



# JALAL AL-DIN RUMI & HUMAN TRANSFORMATION: HOW TO CAPTURE A WILD ELEPHANT

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## Abstract

Through verse, music and dance the Mawlawi Order sought to perpetuate the energy of Rumi's personality and impact of his enlightening insight. Rumi strove to make possible a vertical opening of consciousness within his followers, thereby facilitating fragile possibilities for human transformation. Soul with its innermost focus of *attentive-awareness* forms the only foundation for expanding our understanding of the cosmos, and for attaining what is possible for Man. We reflect on how Rumi might apprehend our current realities, and what has become of human transformation in our era of psycho-somatic physicalism. Our meditation is intended to provide food for thought, as well as enliven the heart.

We are looking for Rumi. *we are still looking for him. We are seeking him – and Rumi is seeking us!* Rumi had his own epitaph inscribed upon his tomb: “*When we are dead seek not our tomb in the earth, but find it in the hearts of men.*” There is where we have to look for Rumi: within the Hearts of men – and the hearts of women and girls and boys. His voice echoes loud and clear for those persons who have ears to hear, and who have learned how to *listen*.

**Key words** : Rumi, Mawlawi Order, spiritual audition, listening

## 1. Introduction

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207 — December 17<sup>th</sup> 1273 CE) joined the east and the west. He was born in Balkh, a province of northern Khurasan (now Afghanistan) ruled by the Khwarazm Shahs, and he migrated west where he resided first in Karaman and then Konya in central Anatolia (Asia Minor). Anatolia had been the Hellenic heartland of the Byzantine Empire (*Rūm* /‘Rome’<sup>1</sup> or the East Roman empire) before the Saljuqs. The manuscript q Turkish settlement of that territory in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, when its population became a mixture of the Greek, Turkic, Arab and Persian races. The Sunni Muslim dynasty of the Saljuqs were descended from a Turcoman tribal confederation which ruled large parts of Central Asia and the Middle East during the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and whose empire at its height stretched from Anatolia through Persia. When embracing Islam these powerful Turcoman warlords had adopted Persian culture and Persian as their official language of government, and they helped to develop Persian culture under the patronage of Turkic rulers thus creating a distinctive Turco-Persian culture. They served as great patrons of Persian art, literature, and language, becoming the cultural ancestors of the Western Turks: the present-day inhabitants of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Turkmenistan. Persian imprint upon Ottoman civilization remained strong until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Turkish scholar Mehmed Fuad Koprulu has described the nature of this Turco-Persian culture central to the Saljuq and then the Ottoman experience: (Koprulu 2006: 149ff)

If we wish to sketch, in broad outline, the civilization created by the Seljuks of Anatolia, we must recognize that the local, i.e. non-Muslim, element was fairly insignificant compared to the Turkish and Arab-Persian elements, and that the Persian element was paramount. The Seljuk rulers ... were in contact with not only Muslim Persian civilization, but also with the Arab civilizations in *al-Jazira* and Syria – indeed, with all Muslim peoples as far as India – and also had connections with several Byzantine courts. Some of these rulers

like the great ‘Ala’ al-Din Kai-Qubad himself, who married Byzantine princesses and thus strengthened relations with their neighbors to the west, lived for many years in Byzantium and became very familiar with the customs and ceremonial at the Byzantine court. Still, this close contact with the ancient Greco-Roman and Christian traditions only resulted in their adoption of a policy of tolerance toward art, aesthetic life, painting, music, independent thought – in short, toward those things that were frowned upon by the narrow and piously ascetic. The contact of the common people with the Greeks and Armenians had basically the same result. ... The Mongol invasion, which caused a great number of scholars and artisans to flee from Turkistan, Iran, and Khwarazm and settle within the Empire of the Seljuks of Anatolia, resulted in a reinforcing of Persian influence on the Anatolian Turks. ... When we take into consideration domestic life in the Konya courts and the sincerity of the favor and attachment of the rulers to Persian poets and Persian literature, then the importance of Persian influence is undeniable. With regard to the private lives of the rulers, their amusements, and palace ceremonial, the most definite influence was also that of Iran, mixed with early Turkish traditions, and not that of Byzantium.

