of your carnal soul. I mentioned these stations at the onset of this book. But as we go along don’t preoccupy yourself with whether or not you will be able to overcome each station or how long it will take to do so. Take it in stride.

The dervish’s eyes must be on the path, true, but they must also be fixed on the destination. Yet if you have the reoccurring urge to ask yourself when you will attain the level of sheikh, then you have failed to grasp the meaning of this journey. The dervish comes out of dervishhood. Believe me when I say I never harbored that conceit when I was a wayfarer. And you mustn’t either!

The nafs has seven stages of development, or levels of being. Rest assured that as you experience this process, your mentor will know where you stand and how much you have matured. Taking his cues from divine signs, he will adjust your lessons at once should he deem you tempered at that stage. That is the murshid’s responsibility on this path. He will not delay you for even a minute.

As we keep quiet, listen, and burn, we hope that the chosen dervish, has left behind that animal nafs. This is that *nafs al-ammarah* we mentioned earlier, the “commanding” self. Having tempered it, a new reality unfolds before you: critical self-evaluation.

At this stage, we begin working on the *nafs al-lawwamah*, the “accusatory” nafs. Here the dervish begins to examine and question himself. At this stop we tell the dervish to “Think!” Think! But from where will you start to think? From your past. You must go through your life, frame by frame, as though you are watching a reel of film. Yes, O wayfarer, it is the time of reckoning.

You must put yourself on trial, as you have now reached a point of maturation that allows you to decipher true right from wrong.

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<sup>288</sup> 2:3207

But as you condemn yourself, your nafs, do not go overboard. Think about the opportunities for learning as you examine the episodes and events from your life, past and present. If you can say, "I learned from the mistakes I made and the sins I committed," then you are on the road to perfecting yourself. Do not hold back. Continue on the path. Your past will be the guide to your future.

I am a historian by trade, in case you didn't know. Can you guess why we study history? We do so to learn from past mistakes and successes. Ancient civilizations that knew their history also clearly understood their present, and could make accurate predictions about the future. This is history's function as a discipline in the social sciences. History repeats itself only for fools who refuse to learn from the past.

Critical self-evaluation requires you to lay down your own history on the dissection table and conduct an anatomic analysis on it. This journey involves many such operations. After all, didn't your mentor evaluate your heart like a surgeon at the beginning of this endeavor? Now it's your turn!

Think long and hard, and find your mistakes. Learn and move on.

Thinking is performed by the mind. It requires you to have intelligence. But not any old intelligence, a certain intelligence.

Sufism teaches people how to use their mind, and shows them which kind of intelligence to nurture. We will center today's conversation around this goal.

We tell a little joke among ourselves where one day everyone put their minds up for sale at the market. And since they have no minds, they are now in the market for a new one. They go shopping at the same market, picking up and trying out different minds. At the end of the day, however, everyone ends up buying back their own mind.

For whatever reason, we all love our own minds. Sure, some people may envy the minds of others say of famous geniuses like Steve Jobs, or they may pick out a few mind-enhancing books from the shelves of the self-improvement section in hopes of acquiring a piece of that genius for themselves. But this does not fall outside the above generalization, because the same sense of narcissism is at the root of both. As long as narcissism still exists in a person's disposition, we can't expect anything more from them. But Sufism helps people triumph over narcissism and progress towards selflessness.

Let me tell you a secret: Every stage of the nafs has its own intelligence, system of thought, and conscience. The mind evolves with each passing stage. People in general – if they can learn from their experiences – often remark with a tinge of regret, "Ah, if I had had the mind I have now, I would not have done that!" Our minds change on the path.

Sufism makes it clear that we have two minds. One is the “acquired” mind, which develops through experience. The other is the mind God grants us, which comes through self-denial and the perfection of the spirit. This is accomplished by reaching God, the master of your intelligence.

But let me reiterate one point: This cannot be achieved through your old, narcissistic and self-centered mind and reasoning! Yunus Emre tells it how it is:

*“Through mind and reasoning God cannot be found.  
A salve for a wound such as this cannot be found.  
They sell our souls at the bazaar of love.  
I would sell my soul but a buyer cannot be found.”*

But why not?

Because the “thoughts” that come from this kind of intelligence and reasoning are dominated by delusions and fantasies. As Mevlana says, “To put it bluntly, your imagination, ideas, emotions, and perceptions are but a child’s hobby horse.”<sup>289</sup>

A mind like that is tantamount to straddling a broomstick with a stuffed horse’s head on it, and parading around in the streets as if it were the real thing. As adults, this mentality makes us look ridiculous. It’s a shame these minds don’t know that “Many a mind as colossal as a mountain has been submerged in the depths of imagination and in the seas of fantasy.”<sup>290</sup>

These imaginative minds, clever as they are, not only do harm their owners, but also to the society in which they live. Delusions and fantasies act as the highwayman on the road to *yaqin*. This is why the people of the book were split into seventy-two nations.

Rumi compares this type of mind to a bat:

*“But most minds, when they delve into thought, prefer the darkness, like the bat.”*<sup>291</sup>

They give reign to dark thoughts. If only they would devote their minds to the good, but they don’t!

And one of the symptoms of a negative mind is pride, according to Rumi. Never mind that pride is also one of the seven cardinal sins! If only people would read the *Masnavi*. I want to scream out, “Read it folks! It tells your story!”

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<sup>289</sup> 1:3345

<sup>290</sup> 5:2654

<sup>291</sup> 6:3392

“The intellectual knows thousands of subjects, but being heartless he knows not his own soul.”<sup>292</sup>

Yunus comes up once again:

*“Knowledge is knowing knowledge.  
Knowledge is knowing yourself.  
If you do not know yourself  
Then what was the point of college?”*

Knowing yourself has two meanings. The first is to know your own true self, your essence. The second is to be in the right mind, to reach maturity, and to keep from going astray, for God does not favor the heedless. For whatever reason, we humans cannot leave the Pharaoh’s “house of hubris.” The nafs shrouds our minds in darkness. We struggle to find the door out. But first we must find the light. This requires a different kind of intelligence, a point Mevlana emphasizes here:

“As cleverness and intelligence predisposes you towards pride, become a fool so that your heart stays sound!  
Do not assume we are talking about the fool who talks gibberish. We are talking about the genuine fool, who is a mystified devotee of God.  
These fools are like those Egyptian women who lost their senses at the sight of Joseph’s beauty and cut their hands.”<sup>293</sup>

The last line is a reference to a scene from Joseph’s life in *Stories of the Prophets*. Joseph was known for his remarkable beauty. Having been sold downriver by his brothers, he became a slave in Egypt. Zuleika, the wife the captain of the Pharaoh’s palace guard, became infatuated with her handsome young slave. Many of Zuleika’s friends, who were among the ladies of the court, disparaged her love for Joseph. Yet they had never seen Joseph. To teach her friends a lesson she prepared for them a trick. She invited them over for fruit and tea, and had Joseph wait on them. Joseph’s beauty enchanted them so much that as the women were peeling their fruit, they cut clear through the fruit and into their hands without feeling it.

For Sufis, this story symbolizes man losing his senses when confronted with the beauty of God. When Rumi uses the word “fool” in the above verse, he means someone who is lost in the ecstatic throes of God’s compassion.

In fact many of the words that connote “fool” in the Turko-Perso-Arabic lexicon stem from the word *abdal*, which in Sufism is the highest rank of saint. *Abdal* in turn is the Arabic plural of *badal*, a word that means equivalency or price. The title is reserved for those who, out of the love of God, traded their lives so that mankind

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<sup>292</sup> 3:2648

<sup>293</sup> 4:1421-23

may have peace. Ali, *Ahl al-Bayt*, the twelve imams, and the martyrs at the Battle of Karbala are all considered to be *abdal*. The people say that every era has its warrior saints of *abdal* rank, but only God knows for sure if this is true. In any case, the *abdal* are those whose eyes and hearts are open.

To the unwise and uninitiated, the enlightened condition of the *abdal* may have looked strange, even foolish. Think of the dervish, wearing simple robes, who, by virtue of his pure heart, desires nothing of the material world but the bare minimum of sustenance. In today's society, he would be, and is, regarded as a fool. Yet the Qur'an says, "Heaven is filled with fools."

God protects the pure and rewards them in paradise. Let's hope that after all this reading, you do not succumb to the doubts sown by the mind. Remember, there is a positive mind, as well as a negative. Mevlana explains these minds, or intelligences:

"There are two kinds of intelligences. The first is acquired, like how a child learns at school.

From books, teachers, thinking, explanations, and knowledge fine and pure. Your mind then becomes greater than those of others, but once again your memory gets bogged down.

In the end you become a recording slate. But he who can pass beyond this becomes a Preserved Slate!

The second intelligence is God's gift; its fount is in the soul.

When the river of knowledge gushes from your heart, it does not become contaminated and polluted!

So what if its plumbing gets shut off; it rushes out of the house of the soul continuously!

The acquired intelligence, however, resembles a river that flows to the house from an outside.

When that supply line is cut, the water cannot flow to the house. So find that spring within your heart!"<sup>294</sup>

Mevlana lays it down for us so clearly that there is no need to provide further interpretation.

Well, here is a quandary. There are two different intelligences in man, but only one man! What I want to impart is this: The positive and the negative aspects of intelligence exist in the same person, side by side. In the mind of man, the wind blows from both directions.

Mevlana takes this wind metaphor and applies it to this topic:

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<sup>294</sup> 4:1965-68



“The thought that comes from the east is that lovely *saba* wind, and that which blows from the other direction is the pestilent west wind.”<sup>295</sup>

What does Mevlana mean by this?

As wayfarers, we better understand the names and directions of the winds of Rumi’s world. The *saba* wind blows from the east. It is light and reassuring. The westerly *lodos* wind, on the other hand, blows in dust from the desert, disrupting the body’s balance and causing aches and pains. In fact, the *lodos* immediately triggers my migraines. And just like the directional winds, the winds of thought can blow from the east, bringing knowledge, wisdom, and truth, or they can blow in ignorance and aberration from the west.

But why?

“The east of this wind of thought is something else entirely, whereas the west of this wind of thought is from that other side.”<sup>296</sup>

Mevlana is saying that thoughts borne on the east wind come from the “soul” or “spirit,” whereas the thoughts riding on the west wind originate from the nafs. The body is home to both these directions, but we must steer towards the easterly wind. We do this by keeping our mind under control. We temper it, train it, decommission it – however you want to call it. The language of the Sufis is rich. We know what needs to be done. The mind will be transformed, there is no escaping that!

The mind of the professor, as long as it acknowledges divine knowledge – albeit externally – is worthy of congratulation. Now imagine that mind being cleansed by the wind of the soul. This is what they mean when they say “enlightening” the mind. While other minds remain untamed like a weed, that of the saint is “the mind of the mind of the mind.” That phrase is not mine, but Rumi’s. Here is the verse from which it comes:

“The saints are the mind of the minds. All other minds mind them as though they themselves were camels and the saints their masters.”<sup>297</sup>

But can a person be enslaved to another person? It has happened throughout history and unfortunately still continues today. Instances of slavery generate a huge outcry for the sake of human rights. And so they should. I too am outraged when others are oppressed. Yet no one raises so much as a finger against people oppressing themselves! What I mean is, mankind has become the master of all things – and we do not hesitate to let everyone know it – yet we have failed to

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<sup>295</sup> 4:3055

<sup>296</sup> 4:3056

<sup>297</sup> 1:2498

become masters over our own selves. And not even close! People are still “slaves” to their nafs, to their desires and dark thoughts.

The saint has rescued his mind from the malevolent clutches of his nafs. His mind has obtained freedom. Now that takes skill! That is knowledge!

As we have mentioned before, the Prophet Muhammad is the City of Knowledge, and the city gate is Ali. So come, let’s search for that gate and see what kind of wise wind will blow towards us out through that gate.

Consider this story:

As Ali was fighting in the Battle of Khaybar, his enemy spit into his face, that face, which was the “countenance of God’s beauty.” What an offence to spit in such a noble face!

But instead of retaliating, Ali threw his sword down to the ground. Though he had set out to vanquish his opponent, he ended up disengaging him. But why?

“Ali said, ‘I drew my sword on the path of God, for I am a servant of the Lord. Do not think me a slave to the nafs... It was necessary to sheath my sword, as there was another reason to partake in battle... My liberty is that I am not a slave of perpetual anger and rage. My bondage is God’s attributes.’”<sup>298</sup>

Ali’s actions and the “knowledge” in his words split the soul of his enemy, revealing to him his own heart. Filled with regret, he fell to his knees, grabbed hold of Ali’s skirts, and said to him:

“Your sword of compassion has rent my soul. The water of your knowledge has cleansed my earth... Since you are the gate to the City of Knowledge, the sun in the sky of clemency, Be open to those who want wisdom, and allow the rind to enter the core of benevolence.”<sup>299</sup>

Ali then said to his adversary, “Come.” Was not “come” our first subject of conversation? Here on the battlefield too, Ali calls his fortunate enemy to the threshold. So just think, if even an enemy of Ali was able to take advantage of his benevolence, imagine what secrets a friend, a servant of the path, would receive!

At any rate, Ali declares:

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<sup>298</sup> 1:3787, 3802, 3812

<sup>299</sup> 1:3746, 3763-64

“Come in, I have opened the door to you. I have made a pure wine of your spit.  
I am granting a favor to he who has done evil. I risk my life for those who obey God.  
O the gifts the righteous can expect from me. Treasures and wealth everlasting.”<sup>300</sup>

Let’s pause for a second on the issue of liberty. What good is knowledge if it will not liberate mankind? Why was the mind given to us if it were not to make us our own masters? There are all these concepts dancing around in the air here: thought, mind, knowledge, clemency, slave, master, etc. Can we discern a clear choreography from all this chaos? People want to solve the puzzle. By all means, let them solve it. Sit tight, the answer is coming. Once again from the *Masnavi*:

“The exalted Prophet named himself and Ali both master and protector,  
Declaring, ‘Whoever is under my protection is also under the protection of my cousin Ali.’  
The master is the one who frees you and removes from your feet the shackles of slavery.  
Prophethood lights the way to freedom. Hence the believers are granted their liberty by the prophets...  
His cues are the cues of eternity. He has transcended all delusions, leaving them far behind.”<sup>301</sup>

Mevlana reins in the raucous dance with these clarifying verses. The master is the liberator. The prophets guide you along the path to liberation. The cues are divine knowledge and Ali is the gate. And knowledge does not have to be read. As you may know, the Prophet was illiterate. That is, he could neither read nor write. Yet his ability to channel the Universal Mind allowed him to set himself and his fellow men free. Speaking of illiteracy I am reminded of a story.

There was once a great saint, who also happened to be a great reader. He was never without a book in hand. People gathered around him one day, and said, “O holy one! What do you expect to gain from all this reading? Why are you putting so much strain on yourself?”

His answer was brilliant:

“So that I can become illiterate!”

But you would have to know Arabic to fully comprehend the genius – and the deep meaning – of his reply. The word the saint used for illiterate was “*ummi*,” whose root

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<sup>300</sup> 1:3841-43

<sup>301</sup> 6:4538-41, 4569

is “*umm*,” meaning mother, parentage, center, primal – you get the idea. But do you get his meaning? If it’s not quite clear, “think” a little more on it. We are now approaching the characteristic that separates the Prophet’s mind from that of the common people. Do you remember the source of Muhammad’s noble intelligence?

The Universal Mind!

“Concerning the Universal Mind, God said, ‘The sight of the prophet did not swerve.’ The lesser mind, however, looks every which way. It is this unwavering sight that serves as the light of the chosen, while the intellect of the crow presides over the spiritually dead as head gravedigger! The spirit that takes the crow as its guide lands in the boneyard! Do not submit to your corvine nafs! It shall lead you not to the garden but to the grave!”<sup>302</sup>

We will dig deeper into the subject of sight later on in our conversation on “see”ing. Let’s keep it in the back of our minds for now as we continue on our way.

O dervish! Bathe your mind in your heart, because:

“Ideas are the flowers that sprout in the soil of the soul. They convey the secrets of the heart. If he finds himself in the company of those who foster conversation, he will grow, like a magnificent rose garden, hundreds of thousands of roses.”<sup>303</sup>

Those who foster discourse are the saints enlightened by Muhammad’s Universal Mind. They know both the knowledge acquired through the senses and the knowledge attained through inner revelation and revealing. The former is known as *ilm*, while the latter is *irfan*, or gnosis. Gaining both types of knowledge is extremely difficult. It requires the Sufi to pass through four stages of knowledge. These stages have become the path’s slogan: *Shariat – tariqat – haqiqat – marifat*. *Shariat* is the outwardly, exoteric path, consisting of the principles and laws of religion. *Tariqat* is the inwardly, esoteric path. This is the spiritual journey that we are undertaking here. Next we have *haqiqat*, the truth. The goal of the Sufi path is to obtain the knowledge of the universe by way of communion with God. Finally we have *marifat*, connoting ultimate knowledge and awareness. This is our final goal. Whether we will reach this end stage is unknown, but there is one thing I know for sure: Become not just a scholar but a knower.

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<sup>302</sup> 4:1309-12,

<sup>303</sup> 4:1318-19

For you to get a clearer understanding of what I mean, we must return once again to Arabic. The word for scholar is *alim*, which comes from *ilm*, meaning learned knowledge, or knowledge attained through the rational mind. The word for knower, on the other hand, is *arif*, which is derived from *irfan*, that is, spiritual knowledge. A “knower” then, is a gnostic. *Marifat*, the final stage of knowledge, also has its roots in *irfan*.

You may pursue knowledge and become a philosopher. Fine. You may become a fanatic and sequester yourself from your fellow man. That would be a shame. But what if you knew that you could become a gnostic? Those who know realize the value in this. We need gnostics, and we need to be gnostics.

What exactly is a gnostic?

