

# **Rumi's Storytelling in The Masnavi toward the Journey of Contentment and Mental Wellbeing**

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# Introduction to Rumi's life

## Who is Rumi?

اندر آخر کردش آن بی‌زینهار

آهوی را کرد صیادی شکار

A hunter captured a gazelle: the merciless man put it into a stable

حبس آهو کرد چون استمگران

آخری را پر ز گاوان و خران

(Acting) like oppressors, he made a stable full of cows and donkeys the prison of the gazelle.

او به پیش آن خران شب کاه ریخت

آهو از وحشت به هر سو می‌گریخت

The gazelle, wild with terror, was fleeing in every direction: at night, he (the hunter) poured (pieces of chopped) straw before the donkeys.

کاه را می‌خورد خوشتر از شکر

از مجاعت و اشتها هر گاو و خر

(Moved) by hunger and (ravenous) appetite, every cow and donkey was devouring the straw, (as though it were) sweeter than sugar.

گه ز دود و گرد که می‌تافت رو

گاه آهو می‌رمید از سو به سو

Now the gazelle would run in fright from side to side, now it would turn its face away from the smoke and dust of the straw.

آن عقوبت را چو مرگ انگاشتند

هرکرا با ضد خود بگذاشتند

Whosoever is left (in company) with his opposite, they (who are wise) have deemed that punishment (terrible) as death,

هجر را عذری نگوید معتبر

تا سلیمان گفت که آن هدهد اگر

So that Solomon said, "Unless the hoopoe makes a respectable excuse for his absence,

یک عذاب سخت بیرون از حساب

بکشمش یا خود دهم او را عذاب

---

I will kill him or inflict upon him a torment, a torment severe beyond (all) calculation."

هان کدامست آن عذاب این معتمد      در قفس بودن به غیر جنس خود

Hark, what is that torment, O trusted (friend)? To be in a cage without thy congener.

زین بدن اندر عذابی ای بشر      مرغ روحت بسته با جنسی دگر

O Man, thou art in torment on account of this body: the bird, thy spirit, is imprisoned with one of another kind.

روح بازست و طبایع زاغها      دارد از زاغان و چغدان داغها

The spirit is a falcon, and the (bodily) properties are crows: it has (receives) painful brands from the crows and owls.

او بمانده در میانشان زارزار      همچو بوبکری به شهر سیزوار

It remains amongst them in sore misery, like an Abú Bakr in the city of Sabzawár.<sup>1</sup>

---

The story of *the Young Gazelle being Confined in the Donkey-Stable* is one from the thousand stories recited by *Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Balkhī*, a Persian poet, Sufi mystic, Islamic scholar, and a spiritual teacher of the 13th century. *Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Balkhī* both known as *Mowlānā*, "our master" among Persians and Afghans, and *Rumi*, "from Roman Anatolia" more popular in the west, was born in Balkh, Afghanistan, which was then part of the Persian empire (Barks 11) Along with his family, Rumi emigrated to Konya, today's Turkey, due to the invading Mongols' threat. His father, Bahā ud-Dīn Walad, was also a known Islamic scholar and a mystic (Barks 11). It is said that Rumi's first astonishment by mysticism took place when he met Attar<sup>2</sup> in Nishapur on the way to Konya. In this meeting, Attar, an acknowledged Sufi mystic and teacher of the time, presented him with the copy of his famous book, *Asrār-Nāma, The Book of Mysteries*,

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<sup>1</sup>*Masnavi* 5, 833-844. Translation, R.A. Nicholson

<sup>2</sup> who was an old man by then

telling Baha Walad, "Your son will soon be kindling a fire in all the world's lovers of God." (Chittick 2). Attar's influence is evident in Rumi's life and poetry. As Rumi states:

---

ما هنوز اندر خم یک کوچه ایم

هفت شهر عشق را عطار گشت

Attar traveled through all the seven cities of love While I am only at the bend of the first alley.<sup>3</sup>

---

In another place, he stresses the inspiration of Attar and Sanai on his mystical path:

---

ما از پی سنایی و عطار آمدیم

عطار روح بود و سنایی دو چشم او

Attar is the soul and Sanai its two eyes, I came after Sanai and Attar.<sup>4</sup>

---

## Shams, the Wandering Dervish

Attar, Sanai, and other Sufi pioneers undoubtedly had shaped Rumi's mysticism, yet, a wandering dervish was the zenith of Rumi's firmament. There are many different narrations on how Rumi and his beloved wandering dervish, *Shams al-Din of Tabriz*, met each other for the first time. Indeed, there are many more stories on how these two companions said their last farewell. Yet, throughout the work of Rumi, it is apparent that the character of Shams al-Din of Tabriz tremendously changed Rumi's personal life as well as his scholarly Islamic ideology and more importantly his mysticism. It is said that both Rumi and Shams had envisioned their companionship long before they met. Recalling that Rumi was a great Islamic scholar of his time, many believe that Rumi transformed into a mystical poet after he met Shams. Shams was a

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<sup>3</sup> This poem is attributed to Rumi and the translation is by Sholeh Wolpé.