Rumi’s family settled in the Sultanate of *Rūm* whose capital from 1205 onward was Konya during the period between the Crusades and the Mongol invasion. He was both ethnically and culturally Persian in language and ethos, while he also wrote some poetic verses in Greek, Arabic and in Turkish (Lewis 2000). As a well-trained Muslim intellectual Rumi was profoundly versed in Arabic Islamic studies, being a competent Hanafī jurist-mufti in his legal practice, and who adhered to the Maturidi theological creed. In fact, Rumi’s mother was a descendant of the famous Hanafī jurist Abu Bakr Sarakhsī (d. 483 H /1090), while his father Baha al-Din Walad (d. 1240) was a prominent Hanafī teacher and mystic

master. The Hanafite legal rite historically was the most rationally oriented of the four major Sunni law schools, and it remains the most widespread legal school today. Maturidi theological teachings are close to the mainstream Ash‘arite creed of the majority of Sunni Muslims, differing only on some minor points. Almost all the Muslim Turkic peoples today are Hanafi in legal *madhhab* and Maturidi in their dogmatic theology.

Rumi wrote both prose and verse in Persian—and all Iranian peoples love the masters of their magnificent language. However Rumi was a (Hanafite Maturidi) Sunni, while the majority of Iranians today are Imami Shi‘ite who love Rumi and who truly *listen to* him primarily because he exalted their language in the most elevated profound manner. People understand that language is the heart of their culture, providing the important seeds and germs for sprouting great ideas and conveying authentic experience. In October 2007 the author attended in Tehran a major conference devoted to Rumi, organised by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy as part of UNESCO’s ‘International Rumi Year’. The keynote speaker was none other than the President of the Republic Mr. Ahmadinejad, who gave a very nice address. The following day there was an article in a leading newspaper written by a prominent *Mullah* from Qum (the main religious center for education, south of Tehran). This religious authority was saying in effect: “*Why are we having this conference for a Sunni? We should not waste our time!*” Naturally most people the author questioned laughed at this sentiment which expressed a narrow Shi‘ite prejudice that a Sunni thinker should not be publicly celebrated – even though Rumi was one of the loftiest Persian poets of utmost profundity. Certainly this *Mullah*’s view remains a minority one in Iran today, for the great majority of Iranians certainly do *listen to* Rumi.

But there is a further lesson for us in this incident: a great Sunni thinker and *Sufi* exponent such as Rumi is beloved in the Shi‘ite majority land of Iran. That is an important lesson for Muslims today, when Sunnis are killing Shi‘ites in Pakistan and in Iraq by tossing grenades into mosques during prayer times. The word **love** has not passed their lips—*they do not listen to Rumi!* Furthermore, the voice of Rumi now echoes loudly and is being *listened to* in the far West where the sun sets: in California and Oregon, in New

York and Florida and Georgia. During the past two decades he has become one of the most popular poets in the United States through numerous translations and free adaptations of his poetry — remember: popular in the U.S. means ‘best-selling’. People like Coleman Barks made a fortune by imaginatively re-interpreting Rumi into an American idiom to feed seekers in the great spiritual supermarket of the far West.<sup>2</sup>

So Rumi’s example is important for us today. A great Muslim teacher who has a living message for our world, and this message is not one of ritual or creed, about what is the correct theological dogmatic formula, or proper legal way of ritual performance: how short should your sleeve be? how much should you trim your moustache? what is permissible to eat? – that type of simplistic conformist un-thinking Islam which rejects the Other, and rejoices in its own narrow cramped vision. *No* – Rumi’s message conveys a universal essential Islam everyone understands when they apprehend it, because his message gets underneath our skin. It insinuates itself through our ear and knocks on the window of our mind, opening up a skylight for direct illumination. Rumi’s message has a distinctive mode of slipping inside and soaking in, of communicating itself to our inner person – *if we are listening*. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lebanese poet Jibran uttered: “*half of what I say is meaningless, but I say it so that the other half may reach you.*” Rumi was a master of conveying this ‘*other half*’. (Paul McCartney of the Beatles lifted Jibran’s words for one of his songs on their ‘white album’.)