Rumi describes a gnostic as someone who is “like a pen held by the mighty hand of God.”<sup>304</sup>

I cannot expound on this right now, for there is so much bottled up in this short sentence. Hopefully we will uncap it later, but for now give it a thought and that will suffice. Mevlana goes on:

“The goal of the enlightened is to receive the light of Muhammad.”

Here we see the literal connection between the spiritual “light” and the state of “enlightenment.” If you fail to receive this light and become enlightened, then you better give it up, for “the gnostic is oriented toward the light of union.”<sup>305</sup>

Wow, the light of union. This is the light that bathes us when we unite with the Beloved. What a beautiful image this paints! And just what does the light that flows from this union distribute to the mind? Let’s give that a thought.

Rumi once again comes through with the answer:

“...And so divine inspiration, which sees the Unseen, enlightens the mind.”<sup>306</sup>

Inspiration enlightens. The mind must take shelter under the umbrella of inspiration. Such a mind becomes light! On the one hand, we have the sickly mind we mentioned at the outset of this conversation, the one that conspires and sows doubt. And on the other, we have the mind adorned with this light, which spreads peace, wisdom and healing to mankind. I suppose you are wondering if it is difficult to switch from one mind to the other, or to transform the first into the second. I will tell you that you can do it if you believe you can. Believe and achieve! However,

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<sup>304</sup> 1:393

<sup>305</sup> 6:1897

<sup>306</sup> 6:2970

many schools in Islamic communities have taught the atheist's creed as the history of science. As a result, they have brought science into direct opposition with religion. They preached that you must extricate yourself from belief if you wanted to be an enlightened intellectual. They tried to transfer the struggle between Church and science in western history to the Islamic world. And unfortunately it has gained traction among many Muslims.

But reason! Do not dim the hearts of the people with positivism. I fretted about these issues throughout my entire academic career, so I can go on and on about the subject, but it's not worth the trouble. But yes, the positive sciences require the reasoning mind. That's fine. It is imperative to have all the scientific methods in your toolbox. Nobody here will object to that. So I don't understand why the defenders of "materialism" resent us so. But we say this: "Mind and reasoning" will only get you so far.

We do not want to get God mixed up in the issue here. Your scientific ability is not always adequate for accessing even the mysteries of creation, i.e. the natural world, let alone the Creator. Stay on the path, we are saying.

We are all trying to learn the "truth of things." We pick up an object and behold it, wondering what it is. If only it could explain itself! Alas, the object waits for us to figure it out. We strive to identify it. Forgive me if I am oversimplifying the process. In any case, we scrutinize the object and under the microscope it becomes a concept, a fact. Yet the analysis of the object is influenced by the subject's point of view. This is especially true in the social sciences. Put another way, the researcher's culture directs his or her research and colors the conclusion. It is impossible to remain completely "objective." Mark that as number one.

Secondly, millions of scholars use the same scientific methodology. But then why does a certain scientist hit upon a discovery or invention when the others do not? What makes this scientist so fortunate? What leads him or her towards a particular research direction that others have not yet thought of?

"Intuition!"

You can also call this inspiration. If you are a believer, you can say this is a gift from God. That gift has arrived on account of your enlightened mind! Got it? During dhikr or the sama, the great masters of the path have imparted to me the solutions for countless problems.

At that moment of afflatus, you receive the answer as though a direct connection has been established, like plugging a cord into an electrical socket. This is, in fact, the whole reason you have begun to worship. When the link between God and Man is established, the flux of light nourishes you mentally, and your ideas give way to expertise. It is a decisive moment!

When you surpass this state, you will stop and look at yourself, and say, “How did I not think of this earlier!”

But that’s not all. I am holding in my hand an even more scientific method. I have not yet cast it aside. This is the Sufi system of knowledge (and the corresponding scientific methodology founded on this system), which provides the answer to the stuffy epistemological problems of the twenty-first century. I am asserting that the process of tempering the mind found in Sufi literature is even relevant and beneficial to carrying out straight science. Sufis do not reject the mind; rather we cultivate it. We deem this process necessary to move on to the next step.

Let me remind you how we arrive at knowledge in Sufism. It is first through a methodology known as *ilm al-yaqin*, the “Knowledge of Certainty.”

This is just the point of entry. At this stage we study what has previously been studied and written about a given topic. We read books and take classes on the given topic.

*Ayn al-yaqin*, the “Eye of Certainty,” comes to us at the second stage. This is the witnessed truth. You do your own research by gathering facts, forming hypotheses and testing them. You then examine your findings.

The results we have drawn are scientific. What we have presented must be viable based on the principle of “refutability.” Our factual model stands as a very scientific prediction or possible scenario. That is, until another theory comes along to disprove it. Our theory can be close to the truth. It could even be reality itself, or it may not be likely at all. How will we know? Here is where we depart from the scientific method.

“Objects speak. Take heed.” But really, they do not speak. At least we do not hear what they are saying to us in their language of form, and if we do, we do not understand it. Then how can we have our facts confirmed? By asking the one who created that object, whatever it may be. We ask the Creator!

We call this “*haqq al-yaqin*,” the Truth of Certainty. This is the third and final level in the Sufi “Theory of Knowledge.” *Haqq al-yaqin* comes from experience, whereas the first level comes from the thinking mind and the second from sight. “I heard about it,” then “I saw it,” and finally “I became one with it.”

“Wow!” you may have said to yourself. Let me try to provide you with an example of *haqq al-yaqin*. My son has been interested in cars ever since he was a small child, in driving them as well as in their design. He was not content with learning how to drive; he wanted to race. As a matter of fact, he used to work at the Formula 1 races in Istanbul.

My son gave his heart and soul to automobile engineering. He bought all sorts of car

magazines and would try to understand how everything worked by reading anything he could get his hands on about the mechanics and manufacturing of cars. That is what we mean by *Ilm al-yaqin*, the “Knowledge of Certainty.”

And if that was not enough, one day I was looking for my car in the parking garage of the building complex where we lived. It was not where I had parked it, though I was positive I had left it there. I searched everywhere, but to no avail. Then I heard a voice from the lower level of the garage. I immediately ran down there and lo and behold, there was my son. He had completely dismantled my car with a friend of his who was an expert in car modification. Every part lay strewn across the floor. Our rusty old car had been peeled like a banana. “What on earth are you doing?” I asked him.

“Nothing! I am trying to get to know the car.” I did not get mad. How could I? It was clear what he had done: *Ayn al-yaqin*. He had seen how the car came apart, what it was made of.

“Don’t worry,” he reassured me. “I’ll put it back the way it was.” And he did too. Eventually.

Later, before he had managed to reconstruct the car, I could see he was experiencing some problems. So I asked him. “What seems to be the trouble?”

He explained what he had done in great detail. I am not mechanically inclined, but what I could gather was that he was struggling with the cause and effect relationships between the different parts. He could neither find what he needed to know in the books nor could he comprehend the dissected car by distinguishing the parts using the reductionism method.

So he asked me, “What should I do about it?”

“Simple,” I said. “You find the person who designed the car and ask this expert, and he or she will tell you.” He did just that and got the car back together. That is what we call *haqq al-yaqin*.

Everything you see around you is first designed in the abstract (*batin*), and then poured into its form, becoming tangible (*zahir*).

This is God’s system! We say in Sufism that we are starting from the “invention” and working our way back toward the “inventor.”

Mevlana explains its implications:

“Your thought, ‘See true and look clearly,’ is once again the light and radiance of that pearl!



Whenever an answer comes to the heart via the ear, the eye says, ‘Never mind that, listen to me!’<sup>307</sup>

This is because:

“The ear is an intermediary while the eye is in immediate union with reality. The eye has direct access while the ear relies on words. In the ear’s hearing there is a superficial transformation, but in the seeing of the eye there is a transformation of essence.”<sup>308</sup>

The ear only picks up the external, exoteric qualities of the “invention.” So often we receive the answers to our problems via our ears, but Rumi tells us to leave that laden aural information by the wayside. Instead we must orient ourselves toward the heart, where the divine breath comes into the soul. This is what he means by “seeing true.” And it is the pearl of wisdom that gives us the idea to do this. If by God you possess this discerning sight, you will learn the truth of things. In Sufism this is called the “Knowledge of Essences.” So look to your heart and try to find the true meaning, significance, essence. This is achieved through seeing. Seeing is greater than hearing.

As Sufis, we are more aligned with the “inventor” than the “invention.” We are taking the invention as the starting point and working our way towards its inventor. This is called “induction.” There is also the concept of learning about the invention from the inventor. We call this “deduction.” At any rate, our struggle is to reach the inventor, that is, to arrive at God, the inventor of everything.

“Why?” you may ask. “What is the point?” The answer is simple and clear: We are commanded to do so. God declared, “I created the universe so that I may be known and loved.”

Do you understand now our struggle and the reason behind our exertion? Every effort we make on the path is for the purpose of getting closer to God. Period. We strive so that we may see that point of unity!

Soon we will discuss the topic of seeing, but for now, consider the wisdom of “thinking.” I have tried the best I can to explain to you what we mean when we say, “think,” and to emphasize its wisdom.

What is there left to say?

Allow me to close today’s conversation with these lines from the *Masnavi*, which will further elucidate today’s subject matter:

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<sup>307</sup> 2:856-7

<sup>308</sup> 2:858-59

“You may assume I am seated beside you, but that which is beside you is my shadow. I am seated at a level that is above your thoughts,  
As I have passed beyond all thoughts and imagination. My place is outside of thought.

I rule over my thoughts and fantasies rather than being held prisoner by them, not unlike the builder who makes his building as he wishes.

The majority of mankind is at the whim of their own thoughts and fancies. For that they are perpetually ill and anxious.

If I should purposely engross myself in thought, I would immediately bounce back from that anxiety, and escape.

I am a bird flying high while anxiety is but a tiny fly below. Can any fly hope to reach me?”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> 2:3556-61

## 12 READ!

*"Whoever has enjoyed the inspiration  
of God can do no wrong."*<sup>310</sup>

Welcome back once again. Glad to see you are still here with this. We are always overjoyed whenever someone shows an interest in Sufism. As long as the soul finds the Beloved. And you, O wayfarer, are the soul.

"What is the soul? The soul is that which is conscious of good and evil, and that which rejoices from virtue and weeps from harm.  
As the soul's very nature makes man aware of good and evil, the more aware man is of the soul the more beauty his soul finds."<sup>311</sup>

The beauty of the soul comes from the Beloved. We have covered a great distance together, wayfarer. In our last conversation we discussed "*irfan*," the deep spiritual knowledge and awareness that the path gradually bestows upon us. Let's pick up from there.

*"Irfan* is the effect of the spirit. Holy is he who is endowed with this in excess. For *irfan* is the light of the soul, and with it the soul of the gnostic grows stronger.  
This knowledge is the soul of the whole universe. Whoever lacks this knowledge is but an inanimate object."<sup>312</sup>

*Irfan*, oh *irfan*, where to begin! Don't worry, I did come prepared. I want you to continue to "read" from the lines below. It starts right where the above lines leave off and goes on to tell how Muhammad's locks open and how to break the seals. Begin with "He is the intercessor in this world and the next..."

"...In this world he guides you to religion, and in the next to paradise. He says, 'Show them the true way in the temporal world, and shower them with benevolence in the eternal world.'  
In public and in private, he prayed to God, 'O Lord, guide them on their way, for they certainly know not.'  
Through his breath, both doors are open. In both worlds his prayers are answered.  
He is therefore the Seal of the Prophets. No one like him has come before and no one like him shall come again...  
He is the last to open the locks, and is the Seal in the world of the life givers.

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<sup>310</sup> 1:225

<sup>311</sup> 6:148-49

<sup>312</sup> 6:150-51

The signs of Muhammad are openings within openings within openings.  
A hundred thousand blessings on his soul, his holy era, and the age of this  
progeny!"<sup>313</sup>

As you may have noticed, we just recited a *salawat* in that last line, whereby we praise Muhammad and ask God to bless him and his family. I was reciting it in my head, but it is proper to begin such meetings with invocation, exaltation, and adoration.

Let's go back to that era, to the day when the Qur'an's first command came down to our beloved Prophet: "*Iqra!*"

*Iqra* means "read" or "recite." It is the first word of the first verse of Surah Al-'Alaq, the first five verses of which are the initial piece of revelation that came to Muhammad via the archangel Gabriel:

"Recite in the name of your Lord who created –  
Created man from a clinging substance."<sup>314</sup>

"Recite" appears again at the beginning of the surah's third verse:

"Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous."<sup>315</sup>

Yet when Gabriel commanded him to read, do you know what Muhammad said?

He said, "But how can I read it? I am illiterate."

Gabriel pressed him again, and again Muhammad professed his illiteracy. They went through this three times. Finally, the angel bore down on his chest and Muhammad read the five lines.

Thus began "The Recitation," also known as the Qur'an, which was revealed to Muhammad over the course of two decades. All its 6,000 odd verses were recited by a man who could neither read nor write.

When interpreting the command, "*iqra!*", Sufis stress the point that Muhammad was not commanded to recite from a page, but from his heart.

Do you understand the subtlety here? "Read what is in your heart!" That is what Gabriel was asking of Muhammad.

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<sup>313</sup> 6:167-71, 173-75

<sup>314</sup> The Qur'an, Al-'Alaq 96:1-2

<sup>315</sup> The Qur'an, Al-'Alaq 96:3

That heart was raised in the way of the Lord and nurtured in eternity. It is Muhammad's heart, the heart of the "chosen one." That supreme book of ours came down from on high, flowing as revelation into the heart of the Prophet.

In Sufi terminology, the names for these divine messages – revelation, inspiration, reward – differ according to how they are received, but all of them enter through the heart, where they are read. If you were to ask me, these messages were the original reading materials. What we read elsewhere are the interpretations of these primary sources. It is this kind of "reading" that we will discuss today. I would also like you know another important term in the Sufi lexicon, and that is *khawatir*. This is a catchall term used for remembrances, thoughts, inspirations, and ideas that enter the heart.

Can you guess where I am going from here?

Remember! What is it that we must remember? Allow me to expand the question: What memory must mankind never forget as long as we live?

Just a moment ago we told you that God said to Muhammad, "Read!" But what did He say to mankind? Did we not hear God's voice? We did.

On the Day of Alast, God Almighty took our souls before Him and said, "Am I not your Lord?" And we replied back, "Yes." Then we departed from that world. We tasted the ecstasy of being worthy of his voice before he sent us into this world. To relive that moment, to hear that voice again (in our hearts), is the inexhaustible obsession of the Sufi.

The moment at which we took our leave from Him was so heartbreaking that the reed flute began to moan, as it does in the opening lines of the *Masnawi*. The dervishes pine to hear that voice once more in their hearts.

There exist those in this world who converse with the Creator by reading what has descended into their hearts. If you delve into the *Masnawi* you will find many examples of this. One instance is when a voice from the Unseen says to Umar in a dream, "Give a certain sum from the coffers of the public treasury to the man sleeping in the cemetery."

There was an elderly minstrel who used to make his living as an entertainer. But he had grown old, and people would no longer look at his face. He fell into destitution and began to regret his life. One day he entered a graveyard. "Today," he said, "I will perform for you, God, and weep out of pity for myself." Not too far away, Umar, the great caliph, was at home asleep. At that very moment a voice from the Unseen came to him:

"It was that voice, which is the origin of every voice. That voice is indeed the original, and every other voice is its echo.

Turk, Kurd, Persian, and Arab alike hear that voice with no ear or mouth involved.

Not only them, but trees, mountains, and stones have also understood that voice.

The secret of Alast, 'Am I not your Lord?', emanates from Him at every moment. Matter and signs come to life upon discerning this.

Though there may be no apparent 'Yes,' from them, their coming into existence from nothing is as good as 'Yes.'" <sup>316</sup>

That voice instructed Umar to donate to the old minstrel, and the caliph fulfilled this command. Through this divine favor, the aging entertainer found peace both materially and spiritually.

The importance here as it relates to our topic is primarily that the divine message reaches the chosen people, and that they read it and immediately understand the mission God has reserved for them. Umar read the message and did what he had to do.

In this conversation we will really get into the meaning and function of "reading."

The prayers that will be "read" at your initiation ceremony are geared towards enabling the new dervishes to start reading their own hearts. First they read Al-Fath, "The Victor," the 48th book of the Qur'an. Recall the above verse in which Mevlana praises Muhammad: "The signs of Muhammad are openings within openings within openings." In Arabic, as well as in Turkish, the word for "conquer" is to "open." When you conquer a city, you break open its walls, allowing that which is outside to come in. The original conquest is the conquest of the heart. That is, to crack open the heart and reveal what is inside. Conquer the heart of a friend of God and you will do well.

We will also read the Ash-Sharh Surah, which says, "Did we not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast?"<sup>317</sup>

I read this surah everyday. And you should too. Read it to open your heart. Now let's talk about what it feels like to expand your heart.

While we're thinking of Caliph Umar, let's jump ahead in the *Masnavi* to another story of his. The Byzantine ambassador had just arrived in the newly formed caliphate. The ambassador sought Umar's house, but he could not find it. He asked around and people led him to the caliph. They said, "He is sleeping in the shade of that date palm." The ambassador approached the slumbering Umar. Lo and behold, "Even as the great Umar was sleeping, he influenced the ambassador's heart, causing his body to go into convulsions." The caliph then awoke and greeted his visitor,

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<sup>316</sup> 1:2107-11

<sup>317</sup> The Qur'an, Ash-Sharh 94:1

whom he had shaken to his core. The ambassador had many questions, and Umar took the time to answer them.

Umar lifted the spirits of the foreigner, who was deeply troubled by his own bewilderment. Umar made anew his heart, which had been shattered and reduced to ruin. After their conversation the ambassador became a believer and a servant of the Lord.