## 2. Where We Are?

Yes, Rumi may still be with us – but are We with Rumi? Are we able to hear his message? And what is our age like – *Where are We?* The very opening lines of his masterwork the *Mathnavi-ye Ma’navi* or *Spiritual Couplets* composed during the last twelve years of his life bid us to listen: *be-shnov az ney chun hikayat mekonad.../ ‘Listen to the tale of the wailing reed, complaining of separation...’* If we heed and properly listen we may audit the complaint of our own lack of unity and alienation, and give voice

to our inner lamentation —matched by the bittersweet suffering of intense longing tugging at our being, longing for a real connection or integration into the fountain and ocean of all Being – the ‘Beloved’. This CALL is the theme Rumi strikes at the beginning of his masterwork when he asks us to listen and heed this inner force of higher energy. The predominant theme is *awareness through love*, the force binding the universe together and moving humans at a deep level of being. Today scholars may explain that these famous opening lines of his *Mathnavi* mark the first appearance within Sufism of the theme of *universal love animating the core of the cosmos*, which reflects the indirect impact of Islamic philosophic teaching within mysticism (the attractive role of *love* linking soul with nature in the philosophy of Ibn Sina).<sup>3</sup> After Rumi, this topic became a commonplace in Islamic mystic literature. However, Rumi is not a philosopher and in fact he often disparages and critiques the overly–intellectualist type of approach philosophy was associated with. Rumi is certainly an artist of the first rank, a wordsmith magician who enchants and teaches simultaneously.

He appeals to our ear and to our heart and mind in language symbolic and brimming with imaginal force. We find ourself enmeshed in his narratives, tale after tale almost like an Arabian Nights labyrinth, with constant allusions and references to the Qur’an and Prophetic Hadith, laced with a myriad tales drawn from everyday life experiences of people. *Mathnavi* is indeed a treasure chest, an encyclopaedia of everything experienced by Muslims until Rumi’s own era. Now after his death well over seven hundred years ago – can we still hear him? His type of poetic teaching needs to be unpacked and explained to the modern mind, and may require a massive commentary to capture all the nuances of allusion and evocation. It demands a detailed appreciation of classical Islamic civilisation in order to be apprehended fully. Nevertheless, most Muslims today lack such apprehension, and merely content themselves with simplistic cartoon-like distortions of their own spiritual and intellectual legacy. Professor Osman Bakar made an interesting remark earlier when he stated: “*Half of Malay cultural tradition has gone.*” Young people now in Malaysia don’t understand what their grandfathers took for granted, since their cultural baggage has been replaced by cell phones, advertisements

on television, face-book electronic friendships, or the latest clothing fashions – rather than basic knowledge about the Qur’an, Hadith, and Islamic teachings. For many young Muslims, even well-educated professionals, knowledge of the breadth and depth of Islamic religious and civilisational richness has shrunk down to obsessions with legalist externals (“*Is it Halal?*”), whereby Muslim identity devolves into a fetish of caste-like parochial ethnicity. Observers refer to this process as ‘inversion’: a type of unravelling decaying into a stunted identity noticeably less ‘Islamic’ in essence than most people assume. That is our existence now, the world which we inhabit, for we are all moderns orphaned from our parent meaning system and value framework which previously guided and molded our understanding and world-view.

We are being swept along in the swiftcurrents of globalizing ‘liquid modernity’. When scientists dig down into the ground for two meters to test the soil in outer Mongolia, they find traces of fluorocarbons there; yet those chemicals were only invented in the 1940s (using the ‘Fowler’ process applied in the Manhattan project). Can we still hear Rumi’s voice, or has it become muffled and distant, almost inaudible, as if deadened through partitions? His voice may have become obscured since his message was delivered in the cultural medium and imaginative symbolism of his own era which has passed. Or does his message retain its original force and validity, and will always have an innate vitality because of the insights into human nature and human potential for development which Rumi possessed? The stories he relates about people, what they did and what they said and thought, how they reacted to their situations – these are truly universal and remained so over half a millennium from his day. In that sense, his work is really universal and lasting, more than most other poets and writers. Let us listen and think, let us understand and realise the veritable legacy of *Mawlana* (Mevlana) ‘Our Master’.

### 3. A Triple Legacy

He left behind for us a large body of works, primarily his most elaborate technically sophisticated poems. Rumi’s *Diwan-e Kabir* or *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* contains 35,000 Persian couplets and



2,000 Persian quatrains (not counting the *Ghazals* and Arabic quatrains), being more than twice as long as his *Mathnavi* with its 27,000 lines of poetry. According to many authorities who are experienced in artistic creativity, the *Mathnavi* forms a united work whose themes and purpose one cannot describe simply; while the *Diwan-e Kabir* contains a life-time of visionary experiences and deep spiritual insights, and is deemed a superior creative achievement. Several prose works comprising Rumi's letters, lectures, and sermons also survive, notably seventy-one talks collected in his *Fihi Ma Fihi / In It What's In It* translated into English by A.J. Arberry as well as Wheeler Thackston. Thus Rumi has a considerable body of written work offering intellectual and spiritual food for thought.