In this story Mevlana explains how people, and living creatures in general, receive and perceive the revelations coming from God. But it's not limited to animate beings. Let's read. I want you to hear the succinctness of his words:

“The rose heard the secret and bloomed. The ear of the stone heard it and became a translucent agate.  
He revealed to matter a sign, and the matter turned to spirit. When He spoke to the sun, it began to shine.  
Later when the sun heard a terrifying secret, its face remained ablaze.  
What did God whisper to the cloud to cause it to rain down tears?  
What did He propose to the earth so that it remains silent and enrapt?  
...If you say you do not want your spirit to waver, do not stuff cotton in the ears of your spirit.  
Let the mysteries be unlocked to you so that you become familiar with things both open and secret.  
This ear of the spirit then becomes a site of revelation. As for revelation, that's a discourse imperceptible to your five senses.”<sup>318</sup>

If God reveals secrets even to the bees, is there anything that a human cannot read through his heart? If he has that kind of heart, of course.

Revelations flow to those who, like Umar, have opened their hearts. So read, read to your heart's content. If the dervish advances from the stage of critical self-evaluation to that of “*mulhamah*,” he will begin to feel the stirrings of what we call inspiration; the *nafs al-mulhamah* is the inspired self. From here on out his inspiration will increase.

Let's go back to “*iqra!*” and remember that beginning. Just as God commanded Muhammad to read, we too must read the Qur'an. As a master of the path, Mevlana says, “If reading the Qur'an had no effect on you, look then at the Prophet and the saints.”<sup>319</sup>

Reading the Prophet constitutes the hadith.  
Reading the Prophet is to read from his heirs.  
Reading the saint is to look at him and read the Living Qur'an.

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<sup>318</sup> 1:1451-55, 1459-61

<sup>319</sup> 1:1539

What an equation!

Do we get it? Do we understand the significance of Sufism and the importance of the services rendered by the saints? There is a certain category of newcomers who come to the saints, to the friends of God hoping for therapy. They are well intentioned yet never consider becoming initiated. It never crosses their minds. And showing no signs of disrespect, they ask the sheikh for a bibliography, "What should we read to increase our spiritual prosperity? Can you suggest to us a book list?"

After all, Sufism is not unreadable. If it is written – if it *can* be written – then it can of course be read!

Is it hard? You bet. Classic works on Sufi thought are by no means light reading. You have to really be steeped in this literature to understand it.

The *Masnawi*, though it was written for a general audience, is also difficult. The problem is that we are so far removed from that cultural climate! But I can't blame anyone. There are easier, more readable works on the market to alleviate this issue. Though for the most part, these are something akin to fast food. Cheap knockoffs, you could say. Something you buy in line at the grocery store or at the airport. If you want the real deal, you have to really pay attention to the author and the publishing house. There is also something else we must not forget. Sufism is lived! Experienced! Is everyone who lives it a writer? No, of course not. But when someone who has lived it writes about it, what he writes is something that goes beyond a paperback book.

Indeed, how do you explain all this to someone who wants a bibliography? What do you think a sheikh says in response to this sort of request? Many times I saw the expression of surprise on the faces of masters confronted with this request! What more can they say but, "The reading material is in front of you. Read him. Read his heart"!

Let's see what Rumi has to say to us on this subject:

"The prophets have in their hearts such spiritual melodies that they animate the seekers of wisdom."<sup>320</sup>

Mevlana says that those same spiritual notes also descend into the hearts of the saints. According to Mevlana, the saints are the Israfil of their time. He is referring to the archangel whose "Horn will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on."<sup>321</sup> Like the trumpeter angel, the

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<sup>320</sup> 1:1919

<sup>321</sup> The Qur'an, Az-Zumar 39:68



saints bring the dead to life and advance them towards perfection. The souls of the saints act on the souls of the dead as they lay in the grave of their skin. They say, "This music is the music of no other. God's work gives life to the dead."

If the music is heard from the servant of God, then it is indeed the Lord's music. Rumi relates the topic to a famous hadith:

"This is the secret of 'By Me he hears, by Me he sees.' If you know the truth, the secret is this.

Pursue the level of the servant belonging to God. This is the prerequisite for God belonging to the servant.

...Muhammad said, 'Happy is he who sees me and he who sees him who saw my face. When someone sees my companions it is as though he has seen me. What a high honor for him.'

When a lamp is lit by a candle, whoever sees the lamp sees the light of the candle as well."<sup>322</sup>

What a sublime passage! You can almost hear the melody in your heart. Songs and compositions like these travel the world from tongue to tongue. They kindle the lamp of the dervishes. They are not history; they are being experienced now. Sufism is not a dead practice. It is applicable today as well as tomorrow.

So far in this conversation we have gone over the profundity behind the concept of "reading" and then discussed how it manifests in the Prophet, the caliphs, the companions and the saints. Now we must focus on our own hearts. The heart is a universe unto itself. The hand, the foot – all of our organs – await its command. Yet I wonder if that heart knows what it wants or what it does. The fact is that we don't know. The heart is a very strange thing indeed:

"If the heart so wishes it seeps downwards, and if it so wishes it rises to the heavens.

If it so desires, it veers toward perceptible things, and if it so desires it turns to veiled things.

If it will, it sets its eyes on the big picture, and if it wants it becomes imprisoned by the particulars."<sup>323</sup>

Hearts are unbalanced. This goes for the general population. Many of them have their anodes and cathodes cross-wired!

"I do whatever my heart desires," they say. For us, daily expressions such as these do not conjure up a peaceful place for the heart, but rather sites of peril.

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<sup>322</sup> 1:1938-39, 1946-47

<sup>323</sup> 1:3563-65

True, there is a place in the heart for both evil and sin. Alas and alack! The heart is such a house that in it resides both angel and devil. The tenants of the heart are the brokers of good and evil!

So then we must ask our heart who will be the driving force behind our power of choice? The devil or the angel?

“When Satan is behind your power of choice, it awakens in you an inclination to do evil through him...

...When the angel then offers you good in opposition to the devil, an outcry erupts in your heart.

It prompts the power of good into action. Before they are revealed, good, as well as evil, are concealed.

So the devil and the angel are two presenters that bring the power of choice into action.

Holy inspirations or wicked suggestions increase your power to choose between good or evil.

This is why, O man of good repute, you should offer a greeting to the angels at the end of your ritual prayer.

This salutation should say ‘The blessing of your inspiration and prayers gave me the power to choose to perform this prayer.’

If you commit sin you will curse Satan, because from him comes this evil inclination.

These two opposites are making you offers in secret. When they present them to you it is behind the veil of the Unseen.

When the veil of the Unseen is lifted between them, you will see who is guiding you.”<sup>324</sup>

If the “veil of the Unseen’ is not raised, it remains impossible for us to read our souls and decipher which “*khawatir*” is acting on our hearts, and whether it is carnal and evil, or good, spiritual, and compassionate.

Muslims have brought forth one of history’s greatest civilizations. For whatever reasons, this achievement often goes ignored in the West, but the fact remains that Muslims have excelled in science and art in every corner of the world. In such periods of inspiration, the *chelebi* temperament, championed by the Mevlevis, reigned supreme. When we say *chelebi*, we mean Universal Man. All these Universal Men went through a process. First a sound mind formed in his “self,” which had been washed clean in the esoteric teachings of Islam (Sufism). The spiritual light then permeated his heart and he attained a perfect heart. Next came sublime ecstasy. It was this process that our artists and artisans underwent. In every work of art, the artist reminds us of the sensation of the path’s ultimate destination. Islamic calligraphy, for instance, is perhaps the most beautiful representation of this concept. Muslims hang calligraphy plaques on the walls of their homes. A certain

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<sup>324</sup>5:2980, 2982-90

wisdom and mystery are engraved in each one. As long as the eye of the believer is fixed on those plaques – as long as they “read” them – they will stay on the path. They serve as a kind of traffic sign on the road to perfection. The line from Rumi below is of that kind of reminder:

“The permission that comes from the nafs’s desires is errant. But if it comes from God, it is perfection.”<sup>325</sup>

God Almighty bestows upon us the perfection that Islam demands and allows our hearts to achieve that perfection. Amen! Muhammad said, “The voice now comes to me from God. I filter out the dregs from that which is pure.”<sup>326</sup>

But how will we novices distinguish between the dregs and what is pure? How will we be able to differentiate truth from superstition? In Sufism this skill is called “*temyiz*.” Being proficient at *temyiz* is exceedingly vital.

What do we do? What must we do?

“The mirror of the heart must be pure, so that you can distinguish without fail the beautiful from the vile.”<sup>327</sup>

What is interesting is that the filter that will enable you to sift out the truth from the different *khawatir* that bombard the heart will either be installed inside the heart or attached to the heart. In other words, the location of this “purification facility” will be in the selfsame heart. This is because, in the words of Mevlana, “this God-given trust is in the heart.”<sup>328</sup>

What is this trust? Some say it is the Holy Spirit, and others say the light of Muhammad. Whatever it is, Mevlana makes sure to clarify that this compass he calls the “God-given trust” is in the heart. We can say here that “the heart is pregnant with it,” as the Universal Man is born from the heart. Continuing in this vein, Mevlana says, “There must be pain. Pain is the way to children.”

Like at any birth, there must be present a “midwife”. Rumi includes this profession in the verse: “These saints act as midwives.”<sup>329</sup>

The saints are the physicians and midwives on hand at spiritual birth. They are the specialists who resuscitate hearts that have stopped beating.

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<sup>325</sup> 6:2074

<sup>326</sup> 2:2882

<sup>327</sup> 2:2094

<sup>328</sup> 2:2519

<sup>329</sup> 2:2519

We will then find our path. We will find a master of that path. We will find that saint so that our hearts can be made anew. When describing this saint, Rumi conjures up images so poignant that we should read them here together:

“Men of heart are a six-faced mirror through which God gazes upon the six directions.

God gazes upon those who dwell within the six directions, but only through those who possess heart.”<sup>330</sup>

The six directions, which constitute the temporal world in which we live, are the four cardinal points with the addition of up and down. God gets to know us in this world through his stewards on earth, the saints. That’s the first takeaway. Secondly, God looks at the heart. We have said this before and we continue to emphasize this point. Recall in the *Masnavi* when the Almighty Creator warns Moses in defense of a shepherd, saying to him, “Don’t think that I look at the tongue and the words. I look at the heart and the spiritual state.”<sup>331</sup>

Taking their cue from this divine statement, the saints also look at people’s hearts, especially the hearts of dervishes. When we say “look,” we mean it in the sense of examining, implying the act of reading the heart. It is similar to how a doctor “looks” at a patient for the purpose of finding a remedy.

To use another metaphor, we can say the saints are detectives of the heart. If something is going through your heart, they will detect it. They uncover the grace of God and determine the degree to which God has given it. They are good judges of character.

Their job though is not to incriminate, but to deduce and solve the mysteries of the heart. If we said such things in public, people would find it strange we are offering such services. But why? I don’t understand it. Aren’t there plenty of uncertified self-styled psychologists nowadays selling themselves as “life coaches”? No one cries foul at them, nor is there any shortage of people eager to open their pocketbooks to them. Yet the saints, the true physicians of the heart, offer these services pro bono.

Yes, the saints do read hearts. They read your intentions. They look at the clues and strive to get to the bottom of the case. We’ll skip over the process for the moment, as we have a few loose ends to tie up first. That said, let me just stress the point that the saints are not “fortunetellers”! People are tempted by fortunetellers. But that is not the business we are in. Those who confuse the saints with fortunetellers do not know Sufism at all!

Nevertheless, I do not want to condemn simple, but well meaning people stuck in a hard place with wounded hearts. Take for example, a father whose son is about to

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<sup>330</sup> 5:874-75

<sup>331</sup> 2:1759

get married. He goes to a renowned sheikh and asks him, "Master, will this marriage last?" Others, however, expect nothing short of a trade projection: "I'm opening a business. Do you think it will fail?" You understand what I mean?

Our religion does advise people to consult experts in different fields, whether he's a sheikh or not, before making a serious decision. Receiving a prayer from a holy man would be a fine start to any endeavor. We have nothing against that. On the contrary, we encourage it.

But it is quite another thing to show up with some sort of expectation, as in, "Let's at least have a look here, master. If the marriage is going to fall apart down the road, let's call this marriage off." You have some spiritual knowledge by now, so I am sure you understand the nuance here. I wish that the good people who commit such indecencies would also understand.

Getting back to the dervish's logbook, let's say your murshid has looked at your heart, and he saw some things. Or rather, God showed them to him. And among the things he was shown, were several scenes related to your fate. So what does he do? He will do whatever God tells him to do. He will certainly pray and supplicate on your behalf, but anything more I can't say, for that remains the purview of his spiritual expertise. But does he reveal to you the future?

Before we get into that, let me give you a more concrete example. Let's take that same man, the father whose son is about to marry. He goes to the lodge and says, "O sheikh, we are about to marry that young man."

The father then asks in his most polite and reverent manner. "Do I have permission, master?" The sheikh says, "I wish him the best!" Taking this as a vouch of approval and a divine forecast, he leaves in a state of joy. He gives his family the good news, and with that positive energy he throws a feast of a wedding.

Yet two months later the newly weds begin to quarrel... And the marriage falls apart. They eventually file for divorce leaving the two families heartbroken. They then start cursing the sheikh. After all, he had wished them the best. "But his prediction did not hold!" they say. "What kind of sheikh is he? A phony, no doubt! And all the wedding expenses have put us in the hole!" I can see that you are laughing, but these scenes happen, and people say these things!

But is the sheikh at fault here? Did he commit any "sin"?

As a general rule, God does not reveal the Unseen to anyone. The friends of God know this. The Unseen is merely "insinuated." That is the word the friends of God use, for to say or think otherwise is improper and liable to touch *gayretullah*. The saints are master engineers when it comes to drawing the line at precaution and trust in God. They know what to do, and they do it with God's aid. The hearts they possess can read His commands. This skill, with its grace and decorum, is *irfan* itself!

Let's consider the disciple who is closest to his mentor. The mentor of course is obligated to keep him on the path. Well, this path has hills, mountains, and cliffs. If for the good of the disciple's final stage of perfection he must fall into the pit, then he must fall. The murshid does not tell his disciple he will fall into the pit. Rather, the mentor's duty is to take the mentor by the hand and pull him out of that crevice, tell him why he fell, and remind him what he needs to work on so he can avoid future stumbles. Then together murshid and murid continue down the path arm in arm.

When the perfect saints look at your heart, they are looking for areas in need of fixing. We have now come to the second part: making modifications to your heart. The perfect mentor will fix your heart using his own. If that sounds strange to you, remember that the saint's strongest suit is his heart. Manifestations of God's glory flow into his heart while abundance and prosperity flows out.

As Mevlana says, "While the saint may appear to be an ordinary man, there are works of divine inspiration in his heart that sets him apart."<sup>332</sup>

Pay careful attention Mevlana's words: "There are works of divine inspiration in his heart." What does he mean by this? The mentor treats the disciple's heart according to the inspiration God imparts on himself. This divine inspiration specifies when and what he must do, and with this he purifies your heart and readjusts your course. This is exactly what Umar did to the Byzantine ambassador.

But let me be clear. This whole thing does not simply just happen on the fly. Your heart is not like a car, which you bring it into the shop in the morning for routine maintenance and have it back in the evening. It is not that kind of thing. You are on a long, narrow road. On this road your deficiencies will be filled in step by step. The incomplete dervish will transform into a complete dervish. You may still receive a scolding now and again from your master during this process. He may get angry with you and shout (though he will never insult you). If you maintain you are in the right, he will come down on you again. Will you be able to endure his wrath? Oh, how Shams Tabrizi bore down on Rumi with his torrid temper! Do you think Rumi let it get to him? Nope, he rolled with the punches. The more he endured, the closer he came to attaining the heart he was destined to have. That is how Jalaluddin Rumi became Mevlana.

I am saying this in order to measure your determination. You may have a sheikh who on occasion – and for good reason – goes into a rage. Will you be able to say, "I deserved to have my head bitten off"? Saying so is easy. Being able to do so when the time comes is not. Look, I am explaining to you the twists and turns of this path. We are not trying to hide anything. We are giving you advance notice. You can get up and leave at any moment you wish. We will not resent it. There is a saying for true dervishes, "Take no offence, give no offence."

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<sup>332</sup> 2:3777

I have a good friend who crisscrosses Anatolia collecting old Sufi folk songs and records them. On his last album he performed a song written by the great poet Muhammad Lütfi (1868-1956) called “*Incitme*” (Give No Offence). I had never heard of it, but I fell in love with it the first time I listened to it. The lyrics go something like this:

*“Show restraint, break no one’s heart, offend not a soul  
Offend not the grieving person held captive on foreign soil  
Give no offense to he who on the road of love is in hopeless separation  
Give no offense to God the Most Merciful, endure every affliction  
Give offence to no one if you are true of spirit and mind  
Abstain from sin, do not offend the Best of Mankind.”*

We must never offend the perfect saints. Nor hurt them. Quite to the contrary, we need to flock to them and enter the souls of these sultans of heart. We must take up residence there.

Imams may have trouble drawing a congregation to the mosque, but those who come to the dervish lodge come for the sheikh. If that sheikh is a true mentor he will be interested in everyone who comes.

Here is what Mevlana says about mosques:

*“Fools revere the mosque (the place of prostration) while at the same time going out of their way to offend those who prostrate.  
Poor fools! The mosque is metaphorical, the heart is real. The true mosque is the house of the gnostic’s heart.  
The heart of the saint is the mosque where God dwells and the pure of heart prostrate.”<sup>333</sup>*

If you chance upon a mentor like Rumi, or the one he describes in that verse, get thee into his heart! Win his heart. Yunus Emre did just that. He did it and wrote about it for you to “read”: “Come to the heart, enter the heart...” “Read” that message too. Kneel before a Mevlana.

Stay that way until that murshid says to you, “Get up, wayfarer, you’ve reached the place where you can now read from your own breast!”

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<sup>333</sup> 2:3109-11

## 13 ENDURE!

*"If you are experiencing hardship, be patient.  
Patience is the key to joy."<sup>334</sup>*

In the Qur'an, God says of Job, "Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allah]."<sup>335</sup> Job indeed became a monument to patience and endurance.

Muhammad also notes the importance of endurance, saying in effect, "Patience is half the religion." With regard to these sublime commands, I too am calling upon you to have patience. I am appealing to you through the words of Rumi:

"O Lord, bestower of caution and perseverance, deliver your people from this restiveness and impatience!  
Whenever perseverance is needed, grant us a favor so that our nafs may stand upright!  
Give them patience and tip the scales in their favor. Efface the forms of hypocrisy.  
O gracious Lord, save them from envy lest they become devils condemned to stoning."<sup>336</sup>

We have now reached a critical threshold in the dervish's logbook. Every wayfarer who embarks on this spiritual journey experiences at a certain stage "occupational burnout," if I may put it in modern workplace parlance. "I'm done, I'm out!" they say. The *misbaha* weighs heavy, the ordeals multiply, and the abandonment of the material world has taken its toll on them. And they decide they can no longer endure.

By now Satan has sunk his claws into your skin. He is scratching his mark into your mind. "Give up!" urges your nafs. "Nothing awaits you. This is not love in our book!" Or, on the other end of the spectrum, the diligent dervish does not find his exertion to be sufficient, despite all his many efforts. He is well intentioned but he thinks he is just spinning his wheels, getting nowhere. Now you see why we are at a critical juncture. Are we clear? Shall we continue?

When we were ambushed by this stage, my master would merely say: "Believe and achieve!" If we can say, "This too shall pass, by God," then no worries. If not, you will be inundated by waves of depression. You would be unable to withstand the

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<sup>334</sup> 1:2908

<sup>335</sup> The Qur'an, Sad 38:30-31

<sup>336</sup> 5:1197-1200



tsunami. It will drag you under, God help you! There is no other way to save yourself from this whirlpool except, "Believe and achieve!" Renew your faith! Get to it!

A long time ago I was walking through the Etiler bazar in Istanbul when I heard someone behind me shouting, "Scratch and win!" He repeated it over and over. Then it dawned on me. That's true! That is the truth of the matter! I turned to the owner of that voice and said, "Friend, there is no better way to describe Sufism. Well done!"

The man was taken aback. "What do you mean?" he asked. "I'm just selling lottery tickets."

At that time the national lottery had just come out with scratch cards. You kept scratching until you won.

Clearly the man had not understood what I meant. But his slogan encapsulated the most relevant process in Sufism: Scratching the rust off the heart until the soul is revealed. Hence, believe and achieve! Guaranteed!

The seal over the heart must be broken. We must chip it away, rent it to pieces. The Owner won't take up residence in that heart unless its vacated.

There's a real life parallel to this. There are countless urban renewal projects underway at any given time in Istanbul. Everyone complains of the constant convoys of dump trucks that come and go from these sites. But they shouldn't. Construction – and later residence – cannot begin without first completing the excavations and hauling away the dirt.

If you can't handle dervishhood, think about everyday life with its thousand and one pains. Live throws at us all sorts of headaches, troubles, and afflictions. Let's reconsider getting on the path and staying there. Sure, the path comes with its own particular struggles, but these constitute a different kind of ordeal.

What else do we have to cling to other than patience! Patience, my friend, patience.

O dervish, if you can't even stand the torments of life in the real world, may I ask how you will bear the ordeals of this path? Mevlana expresses the same sentiment:

"O you who cannot endure this profane world! How can you endure He who has spread out the earth and so beautifully so?  
O you who cannot endure the craving for affection and sustenance! How can you endure God the Bountiful?  
O you who cannot endure neither the pure nor the vulgar! How can you endure the Creator of the heavens?"<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> 2:3074-76

Those who exercise patience in the material world find themselves at ease when it comes to the spiritual journey. In other words, the patience the Sufi learns on the path better equips him to endure the hardships of this world.

Patience is the art of enduring pain. It is a storehouse of perseverance and fortitude. And we so desperately need patience in this age of haste. People today want everything, and they want it now. They restlessly want it, yet undeservingly. When they fail to get it, they become depressed or aggravated. They take no joy from hard work.

With that said, allow me to add one more to my collection of slogans: “Endure and deserve!”

Impatience is the malady of postmodern civilization. Those who do endure show us that impatience is the wrong attitude to have, and they lead by example.

The impatient want without putting the work in. When they cannot have what they want, they strain every nerve to get it. That is why in the 21<sup>st</sup> century corruption runs rampant at every level!

The path however teaches people forbearance and what it means to earn something. Choose, enjoy, or take anything you want! Fine, but there are two ways about it. You can either go the way of the corrupt, or follow in the footsteps of those who endure. We of course recommend the latter. But who are these patient endurers?

The saints, the mystics, the Universal Man.

“The prophets have suffered greatly and endured many hardships at the hands of the depraved.”<sup>338</sup>

Rumi therefore says, “If you endure torment by the depraved, you will easily obtain the light of the Prophet’s tradition.”<sup>339</sup>

As for his advice:

“Bear the burden of strife with patience, for patience is the key to relief.”<sup>340</sup>

Muhammad himself endured much torment at the hands of the ignorant. The cruel and vile acts Muhammad suffered at the hands of Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab are enough to bring tears to your eyes. But the Prophet shielded his heart from all of it. He did not utter a word. He kept his patience, and in the end, patience won out.

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<sup>338</sup> 6:2150

<sup>339</sup> 6:2149

<sup>340</sup> 6:2148

Knowledge of the Unseen became his. This must be the exemplary behavior that Rumi refers to when he says, “the tradition of the Prophet.”

“Patience became for the Prophet his Buraq, and with it he ascended to the heavens.”<sup>341</sup>

Mevlana introduces us to a new expression, “guide of patience”:

“Should the guide of patience become a wing for you, your spirit will soar to the highest heaven.”<sup>342</sup>

Ever the encouraging voice, Mevlana says, “Buck up and show your courage. Take as your guide the mind that considers patience.”<sup>343</sup>

Pessimism is unbecoming to us and to this path. God forbids us to despair. Moreover, He will give us the patience and fortitude to trust in Him and preserve our faith in Him.

Just as God gives us a load no heavier than we can carry, He also grants us the patience to bear that load.

Indeed:

“God said to Job, ‘I have given you as much patience as you have hairs.’ Do not look at your own patience, think about the one who has gifted you all this patience.”<sup>344</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Masnavi*, Mevlana offers us another heartening piece of advice regarding patience:

“Through patience and submission, Job showed seven years of hospitality to the affliction sent by God.

When that harsh affliction returned to God’s side, it heaped praise upon Job. It said, ‘Out of his devotion for the One he loved, Job not even for a moment frowned upon me.’

Job became faithful in God’s knowledge. He mixed like milk and honey with his ordeal.

Whenever trouble enters your heart, always face it with laughter and say, ‘O Lord, protect me from the evil of these woes. Do not deprive me of it, but let me take it as a gift.

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<sup>341</sup> 6:3979

<sup>342</sup> 6:3978

<sup>343</sup> 6:3977

<sup>344</sup> 5:2903-04

O Lord, allow me to be thankful for your mercy in the face of tribulation. Do not torment me with the longing of things passed.’ Remember that sour-faced thought. Think of that bitterness to be as sweet as sugar.”<sup>345</sup>

We each endure our ordeal, but as we do so we must not complain about it to our fellow man. Unfortunately this is one of our bad habits. As humans, we whine and moan about our tribulations to whomever crosses our path. But when we do this, we are making a complaint against God. Man, of course, shares his pain and troubles with God. We talk to Him about it. Even Job was enjoined to pray in order to rid himself of his troubles. Yet that which is to be suffered will be suffered. What matters is how you suffer. One of the great Sufi saints, Junayd of Baghdad, set this benchmark: “Patience is swallowing sips of bitterness without souring your face.” You may grit your teeth, but don’t sour your face.

Honing your patience to perfection comes with *marifat*. Consider the saints. Never in their lives did they complain of God, despite having endured so much. It is not the pain they endure on the path that drowns their eyes in tears, but the divine favors and graces they encounter while suffering these pains. That is what intoxicates them. Here is another tale from the *Masnavi*. It is a favorite of mine:

A disciple entered the service of a sheikh. The sheikh was not old, but, as Rumi describes him, “a sage of intelligence and divine knowledge.” When the disciple saw the sheikh weeping in his room, he could not help himself. He too began to cry. When he stopped crying and left the room, another dervish, who was more aware of the sheikh’s state, followed him out and confronted him, saying:

“O brother, do not think or say, “The sheikh wept for God, and I wept also.” For you to come even close to attaining to the sheikh’s weeping, you must practice asceticism without hypocrisy for thirty years, crossing seas infested with hideous monsters and overcoming perilous mountains full of lions and tigers.”<sup>346</sup>

What a tremendous reality check! Those who know, know the tribulations of the sheikhs and God’s true saints. These saints feel the pain of the world, and are inflicted by its sorrow. No matter how distressed a person may be, they grieve for that poor soul. For these holy men, the eye of the heart is open; they see the pain of the people walking down the street. They cannot remain indifferent to it.

In addition to the man on the street, the masters also have their own disciples and charges, the pain of each they bear in their hearts. They carry on their backs the sorrows, crises, and expectations of all their disciples along with their families and friends.

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<sup>345</sup> 5:3689-96

<sup>346</sup> Heading before 5:1271

And even as they provide this service the Sufi sheikhs come under attack. The faithless assail them on one side and the fanatics on the other. They are trapped between the anvil and the hammer. But they endure. They exercise patience.

If only people knew the history of the saints. Even people interested in Sufism go straight for the works dealing with theory and so-called “philosophy.” It doesn’t ever cross their minds to so much as glance over the stories of these true warriors of the path and learn about their circumstances. This is a mistake! If Sufism is learned by experiencing it, then you ought learn from those who have experienced it. You can learn from those who were able to write about their experiences.

The lives of the saints are journals of patience. Every page of the dervish’s logbook is adorned with patience. They are the gilders of patience.

If only you knew what the followers of God had to suffer from time to time, even in countries founded on the principles of Sufism, such as the Ottoman Empire.

And not to mention the mystic’s own troubles. Everyone seems to assume that the saints are without their own personal pain, as if such a thing is at all possible! He may be a Universal Man, but he is still human. He too has money troubles, family problems, and anxiety about work. His lot is probably worse than average, because for him this is a test, and the tests administered to the masters are quite difficult.

For example Abu al-Hasan al Kharraqani, of whom Mevlana has speaks very highly of, suffered more than his fair share. Oh, in what anguish he lived! Rumi shares his story in the *Masnavi* as a sort of model for us all. I recommend that you find it and read it.

The sheikh’s tribulations in this world have not ended. The main importance is in the meaning. There is a “primary” pain that the saints are forced to endure, which outweighs all the rest. The pain I am talking about is that pain expressed in the ode to the nightingale. In that poem, Yunus laments, “My suffering is enough for me, please do not add to it, nightingale...” It is this pain, you see. Now you understand what kind of patience and endurance is needed. And they assume it a “privilege” to be a sheikh! I bet you did too!

What about the sheikh’s duties?

“Friday prayers are a religious duty, and daily ritual prayer with the people is even better. He must direct the people to good and warn them of evil. He must patiently endure the torment of the malicious and, like a cloud, rain down benefits upon the people.”<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> 6:480-81

We hit upon patience yet again:

“Putting up with the unworthy is polish for the worthy. Patience cleans the mirror of the heart and makes it shine.”<sup>348</sup>

Notice that Mevlana bemoans the same two things: the unworthy and the ignorant.

The Friends of God do not shy from service nor do they tire of it. They not only enjoy walking this path, they love running on it. What troubles them most are the people who refuse to understand them. The saints show no outward offence, but think, as an outsider looking in, how much the malevolence harbored by the ignorant and unworthy must upset these bastions of benevolence. Mevlana suffered quite a bit at the hands of his fellow townspeople in Konya. Even one of his own sons could not comprehend why he kept Shams Tabrizi at his side! Hearsay, treachery, and preposterous accusations and assertions still causes Rumi’s spirit to suffer, and not only his spirit, but that of other saints who have found themselves faced with similar circumstances.

We talked about this before. How can you tell a true saint from an imposter? According my own criteria, if a murshid knows that the person he is talking to is disingenuous, hypocritical or dishonest, and he still offers kindness or welcomes them, then he is a true Universal Man. The true shiekh will see right through him, into his heart, yet he will treat him with civility. Nobody but God’s true saints can show this kind of patience!

Take for instance, the disciple who beseeched his sheikh to reveal what lay behind the veil of the Unseen. “Master,” he begged, “Won’t you tell me the secrets?” His imploring never ceased day in and day out. Each time the master denied his disciple. “Don’t do it, son,” he said. “You won’t be able to bear it.” The novice insisted and insisted until one day the sheikh finally relented. “Alright, let’s go.” So they went out to the market together.

The master reveals to the young dervish the Unseen. God have mercy! He looks to his right and sees a python. He turns left and sees vermin, and in front of him looms a demon. All the lowliest animals in the world were walking around like humans, like something out of Planet of the Apes. The shopkeepers he had always greeted had been transformed into beasts!

He grabbed hold of his sheikh’s frock with fear. “Forget it,” he cried, “I wouldn’t be able to take it!” The sheikh proved to be right.

*“Didn’t I tell you? Didn’t I tell you?  
Dear lover, you cannot suffer our torment.”*

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<sup>348</sup> 6:2041

These are the lyrics of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Turkish Sufi poet by the name of Pir Sultan Abdal. His words still ring true today. Who else but the masters can pull these “caravans of pain and grief,” who can endure this kind of load?

The point here is that divine knowledge and enlightenment must be earned, and nothing illustrates this point better than a door in Turkey. Like everywhere else, doors either open in or open out, with a sign instructing you to either push or pull. On a Turkish door, the words are “*itiniz*” for push and “*çekiniz*” for pull. But if you look at it with a Sufi eye, each of these words has a double meaning. The former is calling you a dog, while the latter is commanding you to “suffer!”

That is to say, you cannot gain access to the building of Truth by pushing or shoving your way through the Sufi door. This is not a crowded subway car. There is no elbowing, jabbing, or pushing from behind here. The only way in is to suffer.

If you are not willing to suffer, stop right there and stay on the sidewalk.

“You cannot suffer...” we have said. Also, “You cannot become a Sufi...” We have also said, “I want to scream at those who say ‘I am a dervish.’” These words do not come from me but from the poetry of the Sufis. These poems remind us of all the suffering that awaits us on the path. Nobody, especially me, wishes you any harm. We just want you to be informed, that’s all.

Say you’re aspiring to be a professional athlete. It’s not like you can get by without hard work and pain! Coaches attach weights to their players’ feet and time them as they lumber down the field shouting, “Faster, faster!” Why do they do this? They want their athletes to surpass themselves. The competition is stiff. They need to train hard and the coaches much push them to their limits.

The murshids do the same. There is a method to their madness. You cannot get the dust out of the rug without beating it. Nor can you turn milk to butter without churning it.

“Your true essence is concealed in falsehood, like the fat in buttermilk. This falsehood is your mortal flesh, your true essence being the divine spirit. The buttermilk had been visible and apparent for many years, while the fat of the spirit languished in it. God then sent a servant to give a hand in beating the buttermilk in the churn. He skillfully agitates that butter churn so you may know what was hidden within you! Or so the words of this servant, some of which belongs to the Prophet, finds its way into the ear of you who seeks revelation. The believer’s ear hears revelation. Such an ear is the friend of the one who calls the servant to God.”<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> 4:3030-36

Indeed, my dear dervish! Fear not! You have reinforcements. They are hidden within you. Your *nafs* plays tricks upon tricks on you in order to run you off the path. But inside you – inside your heart – there is a soul that constantly wants to carry you higher.

Do not forget:

“The soul’s yearning is for life and for Al-Hayy, the Ever Living, because its essence is the omnipresent soul.

The soul’s yearning is for wisdom and knowledge whereas the yearning of the flesh is for gardens and orchards.

The soul’s yearning is for progress and glory whereas the yearning of the flesh is for goods and riches and filling the belly.”<sup>350</sup>

Do what your soul tells you, and exercise patience so that you may find the Beloved! What did we give you at the outset of this ordeal of endurance? Your *misbaha*! Your prayer beads are a means of glorifying God. As such, it is your soul’s mate, so to speak. Understand its value. When you are burned out, pull them out.

“The soul of glorification is patience. Patience is by itself a glorification. No other glorification is of such high degree. Be patient. Patience is the key to salvation.”<sup>351</sup>

Savor your *misbaha*. Delight in glorification. And do not forget: “The pleasure of reaching wayposts is given in proportion to the hardships suffered by the heart and soul on the journey to get there.”<sup>352</sup>

Here is the reward for these hardships. Always think of it this way. Patience acts as medicine on this path. It is intended to make you feel better.

“The affliction applied by the friend purifies you. His knowledge outweighs your discretion.

When you find pleasure in affliction, it becomes sweet. The medicine goes down easier as you start to feel better.”<sup>353</sup>

There is a Turkish proverb that says, “The patient dervish indeed gets his wish.”

Well, at what point must your spirit arrive? “O Lord! Happy in suffering, happy in grace!”

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<sup>350</sup> 3:4437-39

<sup>351</sup> 2:3145-46

<sup>352</sup> 3:4157

<sup>353</sup> 4:107-08



Mevlana again:

“Everyone knows of God’s grace and wrath, for He is at once the Subduer and the Subtly Kind. The whole world flees from His wrath and seeks refuge in His grace. But God Almighty has concealed wrath in grace and grace in wrath. This is His deception and deceit so that He may separate those who possess divine discernment and ‘see by the light of God’ from those who only see what is visible to the eye. ‘He who created life and death to test you as to which of you is best in deed.’”<sup>354</sup>

We will devote our next conversation to “seeing,” but since it came up here, let me take a moment to relate the following anecdote to you.