He also left behind a group of dedicated followers and disciples for whom 'Our Master' was the centre of their universe, the sun around whom they orbited. The *Mevlevi* Sufi Order was established in 1273 by Hussam-e Chalabi (Rumi's scribe and favored pupil), and was then led from 1284 onward by Rumi's only surviving younger son Sultan Walad (d. 1312) who organized its functions and practices in the form known until recently. The leadership of this Order remained among his descendants ever since then. The 13<sup>th</sup> century Mawlana Mausoleum or 'Green Tomb' in Konya with its mosque, movement hall, living quarters, and the tombs of certain *Mevlevi* Dervishes draws visitors from all parts of the world. This Order became one of the chief Brotherhoods of the Ottoman empire, with leading members serving in official positions under the Sultan, and branch lodges established in Istanbul, Eastern Europe, Cyprus, and Syria-Lebanon. A number of prominent Ottoman poets and musicians belonged to this Order. The Konya Mosque-Tomb complex has served as the nerve center for the far-flung activities of the *Mevlevi* Order for more than seven hundred years.

The *Mevlevi* sufis maintained specific techniques and practices perpetuated under authentic supervision until the early twentieth century, when Kemal Atatürk put a halt to the Dervish Orders in the modern Turkish state in 1925. First there was the Movement of the *sama*' exercise<sup>4</sup> accompanied by specially composed music performed by a traditional orchestra with song texts drawn from the

*Mathnavi*, the *Diwan-e Kabir*, or poems by Sultan Walad's *Rabab-nama*. Although popularly known as the "dance of whirling dervishes"—in reality it is a spiritual exercise for training the human inner attentive-faculty opening it up to higher consciousness. This Movement is an inner work deemed a sacred activity. When the author was growing up in Lebanon in the 1950s, the author remembers hearing about a Mevlevi lodge in the northern city of Tripoli which yet preserved a certain activity. There was an old man there named Mahmud Darwish who made the best reed flutes, which are prized by musicians and right now fetch high prices for an original from his hand (they were signed). One of my best friends was his pupil and owns several of these instruments – they are so beautiful and have a unique tonal quality. In the mid-1950s the Turkish government allowed the Movements to be performed once a year in Konya in December, as they continue to be today. Let us be frank and understand that such 'performances' were mainly touristic shows meant to promote Turkish nationalist sentiment, and may have little genuine connection with the *inner work* which originally informed and directed the outer movements. Perhaps in certain former Ottoman territories (Bosnia, Albania, or Cyprus?) there might yet exist lodges where the Movements are executed in a proper manner under authorized direction.

Then there is the Mevlevi music accompanying the Movement, yet another vital aspect of Rumi's artistic legacy. Rumi himself played the *rabāb* (a type of violin) and perhaps also the *ney* (open-ended reed flute). The music performed with the Movement are very old compositions by Mevlevi musicians, specially crafted for this sacred purpose. Mevlevi composers enjoyed an elevated reputation in Ottoman musical practice, noted for their lofty spiritualized style and aesthetic subtlety.<sup>5</sup> So Rumi's message was projected in multiple ways by means of several media: his writings, the Movement, and the music — all perpetuated by his Order — whose combined effect reaches the mind, the heart, and the body.

♦Rumi's teaching possesses a conceptual apparatus which we have to study, reflect upon and struggle to understand. Just as when you are reading a book of physics, in order to understand the science involved you have to make an effort, you have to be

prepared and have enough mathematical training in order to understand what  $E=mc^2$  means. Now the same is true with Rumi's work, something that mere curiosity or casual searching for amusing anecdotes or tales for idle entertainment cannot comprehend.

◆Then the music appeals to our emotions and operates a certain re-arrangement, displacement, or alchemy within our inner person. Of course, everyone perceives the dramatic effects music operates for our inner perceptions – usually for the worse, sometimes for the better. If you listened and actively contemplated some of the greatest musical performances by traditional musicians in Muslim societies, you would discover they are elaborative, sophisticated, attention-focusing, and may operate a subtle change in your consciousness. The Mevlevi compositions do have significant impact — it is an emotional and psychic energy which ferments within.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Rumi's poetry is very highly charged with a wide range of emotions, as well as infused with intellectual content.