One dervish to another asked, “How did you manage to see God? Tell me!”

The second dervish elected to answer him with a description:

“On the left was fire, and on the right flowed the river of Kawthar. The left side a scorching fire, the right side a pleasant river. Some put their hands in the fire, and the others became intoxicated by the Kawthar.”<sup>355</sup>

If it were you, which side would you go to? Towards Kawthar, right? Yet there is deception there! But what kind of deception?

Listening is so important. We have already gone over that. We must listen to the cries of that fire. The fire says, “O fools, do not consider me fire, I am a fountain, albeit a hidden fountain!” Come, it says, do not be afraid of my flames! Come to me, if you are like Abraham. And did the fire burn him?

If you are like Abraham a friend of God, then you are a moth; come to the flame! The moth “sees the light and goes into the fire.”<sup>356</sup>

“The fire has been made to appear as water and in the fire a fountain has been turned on.”<sup>357</sup>

For in the Qur’an it says, “But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you.”<sup>358</sup>

Mevlana finishes the story with this line:

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<sup>354</sup> Heading preceding 5:420, referencing The Qur’an, Al-Mulk 67:2

<sup>355</sup> 4:421-23

<sup>356</sup> 5:443

<sup>357</sup> 5:445

<sup>358</sup> The Qur’an, Al-Baqarah 2:216

“Inevitably, by God’s contrivance, masses of people have fallen flat on their backs in the bottom of the well and left without a rope.”<sup>359</sup>

That rope is the rope of God. If only they had clung to it, they would have been able to save themselves. The rope is lowered down from the heavens and given to the friends of God so that they may grab the hand of their predecessors. You too must grab hold of that rope, O dervish. It is the hand of God. It is the hand upon your hand when you affirm your faith.

Think about it! Would those saints cast you into the pit of your nafs without tying such a rope around your waist like it were a life preserver?

Be patient and you will see results. But let me tell you what you will need if you are to endure.

First of all, you must have a certain disposition or innate ability. If it were not already in you, you would not be here now, so you have that. As you go forward, you will hone this ability.

“Ability is imparted by the King. Without the soul, would the body be able?”<sup>360</sup>

Secondly, that ability will be combined with God’s favor. You will “work” to incur His favor. Even if you can’t appreciate the result, you will become a master of effort solely by submitting to God. You must not falter merely because you can’t immediately see the fruits of your labor. Your gait shall not be hindered on the path. Keep your chin up and carry one. As Mevlana says, “You are not permitted to knock on this door with anything other than hope.”<sup>361</sup>

God has blessed you with your ability, as well as your grace. The third is left to you: work.

Work and you shall have hope, because God has said as much:

“The heavens will be under the feet of whoever has worked for My sake.”<sup>362</sup>

Rumi cites another of God’s commands:

“Whoever struggles with his nafs for God’s sake arrives at the pleasure of truth.”<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> 5:449

<sup>360</sup> 6:4438

<sup>361</sup> 3:3092

<sup>362</sup> 4:1023

He returns to this subject again elsewhere in the *Masnavi*:

“The grass cannot laugh unless the cloud weeps. Milk won’t be given unless the baby cries.  
Even a one-day-old infant knows that the nursemaid will not show compassion if it does not cry.  
Know that the Creator of all nursemaids will not grant milk either without some tears on your part.  
God has said, ‘Let them weep much!’ Give heed to these words so the milk of God’s bounty will pour forth.  
The cloud’s weeping and the sun’s heat are for you two milks that bring radiance into the world.  
If it were not for the heat of the sun and tears of the clouds, our form would not develop and flourish.  
If this heat and lament were not the origin, the four seasons would not be so consistent.  
As the heat of the sun and the weeping of the clouds constantly nourish the world, you too ought keep the sun of your mind burning and your eyes wet with tears like the cloud.”<sup>364</sup>

In Sufism, work is measured by the tears shed for the sake of God. In the above lines, the term “nursemaid” represents the murshid. As Mevlana makes clear, the Creator of all these nursemaids is God Almighty. In other words, recognize that the mentor is in a position to bring you to God, so cling to him as a child clings to its nursemaid. You need him in order to perfect your patience. You need his “*himmat*,” which is the fourth pillar of Sufi synergy.

*Himmat*, remember, is the reciprocating grace and favor of the saints that comes from your hard work. You cry out “*himmat!*” and your sheikh will answer you, “*khidmat* (service)!” Service is the entirety of your work on the path. Work and strive, and *himmat* will come.

The grace of God, together with *himmat*, is, for lack of a better analogy, something akin to boarding the Ark of Noah.

There is a hadith regarding this: “When the flood comes, I am like a ship. My companions and I are like the Ark of Noah. We have become a haven for your salvation.”

Fear no more, for you have taken refuge in his boat. You have become a disciple to a friend of God, to an heir of the Prophet. The saint is at the helm. He will guide you as you advance on your spiritual journey, travelling from one port to the next.

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<sup>363</sup> 4:1021

<sup>364</sup> 5:134-42

We have called these conversations a dervish's "logbook," but perhaps it is more of a dervish's travel diary. You can relax now. You have made it on board! Lay in your berth and go to sleep, or stretch out in your deckchair and gaze at the sea. What does it matter? The ship is already under sail and you are in good hands!

Ten years ago I was on a cruise to visit all the holy places along the Mediterranean with my master and my fellow dervishes.

One night a great squall erupted off the coast of Malta. The waves rocked us like a cradle, setting off an existential storm in the hearts of all the passengers. Everyone rushed around the boat in a great frenzy, knocking on one another's doors and telephoning each other. I was in my berth and my wife was there next to me. I said to her, "Lie back down and go to sleep, we have a master." I turned over to my right and fell back to sleep. The next morning was dead calm. As I dreamt peacefully, my master had spent the whole night in prayer.

You see, I had abided these words of Mevlana:

"When you are with your sheikh, you are travelling on a ship day and night, safe from harm.  
In the custody of the universe's Creator you are free from worry, for the ship is sailing as you slumber...  
Board the ship so that you may go full steam to the Beloved, just as the soul does from where you stand.  
Venture towards God with neither hands nor feet, like the spirit springs forth from non-existence."<sup>365</sup>

We began this conversation talking about the dark clouds that can cast a shadow over the dervish. Have those clouds dissipated yet?

There is no doubt that Sufism is a rough journey. Once again we see how indispensable a capable captain is if we are to setting off on such a journey. It should be even more obvious that without a mentor this trip cannot be completed.

There is a saying among dervishes: "The devil becomes the sheikh of those who have no sheikh," meaning that you better commit to the path and to a mentor. Otherwise you may be led astray. Those who enter the path set their minds and hearts on setting sail on those boundless waters. Not everybody has to become a dervish. But if you say, "I want to join the dervish order," then find your destined "helmsman" – if you have one – so that you can safely complete your journey.

"Secure yourself in the safety of his light and have no fear of dragons and scorpions!

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<sup>365</sup> 4:540-41, 4:557-58

That pure light goes ahead of you and tears to pieces the bandits in your path.

For in the Qur'an it says that on the Day of Resurrection, God will not disgrace his Prophet. The light of the believers shall march before them, showing the way."<sup>366</sup>

Ability, God's favor, effort and *himmat*: These are the keys to patience, as well as to a safe arrival. What happens when they all come together? We attain union with the Beloved.

This union is something like being able to see, but I wonder whether we will be able to bear what we see at this *maqam*. Or will we be terrified like the unprepared dervish who caught a glimpse of the Unseen? Keep in mind that the sheikh had only shown his murid the populace. God forbid he had shown him the truth about himself! I admire the "implications" of the story. What would have happened to those who saw the majesty of Umar had they seen the holy caliph's master? We aspire to *ru'yatullah*, that is, to see God.

But are we ready?

Patience, you see, prepares the dervish for the Mi'raj!

Through patience, the eyes open. There is a very apropos tale in the *Masnavi*.

There was once an impoverished sheikh who saw a Qur'an in the house of a blind murshid.

"I wonder what this blind dervish does with it, for he can't read it," he said to himself. It would be immodest to ask. So he waited patiently.

At midnight he heard the words of the Qur'an and awoke. The murshid was reading the Qur'an, and accurately too!

His curiosity got the best of him and he asked, "How is this possible? Can you in fact see?"

This is what the murshid said:

"I prayed to God, imploring him. I said, 'O my Lord, You who offers help! My deepest wish is to be able to read the Qur'an.

But I do not know it by heart. Please grant me the light so that as I read my eyes may see without error.

Give me back my sight at that moment so that I may read the Qur'an.'

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<sup>366</sup> 4:609-11

A voice from God answered, saying ‘O you who is so devoted! O you who has hope of Me in the face of every affliction.

As long as you have hope and beautiful thoughts of me, your bounty shall increase in perpetuity.

Whenever you wish to recite the Qur’an or read it from the page, I will restore your sight at that moment so that the letters shall not remain unknown.’

Now, if I intend to recite the Qur’an, like a radiant lamp, My God, who is the Knowing, the Bountiful, the Living, and the All-Aware, illuminates the page before my eyes.”<sup>367</sup>

If you have heart, what more do you want? Be patient and see what awaits you on the horizon.

“Patience sees behind the curtain of struggle the beloved’s rosy countenance and musk-scented locks.”<sup>368</sup>

O Lord, Most Beloved of Beloveds, draw the curtains from before us.

I was considering wrapping up our conversation here, but there is one more matter regarding “patience” I must touch upon.

Even the great saints undergo a test of patience. But this trial is not what you think. Yet I can’t put it into words! Perhaps I am not meant to explain it. But let me make it felt so that those who understand will understand. The great saints endured the inability to see God! When they were unable to see they sat patiently!

There was a fourteenth-century poet named Eşrefoğlu Rumi. Before he became one of the great Sufi saints, he served for eleven years Haji Bayram Wali, the founder of the Bayrami Sufi order. During this time he passed frequent tests of patience, winning accolades from his master. He then ended up marrying his master’s daughter. Immediately afterward, at the behest of Haji Bayram Wali, he traveled to Hama to pay homage to Sheikh Husayn al-Hamawi, a grandson of Abdul-Qadir Gilani, founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. There he embarked on the Qadiriyya path. In Hama, Eşrefoğlu Rumi went into exclusion for forty days, all the while not moving a muscle, astonishing the dervishes that brought him his food.

When the forty days were up, legend has it he said to his master, “O sultan, you killed me.” For, during that time, the saint, much to his surprise, had ventured into the realm of the angels!

Now let me present to you from his opus a favorite poem of mine:

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<sup>367</sup> 3:1862-71

<sup>368</sup> 3:3761

“O Lord, do not tear me away from You.  
O Lord, do not separate me from Your beauty.  
Eşrefoğlu is Your wretched slave.  
O God! Do not tear Your slave away from You!”

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Before we leave each other for the time being, let me share with you one of Mevlana’s duas:

“To be estranged from You is a death full of pain and torment, especially if this separation follows divine Union!  
Do not look upon the one who has seen You as You would one who cannot see. Water the greenery that has already sprung up.  
I did not behave with levity on the path to You, so please do not casually inflict pain on me.  
Do not deny another glimpse of Your face to the one who has already seen it.  
Do not repel him from it!”<sup>369</sup>

Amen! You can now close the book. But come back soon!

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<sup>369</sup> 6:2893-97

## 14 SEE!

*“When God gives your eyes the ability to see as He does, He shows you a hundred worlds.”<sup>370</sup>*

I have been good at drawing ever since I was young. I do charcoal portraits. Ten years ago I even had a private art show. Alas I have no time for that any more! But my daughter and I learned a lot from an artist whose class we took together.

Drawing is training the eye. It teaches you how to look at objects. It teaches you to see, to see better. This allows you to render what is visible. But in the visible there is also a rendering of the invisible, and that, you see, is a Sufi skill.

God is *Al-Basir*, the All-Seeing. This path we are on opens the wayfarer’s eyes in both the material and the spiritual world. It broadens your vision and grants you foresight.

Today we get into the topic of seeing. Is there any organ as indispensable as the eye?

“Man is eye. The rest is mere flesh. The eye, however, is that eye which seeks the light of the Beloved.”<sup>371</sup>

You come to know and love something by seeing it. You are in a position to see the essence or truth of things – so much as it is shown to you – with your own eyes. It is the eye that enables us to see the world properly through God.

Observing the manifestations of God in mankind is, for the most part, the purview of the eye. Moreover and most importantly, we have embarked on this voyage in order to *see* Him. On this journey, “It is the eyes that guide the hand and the foot, as it is they that see where to tread and where not to.”<sup>372</sup>

Mevlana allocates so many verses to the development of the eye that you could say it is the most prominent topic in the *Masnavi*. Throughout today’s conversation I will draw from this rich font of material.

Among this material is a well known story about a small group people in a pitch dark barn trying to figure out what an elephant is through touch alone. I’ll retell it here.

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<sup>370</sup> 1:523

<sup>371</sup> 1:1406

<sup>372</sup> 4:3403



Some Hindus had brought an elephant from India and kept it in a dark room. Several of the local people were admitted in to see the strange creature, but due to the lack of light they could not do so with the eye. They had to use their hands instead. One of the locals grabbed the elephant's trunk and said, "It resembles a waterspout." Another took hold of the animal's ear and guessed that it was a fan of some sort. A third person encountered its foot and declared, "The elephant is something like a pillar." Everyone fancied a guess according to his own imagination and limited information.

Had they a candle, its light would have illuminated the animal and there would not have been any question as to what an elephant was.

Sufism "enlightens" a person's judgment and point of view. It enables the eye to see. Even in broad daylight some of us – better yet, most of us – don't even see what is right under our noses! Or if we do, how much of it are we seeing? Are we aware of the true essence of things?

Turning from the elephant to the ant, there is a tale in the *Masnavi* in which an ant sees the movements of a pen as it writes across a sheet of paper. The ant marvels at the wonder and praises the pen. When an ant with sharper vision comes along, he says, "Praise the fingers, for the skill is in them." Another ant, more enlightened even than the second, says, "I shall praise the arm, for the fingers are branches of that arm."<sup>373</sup>

The pen does the writing, but what makes it write? Is it the fingers, the mind, the brain, or the spirit? What is lending inspiration to all of them? This chain goes all the way to the source. Our desire – our aim – is to transcend the bodily form and arrive at the boundary of the universe. You must be able to see the destination as well as all the stops along the way. *Marifat*, the ultimate knowledge sought through Sufism, is this: the opening of the eyes.

God has opened in this sense the eyes of the prophets:

"The hidden form and the light of God have given the eyes of prophets great depth of vision."<sup>374</sup>

The keyword in this verse is "light." Welcome to the subject of "enlightenment of the eyes."

As people distance themselves from the light source, the light withdraws from their eyes. A far off lamp is of little use in illuminating what lies in front of us. So we must bring our eyes closer to the source, to a place where they can see. Let's try to

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<sup>373</sup> Preceding 4:3721

<sup>374</sup> 4:3222

understand how the eyes become enlightened. For this we will have to turn to someone who “sees.” We will consult the Prophet.

What did Muhammad do? He begged of God:

“O Lord, illuminate the mystery of truth, and show us everything as it really is.”<sup>375</sup>

Here Mevlana is referencing a well known hadith. He then explains in the following verses how Muhammad possesses this faculty:

“Muhammad’s eye foresaw the end. While still on earth he had seen hell in all its detail.  
He had completely rent the veil of heedlessness and saw the throne and dais of God.”<sup>376</sup>

The account of the Mi’raj mentions that on that journey the Prophet’s eye neither missed anything nor went astray. It’s important to really comprehend the nature of the destination.

Allow me to move on to a major point that Mevlana emphasizes. Follow closely:

“Though the sun remained veiled in the night of this world, Muhammad saw God and gleaned hope from this.”<sup>377</sup>

Muhammad was a prophet even before the world was created. If it were not for him, God would not have created the universe. Rumi is signifying this “moment.” He stresses that Muhammad “saw” the Creator then and there. The next line is as follows:

“His eyes became enlightened by lining them with the kohl of ‘Did we not expand for you, your breast?’ His sight became better than even Gabriel’s.”<sup>378</sup>

Forgive my interruptions, but I want to point out how Rumi has given us the first clue by making the connection between the heart and the eye. We will expound on this topic in a moment, but first let’s continue with this superb thread:

“Should God apply kohl to the eyes of the orphan, that orphan becomes a matchless pearl...  
Muhammad saw the spiritual stations of God’s servants. Therefore, God called him “The Witness.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> 5:1765

<sup>376</sup> 6:1358-59

<sup>377</sup> 6:2862

<sup>378</sup> 6:2863

I cannot help but once again jump in here for a second. Take note of the word “witness.” Muhammad is the witness here, but it is God Almighty who is the Absolute Witness.

The concept of witnessing is of vital importance. If you are a witness, you are a believer. We’ve already mentioned the *Shahada*. “See!” commands God. And you reply, “I saw... I witnessed...”

If only I could say a bit more on this topic. Later, my friend, later. We must get back to the passage:

“The instruments of the witness are a precise tongue and a sharp eye. He is privy to that which is hidden and that which is disclosed...  
But should the Sun release His light in his heart, the stars would no longer hold any value to him.  
That heart, unveiled, would see all the secrets. He would spy the spirits of the believers and infidels alike...  
The heart is God’s place of focus in this world and the next. The King looks upon the witness at all times.  
God’s love, and the secret of his love for the witness, is the reason behind the creation of all these veils and mysteries.  
Therefore, God, who so loves the witness, revealed on the Mi’raj the secret of ‘If it were not for you I would not have created the universe.’”<sup>380</sup>

The crux of our conversation is concealed within these lines. The truth is being presented from every direction to the sighted. They must call it the “kohl” of truth because it enables us to see, while at the same time it is visible on the eyes. In olden days Middle Eastern and Central Asian people would tint their eyes with kohl to enhance their vision in the desert. Even today, skiers apply a kind of kohl to their eyes on snow peaked mountains.

But this kohl is a different kind of kohl.

“What kind of kohl has the Almighty applied to the eyes of Muhammad that his spirit could see the truth behind a hundred veils!”<sup>381</sup>

The Prophet’s eyes appear tinged with kohl in our Sufi poetry as well. It is a kohl made of spiritual light, applied by God.

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<sup>379</sup> 6:2864, 2867

<sup>380</sup> 6:2867, 2875-76, 2882-84

<sup>381</sup> 6:3474

It was Imam Ali, the door to the City of Knowledge, who said, "I would not believe in a God I have not seen." When we mention Ali's name, we follow it by saying, "God's favor upon his face." This comes from a verse in the Qur'an:

"So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah."<sup>382</sup>

Rumi records in the *Masnavi* the words Ali said:

"And what I do for God I do not out of conformity nor through imagination or guessing, nor by anything apart from pure sight."<sup>383</sup>

Ali indeed says, "I see Him." It is that simple. What is there to be surprised about? His is exceptional, and exceptional people see. And, "For enlightened eyes, the Creator has made the six directions the embodiment of His signs."<sup>384</sup>

The saints also have "enlightened eyes." Mevlana states that it is on their faces "where God casts his gaze."<sup>385</sup>

"The saint sees hair by hair everything that will happen to him in a hundred years."<sup>386</sup>

Recall the story of Bastami and Kharaqani. They were "physicians who cured blindness."<sup>387</sup>

"The gnostics possess a certain kohl. Ask for it so that your eye, which is now like a creek, may become an ocean."<sup>388</sup>

In order for you to see, these sites upon which God gazes must be in your heart.

The saints educate their disciples through the use of these gazes. Really there is nothing astonishing about this. In God's infinite universe, even turtles teach their young using glances.

Sea turtles, after hatching from their eggs, must cross the beach and reach the ocean. The mother turtle shows them the way by going ahead and glancing back at them. There is a famous painting by the great Osman Hamdi Bey called "The Tortoise Trainer," now on view at the Pera Museum in Istanbul. Interestingly enough Osman Hamdi manages to bring all these elements together in one remarkable work. The

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<sup>382</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2:115

<sup>383</sup> 1:3806

<sup>384</sup> 6:3640

<sup>385</sup> 4:617

<sup>386</sup> 6:2025

<sup>387</sup> 3:2731

<sup>388</sup> 5:1907

painting's subject is none other than the artist himself, dressed exactly like a dervish, attempting to train several turtles with his gaze.

As one story goes, Osman Hamdi Bey painted this picture as a retort to the religious hardliners who criticized him. His message was this: "Here these tortoises are being trained, yet you yourselves cannot learn and change your ways." Indeed, change is slow to come in people, and takes the patience of a Sufi. Unsurprisingly, it is said that Osman Hamdi Bey took an interest in Sufism. In any case, stop by the Pera Museum and check out this famous work next time you are in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district.

Speaking of Beyoğlu, not too far away from the Pera Museum is the Galata Mevlevihanesi, a museum and dervish hall devoted to the Mevlevi order. They offer a public whirling dervish ceremony every Sunday. During this ritual, at the beginning of the third *salam*, the sheikh goes to the front of his mat and recites a prayer in Ottoman Turkish: "May God grant you peace, O ye who walk on the path of love. May the veil be lifted from the eyes of thy soul so that thou shalt see the secrets of the age and the mysteries of the true center." This *dua* is addressed to the whirling dervishes so that their eyes may be opened during the *sama*.

Speaking of eyes and gazes, we can't fail to mention the evil eye. Just outside the Mevlevi museum is a street chock full of souvenir shops. You will see hanging in the windows the ubiquitous *nazar*, that blue and white amulet employed to ward off the evil eye. While the *nazar* is indigenous to Turkey and neighboring countries, people the world over have grappled in some way or another with the evil eye. It's unfortunate that such a concept as the evil eye exists, but isn't this just like mankind? To purposely do harm to someone! May God forgive us all!

Mevlana deals with this concept from two angles. The first is that the evil eye can do harm to people. There is in fact a verse in the Qur'an that says, "And indeed, those who disbelieve would almost make you slip with their eyes..."<sup>389</sup> Rumi comments on this, saying:

"Without a doubt, envy and the evil eye would bring the spinning of the celestial sphere to a halt."<sup>390</sup>

Think about that. Yet, is there any protection against the evil eye? The answer is yes: "The cure for the evil eye is the good eye. It tramples all over the evil one!"<sup>391</sup> The murshids "arm" their dervishes with the good eye. However, this is just the beginning. Mevlana reveals his most important point in the following lines. He announces to the saints:

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<sup>389</sup> The Qur'an, Al-Qalam 68:51

<sup>390</sup> 5:511

<sup>391</sup> 5:513

“It is but your bleary eyes that disarm the effect of every kind of eye from all directions.

O sultan, you obliterate and neutralize the evil eye with your good eyes, and what a wonderful cure it is!

Clearly the elixir of His mysteries transforms the evil eye into the good eye.”<sup>392</sup>

This is the second angle. Turning people’s outlooks from bad to good! Is it difficult? You bet. It is something we dream of.

Let’s talk about dreams a little bit. As we sleep we dream, and in our dreams we see things. This is very significant in Sufism. Hence you will find on the shelves many dream interpretation books. Some of them are good, some of them are bad, and some are just plain baffling. I refuse to reduce the matter to such frivolity. Not everything should be dumbed down and marketed.

Mevlana brings up the subject of dreams in a variety of places in the *Masnavi*, and approaches them with a variety of explanations. To delve into all of them would go beyond the scope of this conversation. However, let’s first spend some time on the representational characteristics of dreams and their “hidden purpose.”

First of all, you must not forget that for Sufis, what we experience outwardly is but a dream. Like a dream, our lives here are fleeting. In this world, people amuse themselves with all sorts of charades! That is, the conditions of this world are truly a “mirage.” The saints tell you this. Your mentor “warns” you of life’s truths.

It may come as a surprise, but on the other hand, what you see in dreams is in fact the truth. If the recurrent meaning is worldly, then the dreams belong to that world. The opposite is also true. As Konuk asserts, “Though your dream is impossible on the surface, it is the state of your inner world.”<sup>393</sup>

Because, in this world, you are held captive inside your flesh. In your dreams, however, you are freed from the cage of the body, freed from temporal restrictions. Your spirit attains its freedom, and, like a bird fleeing its coop, it takes off for the spiritual world, its original home. A spirit that flies in your dream can glide through space and time.

Dreams come in various forms: *Shaytani*, *nafsani*, *meleki*, *ruhani* and *rahmani*, all of which correlate to their origins as coming from the devil, the self, the angels, the soul and God, respectively. These dreams are laden with meaning and lessons, and should be taken as missives sent to you in warning. They may even bring back news of your spiritual state from the future. For this reason the dervish is reminded that he must relate to his mentor what he sees in his dreams. When the murshid cracks

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<sup>392</sup> 6:2805-07

<sup>393</sup> Konuk, XI, p. 364

the codes to these dreams and interprets them, he is deciphering clues related to the perfection of that dervish's soul. If we were to explain this using a medical term, we would say, "diagnose." The murshid then writes a prescription for your soul based on this information. At this junction he may explain to you the meaning of your dream or he may keep it confidential. He will decide on a case-by-case basis whether to inform you of your woeful state.

In short, dreams serve as a "mirror" to your soul. As Konuk puts it, "The purpose of the dream is for the Universal Man to see the wayfarer's eternal truths."<sup>394</sup>

Only watch out: When explaining your dream to your master, never lie or misspeak. Otherwise you would be committing a grave error and a sin to boot. Are there some disciples that do this? There are. We have seen people fabricate their dreams thinking that it may boost their standing. They had foolishly assumed that the master would not realize what they were up to. However, they were only fooling themselves.

Dreams perform another function as well. They "train" you. That is of course if you are so lucky. You would be very fortunate indeed if such a Uwaisian channel opened up to you in the spiritual world!

There are also some fortunate servants of God who see in their dreams their sheikhs and other saints walking toward God. These are *rahmani* dreamscapes.

But allow me to reiterate: The sheikh is not a dream interpreter. When he listens to your dream, he will expound upon it using whatever enters his heart via divine inspiration. But he will not say, "Let me look in this book or that book."

We have not yet gotten into a more fundamental Sufi topic: the causal relationship between the eye and the heart. In Sufism there is the concept of the "eye of the heart" or the "inner eye." This is the "eye" that sees the truth of things. The door to that eye opens through the chest.

"In whoever's breast the door is opened, he will see the sun shining from every place."<sup>395</sup>

It is the "light" which pours from your heart that opens your eyes.

"The light of your eye is the light of your heart. Know then that the light of the eye comes from the light of the heart.  
The light of the light of the eye has become the light of God. It is distinct from the light of intellect and sense."<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Konuk, XII, p. 278

<sup>395</sup> 1:1399

<sup>396</sup> 1:1126-27

Here Mevlana is describing what it is to “see by God’s light.”<sup>397</sup>

The saints see by this light. This is exactly what it means to see!

“His eyes see by the light of God. He tears down the veil of ignorance and becomes aware.”<sup>398</sup>

Let’s move on to the nuts and bolts of the issue: What must happen in order for the heart to receive this light?

“Detox,” if we are to use a modern buzzword. Purification! First you will need to install in your heart a “purification system.” Your mentor will make you do this. You will use it to clean your heart when it gets gunked up. That’s the gist of the mechanics involved. Put your heart on a maintenance regime.

“Your eyes see by the light of God so long as you take no bribes. Avarice and greed blinds your heart.”<sup>399</sup>

You will transcend the covetous nafs and wean yourself from lust.

“The nafs that is enslaved by lust has not the strength to see the divine light.”<sup>400</sup>

Don’t let your heart go blind!

“Those with enlightened hearts have polished clean the patina of doubt. They see the Unseen in proportion to the sheen of their heart.”<sup>401</sup>

Detoxification of the soul is the first step. When the heart has been cleaned and flushed out, it has become an empty vessel. Dervishes will not stop here though. Now they must fill it. Dervishes fill their hearts with love – the love of God, the love of the Prophet, and the love of the saints. The dervish then must become a fountain of love for mankind and for the universe that has been made manifest.

Only then will God grant you the eye of the heart. This inner eye, then, is a special gift that God bestows on the dervish.

“Those gifts serve as visible proof of the love that manifests itself within the heart.”<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> 1:2634

<sup>398</sup> 2:1580

<sup>399</sup> 2:2753

<sup>400</sup> 4:235

<sup>401</sup> 4:2909



For Rumi the eye-love relationship is reciprocal:

“The eye’s seeing increases love while love enhances the sweetness of that seeing.”<sup>403</sup>

When the dervish’s heart fills with the love of God, his eyes fill with tears. In the words of Mevlana, tears are the “eye’s blood.” The more they flow the more polished the eye becomes. And its vision waxes sharper.

“O king! That is the heart’s blood dripping from my eyes. Look and see what is gushing from my eyes!”<sup>404</sup>

I suppose we can call this *hal* the tears of blood stage.

Oh the afflictions the lover endures for the Beloved! If God commanded him to die, would he refuse? This is the gauge of love, death for His sake.

There is a popular Turkish song that goes something like this: What is love, is there anyone who knows? / Is anyone who is in love happy all the time? / Saying I love you is so easy to do / Is there any who would die if told to do so?”

True followers of God lay down their lives for Him. But why? Why do they make such sacrifices? They sacrifice themselves so that they may bear witness to the Beauty of God!

Look where we have arrived: For the Sufi, the price of bearing witness is martyrdom. In fact, the word for witness and the word for martyr in Arabic are the same: *shahit*.

This connection demonstrates that true faith is established in the heart. To be a true believer, Sufis see it as absolutely essential to glorify the Oneness of God by deed; that is, to express the *Tahwid* with both tongue and heart. True believers must dispense with rote memorization and step out onto the path toward true understanding. They must make the leap from mimicry to inquiry. This begins with the eye. After all, the *Shahada*, the Muslim profession of faith, is prefaced with the words, “*ashadu*,” meaning “I witness.”

There is no other way to see the Beloved. In fact, let me tell you something that you may find strange the first time you hear it.

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<sup>402</sup> 1:2628

<sup>403</sup> 2:3238

<sup>404</sup> 3:4711

“It is obvious that God appears to the gnostic. It is well-established that God does not hide.”

Seeing God, my dear wayfarer, means reaching a level of spiritual maturity whereby you can fully understand Him through all His acts, names, and attributes; to feel His existence and magnitude within the flow of life. This is Oneness! However not everyone is destined to be graced by God’s manifestations. Here, though, we are entering dangerous waters that we best not venture into. Yet seeing that you have a thirst for them, let’s wade in just a bit. I won’t leave the topic hanging in the air like that!

This is the main point: Whether it be Mankind or the Universe – the whole of Creation – exists not to see itself but to see the Creator reflected in itself. It is a matter of being able to see God’s reflections and manifestations in Mankind and the Universe. It is being able to see both the temporal and the everlasting, the relative as well as the absolute.

Did we not already cover the symbolism of the mirror and the shadow? This was the reason why!

What is it that dervishes do? They attune the eye to the everlasting and absolute rather than concentrating on the temporal and relative things that the average person assumes to be “actually there.” We Sufis focus on what is real! What the common eye sees as extant is intrinsically transitory and will eventually return to nothingness. But God is eternal. Though the lay people are unable to see God, it is He that allows them to see what they see. It is God who grants vitality to both subject and object. There is therefore only one of Him! The rest (Mankind and the Universe) is bound to Him and dependent on Him.

The universe is such that what is there does not exist while what is not there actually exists. When looking at it superficially, some people call this a contradiction. It may come as a surprise, but we call this system the truth of things.

The masters of the path tell us, “Recite the funeral prayer for what is temporal and relative in the mind and heart so as to protect yourself from these ‘veils’ that prevent you from seeing the essence.” People and objects are all around us, true. But what really matters is to avoid seeing them as they appear to the five senses. What we are doing is exceedingly important and valuable, as it puts everything in its place before God!

In this framework, we can say that there are three types of “sight.” First, people can see creatures and objects, but they do not see God in them. These are the heedless! The second type is when someone erases the existing universe from their eyes. Think of the Sufi in the state of *sukr*. In this state of astonishment and fervor, the Sufi sees nothing but God everywhere he looks. He has reached self-annihilation, but he

remains there. At the third level of sight, the Sufi attains self-annihilation and arrives at perpetuity: he sees God in everything.

This means that objects change according to the eye. The magnitude of the eye's lens is dependent on the soul. Your heart determines the strength of magnification.

“Vision” in Sufism is related to how close you are in your heart to God. The closeness here is the intimacy in regards to spiritual station. To reach God is to attain *marifat*. Hence the sighted are the ones that Rumi calls the gnostics, and the ones that attain the level of *marifat* are those that possess *irfan*.

*Irfaan* too is a matter of cognizance and perception. The strenuous Sufi journey has but one goal: to endow you with the highest level of spiritual perception. Outwardly nothing will change when you complete your spiritual journey, neither you nor anything around you. What will change is your point of view. I have known a good many wayfarers who have said, “Is it worth this much trouble?” I have no idea what they were expecting. Were they hoping the walking stick in their hand would turn into a dragon or that they could cross the Bosphorus in some magical way that does not involve a bridge? There's the Marmaray train. Get on and go! That's not what Sufism is!

Perception lies at the heart of sight. Mevlana goes into such depth on the state of perception in the *Masnavi's* fourth volume that he could have written a separate book on it. The subject heading reads:

“On the presence of prosperity in ruin, of community in waywardness, of durability in destruction, of aim in aimlessness and of existence in nonexistence.”<sup>405</sup>

It is a long subject, but I will give you the short version.

“Oh the many who have travelled to Syria and Iraq and have seen nothing but blasphemy and discord!  
And the untold numbers who have gone to India and Herat but have seen nothing but straight commerce!  
And the countless who have seen nothing but deceit and treachery when they traveled to Turkistan and China!  
As they scour the whole earth with no sense of perception save for color and smell, they find nothing but that.  
Should an ox suddenly enter Baghdad, traversing the city from one side to the other,  
Of all the city's splendors and joys the only thing the beast will see is a watermelon rind!

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<sup>405</sup> Heading before 4:2341

Straw and grass are the things on the path worthy of the gaze of a cow or an ass!"<sup>406</sup>

Indeed, Mevlana says of perception: "You see as much of the world as your perception allows."

After spending the above verses admonishing the heedless and the ignorant, Rumi uses the next verses to praise the inanimate objects that can "see":

If God had not given the wind sight, how would it have, without an eye,  
singled out the tribe of Ad?<sup>407</sup>  
How would it have distinguished the believers from the enemies? How would  
it have known the wine from the gourd that contains it?  
If the fire of Nimrod had no eye, how then would it have honored Abraham?  
If the Nile had no eyesight, how would it have told the Israelites apart from  
the Egyptians?  
If there was no sight in the mountain or in the stones, how then did they  
befriend David?  
If this earthen soil had no eyes, then how did it swallow up Qarun?  
If the Moaning Pillar had not possessed the eye of the heart, how would it  
have felt the anguish of separation?  
If the gravel in Abu Jahl's fist had had no eyes, how then could it have recited  
the *Shahada*?<sup>408</sup>

Heavy, no? Now let's pay close attention to what Mevlana says now:

"The gnostic's every hair has been made an eye."<sup>409</sup>

We have arrived at perception! Who are those endowed with perception? The gnostics! The equation is so clear, simple and explicit. Then what does the dervish's eye see first? Let me correct that: "who" will it see? It will see the friends of God, the "sighted."