◆And it moves us, impacts on our physical organism. The Movement addresses the corporeal dimension of the human person, by training, purifying, and discipling the body. Rumi was concerned to simultaneously educate our body, our mind, and our soul or emotional life. The human being comprises three main components: body, mind and emotion. When these three parts are well coordinated and blended, the possibility for the fourth mode of being human emerges: the Completed Human.

*How do they capture a wild elephant?* Who knows: one day perhaps you may have to do so – or if you understand properly, then you are already doing so. (There are many Sufi tales about the elephant, an animal who serves them as an important symbol.) They bring two trained elephants up and put one trained elephant at one side of the wild elephant, and the other trained elephant at his other side. Now, the wild elephant will not be alarmed because these two are both elephants. Yes: these two elephants are trained under the guidance of humans, yet the wild elephant will tolerate the trained elephants to approach his sides. Then they carefully move the two trained elephants, with the wild elephant between them in the middle, and they are able to take him where they want until they bind him up, and begin to train him. So that is how you capture a wild elephant: you need two trained elephants!

This quaint tale, which is a true account, is repeated by Sufis for the lesson it provides about training the human and developing our potential. You need your **body**, our organism needs to be trained and purified and disciplined. The body needs to be regulated and accustomed to proper activities to achieve optimum performance and longevity. It needs to be cleaned, fuelled, exercised, and given adequate rest and relaxation. That is what prayer and fasting and physical exercise with a wise lifestyle are all about, by the way. Then you need to train your **mind** and your thinking–perceptive processes. The human intellectual thinking–knowing faculties represent one of our most distinctive functions which separate us from animals like the elephant. *Physical training is not too difficult to achieve*, I'm sure you know what an athlete will put themselves through in order to win a gold medal. Tremendous effort and sacrifice, dedication and sustained training may enable them to achieve their goal. We can train our body; and it's not impossible to train our mind. You may learn to remember better and more comprehensively if you exercise certain features of your mental apparatus; you may be able to train your thinking to comprehend and apply complex mathematic, geometric, or analytical topics; or to read music notation when playing an instrument; or simply to solve a cross-word puzzle more quickly. But the problem is our **emotions** – they are so volatile. Human emotions in their raw un-reformed condition may easily flare up like throwing gasoline onto an open fire.

Do you remember when you were young, how tender and fierce your emotional reactions were? How easy it was to feel wounded by a casual remark from someone else, or to feel angered or elated by something your parents said? The most reasonable, intelligent and successful adult human could become like such a child prey to unregulated all-consuming emotions which 'sweep us off our feet' — sometimes by reason of the simplest emotion of anger, jealousy, fear, hope, or desire acting on our person in a powerful way, leading us to behave in totally inappropriate or self-prejudicial ways. Such volatile emotions may be sweeping you off your feet before you know it, before you can prevent it by exercising a degree of control through your thoughts and by remaining centred in your body. We all have experienced this 'swept away' effect,

save for those individuals whose emotional life is abnormal or defunct, leading partial lives. Where is the individual able to resist the tempest of their emotions, remaining calmly self-possessed amidst the onslaught of surging forces?

Now, our two elephants were brought up on either side of our untamed beast: we mean the Movement (physical training), and his writings (intellective–reflective discipline). Then our emotional world could be harmoniously modulated, or balanced and clarified, we might be enabled to realize a mode-of-being displaying realized self-possession and harmonious integration of all three parts of our common being. The atmosphere may be cleared off and brought into harmonious relation with our body and our knowing-perceptions. Then we may grow into an individual whose sanctuary or apparatus (organism) is functioning properly through good health, good sleep, good rest, good diet; an individual whose thinking faculty has clarity exhibiting elements of reasonableness, not being swept off our feet by the passing cloud of a momentary emotional response. I do not mean ‘logical’ or able to perform complex mathematical equations—but one who exhibits wisdom, reasonableness, and virtuous conduct. A wise reasonable person would understand: *if I postpone my immediate gratification right now, I will achieve a greater reward later*. Actually, this is deemed to be one of the hallmarks of intelligence.