Read what Rumi has them tell you:

"Should you look at me for a moment with my eye, you will begin to see a world beyond this one."<sup>410</sup>

He emphasizes it again:

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<sup>406</sup> 4:2373-79

<sup>407</sup> The prosperous people of Ad turned to idol worship and were later ruined by a massive storm after they did not heed the prophet Hud's divine message.

<sup>408</sup> 4:2412-19

<sup>409</sup> 4:2401

<sup>410</sup> 4:2398

“When you are together with Friends you will see a rose garden everywhere!”<sup>411</sup>

Come on, dervish, wake up! Go and rub into your eyes, as if it were kohl, the soil on which the saints have tread so that you may gain your sight! This is Mevlana’s guidance; should we disregard it? If you want this path, by all means, take it. That earthen kohl is submission. Be humble like the clay, they say. See the symbols and signs, but understand the meanings behind them. “Master,” they say, “I am reading the *Masnavi*, but I do not understand a thing.” They are right. You will not understand even the parables, though you have no problem reading the fables of La Fontaine. Why? Because the heart required to understand Rumi remains empty. The eye sees the letters and follows the lines, and so the mind thinks it is reading the text. But of course, the meaning is not sinking in.

This is why we resent rote learning. Knowledge is not imprinted. After a while, the visible object fades and disappears, like the disappearing ink of old spy movies. The knowledge, like a film, comes to an end: *Fin*.

But *irfan* is permanent. It nourishes the brain by ripening perception. The gnostic’s perception is suffused with wisdom. In Sufi literature, the term for this perception is “*farasat*.” We can call it “vision,” in the deepest sense of the word. Just as the human resource administrator asks an applicant during the hiring process, “Do you have vision?”, I too ask that question of the young people who come to me. It is not for nothing! As a company’s corporate identity is founded upon its vision, so too is your spiritual attainment.

Where were we? Ah, *farasat*. This term also connotes shades of valor and courage. There is a hadith that warns, “Beware the believer’s *farasat*, for he sees by the light of God.” The saints and mentors are like that. They possess the “eye of the hawk,” as Mevlana says.

At this juncture, let me share with you a couple of stories that illustrate this subject. Over a millennium ago, a young man came to a dervish gathering as the great saint Junayd of Baghdad was conducting *suhbat*. Junayd lowered his head for a moment and fell into deep thought. When he lifted his head, he said, “Hey, young man, become a Muslim. Your time has come for you to be Muslim.” To everyone’s surprise the youth was in fact a Christian who had joined the *suhbat* dressed as a Muslim. The incident immediately caused the young man to be humbled by Islam.

The other tale is of Emir Sultan. Born in Bukhara, he came to Anatolia for spiritual training after receiving divine signs to do so. He founded a dervish lodge in Bursa and ended up marrying the daughter of Sultan Bayazid I, who was then on the throne. One day the illustrious Haji Bayram Wali paid him a visit. At that time,

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<sup>411</sup> 4:2372

tradesmen were busy repairing Emir Sultan's house, which, like the other homes around Bursa Castle, had fallen into ruin. During the visit a carpenter suddenly dropped a huge timber. When Emir Sultan's holy glances met the falling timber, the wood became suspended in air.

Witnessing this event, Haji Bayram Wali thought to himself, "Certainly Emir Sultan wants to show off to me with one of his miracles."

Emir Sultan heard this! "It was not my intention here to prove by this miracle that I am a saint. Children are playing around the castle here. I did this so that the timber would not fall and crush them. My aim was to spare the children this disaster." After the children had fled, the timber fell to the ground!

The purpose of opening the eye is so that it can see clear through to the end result. There is yet another story in the *Masnavi* I want to tell you. This one is about an elderly man who walks into a jewelry shop. "Do you have a scale?" he asks. "I have no broom," came the jeweler's reply. The man was taken aback. "I didn't ask for a broom!" he said. The jeweler kept his poise. "I don't have a sieve either," he said. This time the man became cross. "I also didn't ask for a sieve! Are you mocking me?!"

The jeweler remained calm and said, "You are a jeweler also. You asked me for a scale so that you could weigh your gold powder. But you are old; your eyes can't see clearly anymore and your hands are shaky. If I were to give you a scale, you would spill your gold all over the floor as you weighed it. In order to separate the gold dust that has fallen on the floor from the dust already there, you will first need a broom, followed by a sieve. I figured it would be best if I stayed out of it!" Mevlana relates this parable in order to explain the importance of foresight. This is what it means to have *farasat*.

Today, wayfarer, we have delved together into these crucial concepts regarding "seeing." This topic has wiped me out. So let's sign off here, for there is so much more to it than I have explained or that I can even understand.

Come, let's top off this conversation with a Mevlevi greeting:

*"May there be love for thee  
May thy love turn to beauty  
May thy beauty turn to light  
May thy light turn to sight!"*

Amen!

## 15 GIVE THANKS!

*“These trophies, offerings and blessings  
of the King are always for his servants.  
God has no need of any of these gifts.  
Happy is he who can render thanks.”<sup>412</sup>*

I assume you thumb through the *Masnavi* from time to time. Have you ever come across the story of the inhabitants of Zarwan?

Zarwan is a town not too far from the Yemeni city of Sana. There lived a good-natured, experienced, and benevolent farmer. He was generous, “a mine of grace and favor.” The troubled and needy flocked to him as though he were “the Kaaba of the destitute.” And he would always give them one tenth of his produce. Not only that, he also gave away a tenth of his flour when he ground his grain at threshing time, or a tenth of the bread he baked from that flour. On top of all that, he also donated one tenth of his income to the needy.

He had imparted on his children this advice:

“After I leave this world, do not dare, out of greed, withhold from anyone in need the portion allotted to the poor.  
Do this so that your crops may continue to flourish in abundance out of your obedience (and gratitude – MKÖ) to God.”<sup>413</sup>

No sooner had the farmer passed away did his children turn a deaf ear to this advice by pocketing a share belonging to an almswoman. And lo and behold, their land dried up and their crop yield diminished as a consequence to this act. They had neither harvest nor income!

Mevlana offers a similar parable elsewhere in the *Masnavi*. In the story of the Shebeans he illustrates how a failure to share and to show gratitude leads communities to ruin.

In fact, Rumi is not merely telling us a story; he is telling us the truth. His words do not belong to history or the past, but to the present. These stories portray the postmodern age we live in. “We are all Zarwanians!” As long as capitalism is kneaded with selfishness, greed, and avarice, we will stumble from one economic crisis to another.

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<sup>412</sup> 1:3141-42

<sup>413</sup> 5:1479-80

So what is Mevlana trying to underscore here?

“We must offer endless thanks to the Benefactor. Abandon Him and you will unleash His perpetual wrath.”<sup>414</sup>

So what will happen if you do give endless thanks?

“Give thanks and God shall bestow your livelihood upon you in heaps, free of traps, fear and enemies.”<sup>415</sup>

After all, the Qur’an says, “... 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]...”<sup>416</sup>

Now let’s eavesdrop on a conversation between two great saints.

One of these greats is Shaiq al-Balkhi, the other is Ibrahim ibn Adham, who is also from Balkh. They are talking to each other.

After exchanging pleasantries, they begin their conversation in earnest. Ibrahim al-Adham says, “We give thanks when our bellies are full, and we wait patiently when they are not.”

Shaiq al-Balkhi responds, “Ha, that’s what the dogs of Balkh do. When we have it we dole it out, and when we don’t we give thanks!”

Observe the high level to which these saints have attained!

As Rumi puts it, “Like the nightingale, they always sing a hundred beautiful notes in God’s rose garden of gratitude.”<sup>417</sup>

We can interpret the verse to mean this: Anyone who attains a spiritual state such as these men have sings praise at all times, regardless of whether they are moments of God’s grace or moments of God’s wrath. Sharp thorns grow alongside sweet-smelling flowers. Gratitude is a rose garden, says Rumi.

In another of Rumi’s works, *Fihi Ma Fih* (It Is What It Is), he writes:

“Gratitude is hunting and bagging God’s blessings. When you learn the voice of gratitude, you are preparing yourself for an increase in divine blessings. Whenever the Lord loves his servant, He afflicts him. If the servant bides his time and endures, God improves his station, and if he offers thanks, God will set him above the rest.

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<sup>414</sup> 3:2671

<sup>415</sup> 3:2881

<sup>416</sup> The Qur’an, Ibrahim 14:7

<sup>417</sup> 2:3288



Some give thanks to God's grace while others give thanks to God's wrath. And each one of them reaps the rewards, for gratitude is the elixir that converts wrath to grace. Wise and perfect is the one who gives thanks both in contentment and in affliction. Even if his desire is for the pits of hell, this person is the one whom God has chosen. Therefore gratitude expedites the actualization of intention, for outward grievance generates inward grievance."<sup>418</sup>

The conversation between the two saints from Balkh presented us with the possibility of seeing gratitude from two different angles. That is, if you possess the ability to see!

Mevlana again chastises those who neglect to give thanks. He is urging them to hasten to God's attention and give thanks. God nullifies the works of the "ungrateful" while He "cleanses the hearts" of the "people of faith."<sup>419</sup>

Gratitude is essential. But why?

"When thanks is not offered, beauty and talent vanish, such that they are never seen from again."<sup>420</sup>

In other words, you are cut off.

God snatches this sense from the minds of those servants who neglect to give thanks:

"His sense of gratitude and affection leave him so quickly that he can never remember them again."<sup>421</sup>

Alas and alack!

On the other hand, there is great news for those who *do* give thanks:

"God says, 'O death... Give back everything that you have taken!'"<sup>422</sup>

But let's read how the friends of God would respond should this happen. Mevlana says:

"Death gives it back, but they will not accept it, because they have been gifted with the blessing of spiritual life.

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<sup>418</sup> Konuk, IV, p. 385

<sup>419</sup> 5:996

<sup>420</sup> 5:997

<sup>421</sup> 5:998

<sup>422</sup> 5:1006

They say, 'We are Sufis. We have discarded our robes. We gambled them away and we refuse to take them back again.'<sup>423</sup>

Are there any such heroes who can do this? There are! Ibrahim Adham was one such hero. A good samaritan saw his wretched state and wished to offer him alms. But he said, "No can do. What I didn't give to get to this state! I will not take it back this cheaply!"

In case you didn't know, Ibrahim Adham had been a great ruler of Balkh, but he gave away his crown, throne, palace and wealth for this cause, free of charge. So he was not about to throw away the spiritual station he had earned through all his giving for a mere three cents worth of alms. Certainly not! He was quite content with his spiritual state and course of action.

To become destitute for the sake of God and to remain that way, no doubt requires determination and perseverance!

The conversation has carried us to the spiritual and esoteric frontiers of gratitude. Blessings, in the world of the Sufis, have now turned into gifts of an intimate nature.

"Because it has been promised that blessings will increase for the grateful, as closeness to God is a reward for prostration.

Our Lord has said, 'Prostrate and draw near.' The prostration of our bodies brings the soul closer to God."<sup>424</sup>

Prostration – and we can also say abdication – brings the lover closer to the Beloved. A topic of utmost importance, no?

Freeing oneself from the body, cleansing oneself of bodily passions, that is, becoming destitute for the sake of God, delivers a person from earthly idols. It liberates the soul.

In the words of that impeccable saint, I will say, "If you speak, speak your gratitude for being spared idol worship, and God shall deliver you from the idols within."<sup>425</sup>

The time has come for another parable. This one is about a man named Juhi. He was poor but cunning. "My darling," he said to his wife, "you are a beautiful woman. Come, let's set a trap for that *qadi* using your coquetry and guile." He then sent his wife to go lead the judge astray. The woman went to the judge and made a false complaint about Juhi.

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<sup>423</sup> 5:1007-08

<sup>424</sup> 4:10-11

<sup>425</sup> 2:369

And boy did the *qadi* fall for her beauty! “The court is so noisy,” he said. “Let’s meet in private and you can tell me all about your husband’s cruelty.”

“My husband went into town on business,” said the woman. “My house is empty. We could meet there.” That night the *qadi* came to Juhi’s home. She had prepared for him hors d’oeuvres and various liquors. And then, just as the two were on the verge of sin, and exactly as they had planned, Juhi knocked on the door. The judge jumped to his feet and tried to find a hiding place. In fear and haste, he threw himself into a trunk that happened to be in the living room.

Juhi walked into the house, and what does he say? “Woe is me, I have nothing but that trunk. People assume we have gold and silver in there, and so they never extend us a helping hand. But I will show them! Tomorrow I will take that trunk and burn it, right in the middle of the market.”

The next morning a porter came and loaded the trunk on his back, and headed straight for the market. The *qadi*, who was still in the trunk, called out to the porter. “Hey! I have a deputy at the court. Run! Find him, and tell him to make haste and get here as quickly as possible so that he may buy the trunk and save me!” (from disgrace as well as from the fire).

The porter did as the judge requested. The judge’s deputy hurried over and purchased the trunk. Of course, he paid through the nose. One hundred gold pieces! That’s nothing to scoff at!

The *qadi* was saved for now. But Juhi wanted to play the trick on the *qadi* again the following year. By now the *qadi* had grown wiser, and of course shooed the woman away. “Come on now, lady,” he said, “Get away from me. Play your games with someone else.”

Well, had Juhi grown wiser? Don’t count on it. Count how many times the *nafs* has deceived someone, how many times it has led someone into the same trap. Those who do not learn from their mistakes are legion!

The original story is there in Rumi’s compelling verses. Mevlana is saying that we are all in a “trunk.” A box, let’s say. What kind of box is this? “A box of whims and desires!” The *qadi* had ended up in the box out of his lust for Juhi’s wife.

Admire the beauty of this line: “Should he go forth from the box of the ego, he will just go from one tomb to another tomb.”<sup>426</sup>

We spend our lives passing from one box of passions to another. Then we get placed once more in a box and buried in the ground.

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<sup>426</sup> 6:4499

It is such a shame that mankind does not realize that we are a slave to boxes.

“He knows not the pleasure of freedom. A trunk of forms constitutes his reality.”<sup>427</sup>

“There is one person in a thousand who is true-sighted and understands that he is inside a trunk.”<sup>428</sup>

Mevlana is saying that the prophets and saints will save you from this captivity. They will drop a bucket down and pull you (your nafs) out of that dark well.

“Unless he is outside of this six-sided well (the material world), how could he draw Joseph out of it?

This someone descends from the un-pillared heavens, and his body, like a bucket, comes to the rescue of those at the bottom of the well.

When Joseph clung to his bucket, he was delivered from the well and became king of Egypt.

Other buckets seek to draw water from the well, but his bucket ignores the water, seeking only people in peril.”<sup>429</sup>

Here we have once again arrived in the presence of the Universal Man.

If you have found a true mentor, if he has shown you the way, and if you have begun your journey, render thanks. You have been drawn out of the well. You have stepped into the elevator of the saints. You have grabbed hold of the bucket’s rope, which is entwined with God’s rope. The hands of the saint to which you have submitted are gripping the other end of that rope. He is pulling you up. What more do you want? Give thanks, give thanks, and give thanks again for your good fortune. You are lucky! Otherwise you could be pacing around in your dark box. Instead you have embarked on a spiritual journey. Endure. If during that voyage you venture up on deck, you will be exposed to the vast ocean before you. You will see the horizon. You will see what is written in the firmament. You cannot call it a simple joy. You will experience ecstatic pleasure. Especially if you make it to the captain’s bridge. From there you will see eighteen thousand universes.

“Thank the benefactor,” says Mevlana.

“Giving thanks to him is tantamount to giving thanks to God, since by God’s gift he has reached a position to help.

To show ingratitude towards him is to show ingratitude to God. His right is by the right of God.”<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> 6:4510

<sup>428</sup> 6:4505

<sup>429</sup> 6:4570-73

<sup>430</sup> 6:3254-55

The perfect mentor puts you in touch with God, so why would you show him anything but gratitude? He is owed immense gratitude.

“If you offer thanks and make a sincere effort, fret not, for he will pay you back a hundred fold.”<sup>431</sup>

Konuk expounds upon this verse: “O wayfarer, if you have attached yourself to a mentor and actually express in deed your gratitude for the knowledge of the Unseen and the science of ecstasy that you have learned from him, and you practice asceticism, and labor on this path of hardship, then you have no cause for grievance, because either God Almighty, or the saint, will increase the knowledge you have already acquired by a hundred fold.”<sup>432</sup>

The main point is that you perform an expression of your gratitude. Let’s say you have found your teacher and your lodge, and having been accepted, you start out on the path. And now you are working through these stages we have gone over in the dervish’s logbook. So what is expected of you during this process? In the simplest terms, you must pay your dues. So again, what will be asked for here?

Let’s look even further ahead, after years have gone by, they say, “You did it. From now on, fly with your own wings.” In exchange for the knowledge you have gained, the knowledge of the Unseen, you are required to give alms. But what kind of alms are we talking about here?

Let’s go over it again.

First of all, you will pay close attention to “representation.” You will conduct yourself as an example. You will act as an ambassador of the path. From the moment you took that step toward dervishhood, you have carried a certain responsibility. You will act out of consciousness.

You will become a “good” person. You will become a person who is “sure” of his hands, body and tongue.

It’s so unfortunate that in this day and age, there are people who only pretend to be holy, who ram religion down people’s throats, and as a result turn people away from religion, from spiritual betterment. In contrast, you should act as a spiritual touchstone. There is no need for you to preach, to behave with missionary zeal. Your stance and outlook should directly correspond to an honest, upright spiritual state.

There should be people who, unable to help themselves, blurt out to you, “You have something, but I can’t quite put my finger on it. Tell me so that I can be like you.”

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<sup>431</sup> 5:994

<sup>432</sup> Konuk, IX, p. 337

Others – those who have tasted something of the joys of this world – should come up to you and ask, “In which rose garden do you grow?”

These days representation has become crucial, believe me. It is much more important than proselytization. Getting out the message or sounding the call only means something if it comes from the “right” person. It is alluring for sure. But only those who have defeated their own nafs can come and ameliorate the nafs of others.

We must lead by example. Abu Bakr “saw” the Prophet, and that was that. Muhammad embodied such beauty that Abu Bakr had no need to be convinced. There is a true model for you!

In short, can those who see you say, “I want to be whatever you are”? Can you make them say that? Therein lies the key, the mark of true skill. They should be able to sense – from the outside – the light within you.

Is this possible? It is. People will one day show up and say, “I’m a great admirer of you.” They may even say, “I am in love with you.” You will smile at that. You should not take it personally. Your answer ought to be, “You do not admire me, but what is inside of me.” Arrogance has no place here!

Proselytization comes after representation. Simply put, people will ask you and you will explain. You will have a conversation. Up until now, you have always only “listened.” Now it is your turn to talk. Oh no, right?

Fear not, wayfarer, the Creator will take over from here! Remember how your sheikh would speak? What would he emphasize and when? Let’s think for a moment together about how religious discourse is practiced. Be thankful you had a good model in front of you.

“The sheikh’s words gathered the people together and united them. The chatter of the rest sows divisiveness.

Solomon began to understand the language of birds when God enlightened him.

During his time the gazelle and the tiger became friends, sparing them from conflict and bloodshed.”<sup>433</sup>

From now on you can mark on your own the key words in Mevlana’s verses. Discourse should serve the purpose of uniting. It should serve peace. Put another way, what does Sufism teach you in one word? Oneness. To unite. To become one, but without getting rid of differences. The verse is not saying that there will no longer be a gazelle and a tiger. So what does it say?

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<sup>433</sup> 2:3699-3701

It says they must be able to become friends. And what a huge need there is for that in this day and age, the need for union in peace, in righteousness, and in faith.

All of us have an eternal truth that is particular to us. Yet we have all come from the same noble jewel. How nice would it be if we were able to put those fragments back together again in this world! Oh, but it can be done!

God has made sure we have been instructed from childhood to do this. I am talking about puzzles. In a jigsaw puzzle every piece is a different shape. But when they are put together, a single picture forms. Legos come together in the same way. *Ebru*, the Turkish art of paper marbling, also follows that philosophy. Think of all the many examples there are of this. You must understand that difference and multiplicity are not inherently contrary to unity, but that they in fact complete one another.

Our discourse has brought us to “unity.” Listen to what Rumi says about unity:

“When the word breaks free of letter, sound, and breath, it casts off everything and becomes an ocean.”<sup>434</sup>

The word (discourse) should take us to Him. God’s path is the path of conciliation, peace and salvation.

What then would happen if you sailed off into this ocean of words with this belief? Listen closely:

“In the end, all three parties – the speaker of the word, the listener of the word, and the words themselves – become the spirit.”<sup>435</sup>

Oneness!

Mevlana says here:

“Though I am the Word, I am at once the speaker as well as the listener!”<sup>436</sup>

Mevlana did not mean this, of course, in the sense of, “Nobody is listening to me, I am speaking to myself.” I gather that you are now beginning to grasp the Sufi axis on which the meaning of this verse is set on.

I want to touch for a moment on the topic of speaking. Discourse, as Mevlana emphasizes, is the “ladder of the soul.”<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> 6:71

<sup>435</sup> 6:72

<sup>436</sup> 6:2270

<sup>437</sup> Konuk, XIII, p. 348

Those who speak from the heart possess a special language. We learn a foreign language in order to understand the people who speak it and to become familiar with their culture.

With that in mind, I want to share with you another anecdote, one that the late, great master, Mehmet Dumlu Kütahyevi, told me. It was about the Sheikh ul-Islam of a certain era who was hung up on a spiritual matter. He became so troubled that it looked like his problem was going to do him in. None of the scholars in the capital could give him a satisfying answer. Finally he begged God for help.

That night Olanlar Sheikh Ibrahim Effendi appeared to him in some form, as if to say that his answer lay with this saint. The Sheikh ul-Islam could not believe it. Yes, they said he was a saint, but at the end of the day, he was illiterate and had the temperament of a Malamati.<sup>438</sup> There was not a single person – lay or educated – among those he had consulted that did not ridicule him.

So the Sheikh ul-Islam put on a disguise and arrived at the dervish lodge in the middle of the night. As a saint, Sheikh Olanlar knew he would have a guest and who that guest would be. He prepared the lodge for the head scholar's visit. After they drank soup, they sequestered themselves in a room. Sheikh Olanlar began by saying, "We are ignorant, we do not know, but according to what we hear from the greats who do..." In an instant he solved the Sheikh ul-Islam's problem.

The high official left indebted in gratitude. His assistants who were waiting for him did not believe what they had heard. How did that illiterate man do it? He did not even speak Arabic.

The Sheikh ul-Islam gave a brilliant answer: "Yes, maybe he does not know Arabic, but he speaks the language of God. Yes, gentleman, the language of God!"

God's own tongue. His discourse.

We can speak using that language.

In another *Masnavi* story, an arrogant scholar boards a ship, and looking down his nose at the captain, asks him, "Do you know grammar and syntax?" The captain says he does not.

"Then you have wasted half your life!" replies the scholar. Naturally, the captain was offended by this.

The ship set sail. Not too far into their voyage they encounter a violent storm. The ship begins to sink. There is no hope of rescue. The scholar rushes to the captain,

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<sup>438</sup> Malamatiyya were a group of Sufis who took the "path of self-blame."



wondering what to do. “Sir,” says the captain, “do you know how to swim?” The scholar says he does not.

“Then you have wasted the rest of your life!” replies the captain.

If you understand this anecdote in terms of symbols you will see the need and value in speaking God’s language. It is the language of the gnostics, of those murshids who possess full spiritual knowledge. You must learn that language and speak it. Then, “Whatever you say will also be luminous, for the sky issues forth nothing but pure rain.”<sup>439</sup>

Be a cloud. Accumulate what you have gathered from your mentor and shower it down in places parched and in need.

The murshid speaks, and makes others speak!

A dua is also a form of discourse, is it not?

We have seen this in our previous conversations. But at that time you were instructed to listen. Now you are meant to speak. So we will talk a little more about dua from this perspective.

From oneness in discourse to oneness in prayer – let me explain this:

“For the sheikh’s dua is not like every dua. He has been annihilated and his words are God’s words.

As God is then asking and imploring Himself, how could he refuse his own prayer?”<sup>440</sup>

Mevlana prefaces the above verse with this annotation: “A prayer performed by an ‘arif who has reached God is like God’s petition to Himself, for, ‘I am his ears and his eyes, and his tongue and his hand.’ God did say, ‘when you threw, it was Allah who threw.’”<sup>441</sup>

The great saint Bayazid Bastami said of his sixty odd years, “For the first thirty years God spoke and I obeyed. For the next thirty years I spoke and God obeyed.”<sup>442</sup>

Do you get the clever wit here? Service through speaking. *Khidmat* via your tongue.

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<sup>439</sup> 5:2489

<sup>440</sup> 5:2243-44

<sup>441</sup> Heading preceding 5:2242.

<sup>442</sup> This quote is commonly rendered in English as, “For thirty years I sought God. But when I looked carefully I found that in reality God was the seeker and I the sought.” The meaning is more or less the same.

The performance of gratitude on the Sufi path does not end here. But really do not let me intimidate you. Our line of work is very simple:

“Whatever you do, do it, but do it with love!”

Go all in. Do not begrudge the ones you serve for the financial setbacks you may incur through giving. Do your duty justice. Do your job with love, that is. Carry it through with an altruistic conscience. That’s number one. Mark these words of mine.

Number two is to never forget where you came from! I am saying this on two accounts. The first is that “We come from God, and to Him we shall return.” The second is the day you came here. The dervish lodge is a wounded gazelle club. You came here as a wounded gazelle. Perhaps you have benefitted. You came in order to be good, to find the cure to your troubles. You were moaning like the reeds in the marsh. What did you become, or what *will* you become here? Let me be frank, they call the murshids “healers of the heart.” Those who come here and knock on the door assume we will stop the blood hemorrhaging from your heart. This is not true. We are like nightingales. We add pain to the pain of those whose hearts are burning. You will not say, “My pain is enough for me. What is all this?” Your pain was one; we then add a thousand more. If your troubles were personal, we will heap the whole world’s troubles on you. We do it for the dervish’s own good, until he forgets his own pain.

We purchase your pain, so that we can have your soul. In exchange, we show you the Beloved. If you are anguishing, we tell you to anguish for God. We tell you to anguish on the path in order to reach Him. Even this is not enough. These servants are members of God’s family. We tell you to suffer alongside them.

You were once a wounded gazelle. You understand their burning hearts. Go, anoint their arms. Give it a go. Try and we will see. Can you give these other wounded gazelles a comforting shoulder to cry on?

Run! Lay claim to those people!

We expect you to serve others. That is what is expected of you.

Your mentor, if he is indeed a Universal Man, does not expect personal service from you. He would never make you serve him! Your service is to the people. But the murshid directs you at the initial stage until you no longer need him, when your heart – the eye of your heart – guides you.

You must perform your duties, whatever they may be. This is imperative, if you are to reach maturation. My esteemed sheikh once said to us, “No matter what, serve the people for God’s sake and for the sake of good.” We have tried to uphold this mandatory edict. We have had our faults, no doubt, but we have not failed to act.

Dervishhood, I will say again, is not a place to put your feet up and relax. This is not a lodge for the indolent. Actually, at one time there was such a thing as an indolent's lodge. That was the nickname given to a leper hospital in Ottoman times, indolent here meaning slow to heal. In the days when society and the state ostracized lepers and sent them into isolation, the dervish orders ran to their aid and set up organizations to help them. But just as many expressions related to Sufism have had their original meanings replaced over time with different, negative connotations by Sufism's detractors, so too did the term "indolent's lodge." Its original meaning all but forgotten, the term now merely implies a place for idlers, loafers, and good-for-nothings. But the Sufi heart remembers.

The heart wants to take care of the lepers, the infirm, the wretched, the homeless, the destitute, and wants to do it in deed. Did we not expand your breast for this very purpose? Did we not open your heart? Did we not inflate your heart to the sky so that every aching heart may fit into it?

In short, Sufism ultimately comes down to "social sensitivity." Like our bodies need bread and water, our era needs these kinds of "ethics." At the very least, we believe this and we preach this.

Dervishhood is a difficult trade, no?

If we did not give you love, His love, you would not be able to bear the weight. You would not be able to lift this spiritual barbell. But this is not the case. You will not tire. Your trainer says, "Do it!" and you will lift that dumbbell into the air. If you succeed in letting that dumbbell press down on your chest, your trainer will say, "That's not enough! Raise it high!" But this does not mean that your strength is gone. You will lift that weight. We do share an affinity to weightlifters. While their burden is material, ours is spiritual.

If you are "convinced" of the conversations we have been having for a while, then "come" close. Do you still want to be a dervish after all you have learned? Are you committed?

Then get closer and let us perform your ceremony. Let us breathe into your heart the Al-Fath (Verses 10 and 18) and Ash-Sharh. Let us arm you. Let us fortify you.

Your sight has already come. Your signs have been given. They have arrived in spirit. Only formalities remain...

May God favor you and make your work easier. May God employ you in his sublime service!

I began by saying, "Listen well." I said, "Listen well, for what I am telling is your story."

What I have told to you is actually “my” story. I told you my story up until the time I let go of my ego. Be relieved. The dervish’s load is a heavy one, but there is only one who has given you that burden, who has made you do it and who also does it. Surrender. That is enough. The saints of the path will take care of it for you. Outwardly you are becoming their ears, tongue, hands and feet. You are becoming an empty vessel so that they can work through you. Indeed, we are always together. Yet a day will come that we will no longer be here physically. We will have disappeared behind the veil. “Now we’re here, now we’re not,” as they say.

What will you do when that time comes? Responsibility and sin will ride on those delicate shoulders of yours. In Sufism, in the dervish’s logbook, you first walk to your sheikh, and you annihilate yourself in him. You experience oneness and humility in him. A day then arrives when the bird flies the coop. Your sheikh walks toward you from the spiritual world and annihilates himself in you. You will feel this. You will sense him filling up your heart. You will experience that taste, that strength. You will “find” your sheikh. What I mean is you will discover your truth. Just as Mevlana has shown us:

“I am not the form that appears to the lay eye, but maybe the sweetness and pleasure that manifests out of my words from within the disciple. When you find that moment and taste that pleasure, seize the spoils and give thanks that I am he and you have found me!”<sup>443</sup>

We have turned around and wandered back – once again – to gratitude. Give thanks, wayfarer, that we have opened this door for you.

Never grieve for your mentor. Besides, they don’t die. They only die like sugar dissolving in water. If you try to become like that water, then you have nothing to be afraid of!

Moreover, when they walk towards God, the perfect murshids are like a sword drawn from the sheath.

Put another way, they are like a doubled-bladed sword. And I do not mean a double-edge sword! This sword has a name: Zulfiqar.

The world has never seen such a valiant sword, a sword as brave as its wielder, Ali. The perfect mentors are the heirs of Ali and the Prophet. Armed with their Zulfiqars they cut through every problem.

The conversation really begins now. You have a lot to learn after this. But you will learn it by living it.

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<sup>443</sup> Konuk, XIII, p. 43

I will leave it to Rumi to say what I am trying to tell you:

“This is neither astrology, nor geomancy, nor the interpretation of dreams.  
This is the inspiration of God. And God best knows what is right.”<sup>444</sup>

This is what we have heard from the Almighty!

Reading the *Masnavi* is a tradition. As such, we always close with this line. And that is what we have done.

May God keep us on the path, prevent us from straying, and preserve our composure. May He try us with neither honor nor dishonor. May He not test us, any longer... What more shall I say?

May good be victorious and evil defeated. Let God Almighty ignite our hearts with His beautiful attributes, increasing our inspiration and divine pleasures. Blessed be the breath of Mevlana, the secret of Shams Tabrizi, the favor of Imam Ali, and the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad.

Let us say, “Hû, hûûû”

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<sup>444</sup> 4:1852

## Glossary of Sufi Terms

- Ahl al-Bayt – Muhammad’s family; literally “People of the House.”
- al-Insan al-Kamil – the Universal Man.
- ‘arif – a mystic, saint, or guide continually engaged in the quest for spiritual perfection; a true lover; a Universal Man; a gnostic.
- Basmala – the name of the Arabic phrase, “*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*” (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). All great works begin with the Basmala.
- batin – the universe’s interior, hidden, and esoteric dimension; the concealed meaning that underlies an object or an action; the unseen purview of the heart.
- Buraq – the mystical steed that brought Muhammad to the edge of heaven during the Mi’raj.
- chelebi – an honorific title given to Universal Men associated with the Mevlevi Order.
- cupbearer – a guide or mentor who pours the wine of divine love into an aspiring lover, the Universal Man; capitalized, it refers to God.
- Day of Alast – the moment of creation when God asked all of Mankind, who were still only spirit, “*Alastu bi Rabbikum?*” (Am I not your God?). They answered, “*Bala*” (Yes).
- dhikr – the ritual practice of invoking, remembering, mentioning or to alluding to God.
- dua – a prayer of supplication.
- farasat – the gnostic’s sense of perception; spiritual vision.
- gayretullah – literally God’s effort; to touch *gayretullah* means to provoke God into inferring in the lives of humans, often to punish or prevent misdeeds.
- hadith – a collection of accounts describing the sayings, habits, or actions of Muhammad.
- hal – the spiritual states that God bestows upon the dervish.
- himmat – spiritual grace and favor bestowed by the prophets and saints.
- Hû – Another name for God, literally meaning ‘He’; some Sufis believe it to be the most beautiful of God’s names; it is also the sheik’s affirmative answer when asking permission to enter or leave.
- ilm – knowledge attained through the rational mind; science.
- Ilm al-Ladun – Knowledge of the Unseen.
- irfan – spiritual knowledge; gnosis.

Kaaba – the holiest site in Islam, located in Mecca. Muslims are required to circumambulate around this black cubic structure seven times during the Hajj.

Kawthar – Abundance; the water of life, which flows in a river in Paradise and is offered to the worthy from a pool on the Day of Resurrection.

khawatir – remembrances, thoughts, inspirations, and ideas that enter the heart.

khidmat – service to others for the sake of God.

khirqā – the woolen robe worn by dervishes.

marifat – ultimate knowledge and awareness of the divine.

maqam – the seven stations on the journey toward spiritual enlightenment, which are reached through hard work and effort.

Mevlevi – the dervish order based primarily on the teachings of Rumi.

Mi’raj – Muhammad’s spiritual journey through the seven heavens to the foot of God’s throne; also known as the Night Journey.

misbaha – prayer beads used in dhikr.

muezzin – the person who recites the call to prayer.

murid – disciple; student.

murshid – Sufi master; mentor; sheikh.

nafs – the carnal soul or ego; Sufis are continually striving to abase, temper and perfect their nafs to the point of annihilation.

qadi – a Sharia judge.

Qibla – The Qibla is the direction towards which all Muslims must pray. It points to the Kaaba in Mecca.

sahw – spiritual sobriety; to abstain from spiritual intoxication; the converse of *sukr*.

salaam – an Arabic greeting; one of four movements or acts in a sama ceremony.

salik – the spiritual wayfarer; used as a form of address.

sama – the Mevlevi whirling dervish ceremony symbolizing the Mi’raj.

Shahada – the name of the Arabic phrase, “*La ilaha illa-llah, muhammadur-rasulu-llah*” (There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God); the Muslim proclamation of faith.

suhbat – spiritual conversation between murshid and murid.

sukr – state of spiritual intoxication or ecstasy.

Tawhid – the Oneness of God.

yaqin – certainty of God and His attributes.

zahir – the universe’s exterior, exoteric dimension; the physical and visible manifestation of an object or action.