May I remind you of the exercise performed with young children to test their intelligence? They give the child a piece of chocolate, telling them: ‘*you can eat it now – or, if you wait half an hour, you receive five chocolates.*’ What do you want? Eat it now, or wait and get five chocolates? They leave the room, but keep the one piece of chocolate before the child to see what they will do. Most children will eat it now. Some will wait, because they are a bit more intelligent. They understand: “if I *wait*, I’ll get five!” But still they sit there looking at the chocolate and salivating, feeling physical appetitive desire to enjoy the sweet. The researchers observe from behind a one-way mirror: the child really wants it and suffers from not eating it, but they will deny immediate gratification in order to gain a greater reward. This trait of behaviour clearly indicates intelligence. So by ‘intelligent’ we do not mean logical; rather innate wisdom as evidenced by the ‘law of greatest reward’.

#### 4. From Outer To Inner

Yet who today understands what is involved in serious spiritual training, and who values that mode of inner activity or understands the purpose and the reason why people would train themselves in that manner over their lifetime? Rumi was addressing all of our several parts in order to train people to perceive higher truths. There are so many more important things in his teaching we cannot even touch on briefly here. Rumi's emphasis throughout was upon the tension between this material external world and our inner spiritual life. He emphasizes a definite relationship between two overriding elements of our existence, referred to by a great variety of images and symbols. One he terms *surat* 'form': the material shape, an outer arrangement of things, the physicality of living beings. The other he terms *ma'nā*, signifying a number of related meanings translated by a variety of terms. R. Nicholson in his English rendering of the *Mathnavi* translated *ma'nā* using about ten different English terms, according to his understanding of the context: "meaning, reality, spiritual reality, essential reality, spirit, spiritual truth, spiritual principle, spiritual thing, essence, idea, ideal thing." A.J. Arberry provides several more renderings, including: "truth, heavenly truth, abstraction, verity (Chittick 1983: 19-26,248-250,352).

William Chittick pinpoints the distinction between these two terms:

Form is a thing's outward appearance, meaning its inward and unseen reality. Ultimately, meaning is that thing as it is known to God Himself. And since God is beyond any sort of multiplicity, in the last analysis the meaning of all things is God. ... The world then is form, or a collection of a myriad forms. By its very nature each form displays its own meaning, which is its reality with God. It is man's task not to be deceived by the form. He must understand that form does not exist for its own sake, but manifests a meaning above and beyond itself.

So we may simply understand *ma'nā* to connote 'intrinsic meaning' or essential reality. What Rumi is telling us is that the world's form and shape and material existence is impermanent like a veil over reality. It doesn't have the same degree of realness and worth as the veritable meaning within or beyond the material, the intrinsic reality. Rumi states:

Know that the outward form passes away,  
but the World of Meaning remains  
forever.

How long will you make love with the  
shape of the jug? Leave aside the jug's  
shape: Go, seek water!

Having seen the form, you are unaware of  
the meaning. If you are wise, pick out  
the pearl from the shell

(*Mathnawi II* : 1020-2022).

In order for us to benefit from the creation God created and to fulfil the purpose of our existence, the human performs a special function in this creation. Namely, to extract from the forms and our experiencing of them, a certain reality and inner truth and meaning. By this means, one can ascend beyond the outer shapes of existing things and apprehend the inner reality. Thus, the dichotomy between *surat* 'form' and *ma'nā* 'intrinsic meaning' opens up the epistemic difference between two modes of knowledge and vision: 'discerning only form (which Rumi refers to as the 'science of bodies'), as opposed to 'perceiving the intrinsic meaning beyond the form (termed the 'science of religions'). The former covers all conventional knowledge yet remain mere shadows lacking direct access to the inner reality; the latter entails direct apprehension of the inner meanings as unobstructed light. Every outward form, therefore, manifests a hidden meaning – including the very form of the human.

For Rumi apprehends, as with all great spiritual visionaries and knowers in the major religious traditions of humanity, that the human being has a special role in creation and in existence. Therefore, development of qualified and purified individuals who are clear enough in their thinking, stable and virtuous enough in

their bodily existence, and harmonious and balanced enough in their emotional life is absolutely essential for the purpose of this cosmic world order which we inhabit. The very stability and regularity of the moving spheres and worlds depends upon us. We look up and see the Stars – while they are looking down and observing us. Our entire universe is an aware conscious being. The Star beings are saying: “*What a mess down there on that tiny planet! a real mess!*”—and it hasn’t gotten better since Rumi’s death. Truth is, it has gotten a lot worse.

If I had to try to express what would Rumi say if he was here now with us? – because he is with us and in us, he is listening right now – if *we* could hear Rumi, he would be telling us: ‘*You are too much hung up on the sūrat, too much occupied with the outer form! You have completely forgotten about the inner essence and the spirit of meaning that the human being represents.*’ Furthermore, he would probably say: ‘*You have invented so many ways and means of confusing yourself, becoming more base than an animal, because your thoughts themselves are a form, and you remain trapped within the shadows of your own thoughts!*’ We have five forms and they each have within themselves an intrinsic meaning. Here we touch upon an important part of Rumi’s teaching treating the function of an image. Let us listen to his voice reaching out across all these centuries, entering our minds and moving our hearts.

What we think matters; our ideas are important, therefore you need to take extra care about what ideas you put into your head and which rule you. What are the dominant ideas now for most people? Do you open your eyes and look around and see our reality? Financialisation, marketisation, globalisation – everything is pursued on the material level and for selfish interests as defined by the physicalist or materialist understanding of the human – for the human is merely a biological animal. We should throw the word human away, and just call him “animal” – the human animal. That is what the great majority of modern scientists and society leaders believe. They do not seriously accept anything of our human reality beyond the biological animal, while our cognitive and psychological functions are studied and explained in terms of neuro-chemical physiological processes. In terms of human existence



sourced in a transcendent immaterial realm, and regarding the essential reality beyond the corporeal body – well, that may be for children and old people to think about. But no adult who is really intelligent and rational would ever take such fairy tales seriously. These are some of the things to consider when understanding our present situation.

We close by letting Rumi speak in his own words from lectures preserved in *Fihi Ma Fihi*. He mentions the real enemies of humans and our real struggle or *jihad* dealing with soldiers of our thoughts and the troops of ideas (Thackston 1994: 60-61)

Thoughts matter, Forms are secondary, mere instruments. Without thoughts, forms are ineffectual ‘solids’. Whoever sees only form is himself ‘frozen solid’ and has no way to reach the intrinsic meaning. He is a child and immature, even though he may be one hundred years old. ‘*We have returned from the minor struggle to the major struggle*’, said the Prophet. That is: We were in combat with forms and were doing battle with a formal adversary. Now we are doing battle with thoughts, so that the good thoughts may defeat the bad ones and expel them from the kingdom of the body.

In this struggle, this major battle, ideas matter and are operative without the means of the body. Inasmuch as the Active Intellect turns the celestial spheres without an instrument, so it can be said that ideas require no instrument.

*“You are substance; this world and the next are coincidentals . . . Weep for him who seeks knowledge from the heart; laugh at him who seeks reason from the soul.”*

We hope you can hear us, Rumi, and earnestly hope we may be enabled to listen to you. *Thank you very much Rumi, for all your sincere efforts on our behalf.*

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See *Qur'an*, chapter 30 'The Greeks' (*al-Rūm* verses 1–4), which refers to the Sassanian conquest of the Byzantine province of Palestine during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, when Jerusalem was occupied by the Persians. Here 'al-Rūm' designates the Greek Byzantine polity with its capital in Constantinople, not the Latin Roman. Thus, the *nisbah* place-name "al-Rūmī /The Greek" attached to Jalāl al-Dīn's name indicates his chosen land of residence in his mature years. Before then he was referred to as *al-Balkhī*.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Coleman Barks taught at the University of Georgia (Athens, Georgia) for three decades; although he neither speaks nor reads Persian his interpretations of Rumi and other Persian poets are very well known. In 2006 he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Tehran, and in 2009 was inducted into the Georgia Writers' Hall of Fame. Barks was a disciple of the Sufi master Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986), a Sri Lankan Tamil who settled near Philadelphia and whom Barks first met in a dream on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1977.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Schimmel (1993:328) While love ('*ishq* & *mahabbah*) was a major theme for early Sufis, a specific notion of the cosmic force-of-attraction between individual soul and celestial realm was absorbed into *tasawwuf* from common Islamic teachings which had acclimitized philosophic insights. Rumi himself employed key notions such as 'Active Intellect' *al-'aql al-fa'āl* in his teaching.

<sup>4</sup> The *samā'* is a venerable technique of 'spiritual audition' or 'inner-listening' evolved by Muslim mystics to induce profound individual transformation, of which the *Mevlevi* form was a special elaboration. For orientation consult (Lewisohn 1997, Avery 2004).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of Ottoman musical practice, including Mevlevi musicians and compositions, see the excellent work by Feldman (1996 : 560).

<sup>6</sup> For basic aspects of this topic, consult for example Sari (internet)

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