<sup>4</sup> This poem is attributed to Rumi. The translation has been taken from the book *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, by A.J. Arberry, page 141.

revolution in Rumi's life that revolved Rumi's Islamic thought toward a spiritual transformation. Thus, religion from its conservative form converted to a mystical path that was fueled by love and traveled toward the ultimate divine unity.

*Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi* is the selected poems in the traditional metrical conventions of ghazals dedicated by Rumi to his beloved Shams. *The Divan* contains many verses praising Shams and lamenting his disappearance (Gooch 133-134).

## **A Mystic Poet that is a Spiritual Teacher:**

Rumi is mainly known as a Persian poet, but he is beyond a mystical poet to many of his readers. Indeed, he is a spiritual teacher who takes the hands of his readers, walks them throughout the poems, and, step by step, shows them the path. This is not an ordinary path but a Sufi path toward mysticism. Before digging into the definition of the Sufi path and introducing the elements of Sufism, it is first essential to answer the question that might arise in the minds of many readers. If we agree that Rumi is a spiritual teacher, leading his readers toward a complex mystical path that many are not familiar with, why is he still one of the bestselling poets in the U.S where the concept of Sufism is not even frequently explained? What is it about this 13th century Persian poet that young Americans find interesting enough to read? I believe the answer to these questions lies within a larger question. Can Rumi's poetry and these elements of Sufism, more specifically his famous book of *The Masnavi*, lead us toward feeling more content with our lives? Can these Sufi beliefs within the poems of *The Masnavi* promote our mental wellness? To answer this question, there are many aspects to consider, but first it is crucial to introduce Rumi's most popular book, *The Masnavi*.

# The *Masnavi*

Rumi's book of *The Masnavi or Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi*, literally in Persian means, "The Spiritual Couplet." The word *masnavi* itself implies the form of poetry that is adopted in the book. Masnavi, as a form of Persian classical poetry, follows a specific order, in which each half-line or hemistich follows the same meter. The internal rhyme in masnavi changes in successive couplets according to the pattern aa bb cc dd etc. This independent distich's metric enables the poets to compose long works containing over a thousand verses. That is the main reason that most Persian poets compose their didactic poems and anecdotes in the form of masnavi. "By Rumi's time a number of Sufis had already made use of the masnavi form to compose mystical poems, the most celebrated among which are Sanai's *Garden of Truth* or *The Hadiqat al Haqiqa* and Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* or *Mantiq-ut-Tayr*" (Mojaddedi xx)

The fact that Rumi's students would have to use the books of other Sufis, such as Sanai and Attar, as their main sources elevated the need for another Sufi book. Therefore, with the encouragement and direct assistance of two of his most profound students, Rumi started writing his *Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi* in the final years of his life (Chittick 5-6). The book of *Masnavi* is a series of six books containing over thousands of lines and is considered the most remarkable mystical poem ever written. Rumi composed an intense Arabic introduction for the book and, within that, compared his book of *The Masnavi* with the holy book of the Quran. At times, this act of Rumi was considered blasphemy among many Islamic fundamentalists both at his time and even our time.



To many, this blasphemous insurgency was confirmed with the following line:

---

مثنوی معنوی قرآن است در زبان پهلوی.

*Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi* is the Quran in Persian.<sup>5</sup>

---

In Islamic theology, there is a term called *Tahaddi* (Arabic: التحدي), which refers to the challenge of the Quran. This Quranic challenge requests non-Muslims among both humans and jinn to produce either a chapter or multiple chapters like those within the holy book to prove the Quran's superiority over any human work. Below is the direct verse from the Quran that also stresses the impossibility of overcoming this challenge.

"And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to my servant, bring a single chapter like it, and call your witnesses besides God if you are truthful. But if you do not do this, and you can never do this, then fear the Fire which has been prepared for the disbelievers and which shall have men and stones for fuel"<sup>6</sup>

If Rumi is claiming that "*Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi* is the Quran in Persian.", does this mean that he is claiming that he has overcome the Quranic challenge? Then, this would be highly contrary to the essence of *The Masnavi*, as it is full of praising God and his messenger prophet Mohammad, to whom Muslims believe Quran was orally revealed by God.

There are undoubtedly many more aspects and more detailed discussions on this subject, but it goes beyond the topic of this thesis. However, there is a more important subject to focus on

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<sup>5</sup> Mojaddedi (2004). p. xix.

<sup>6</sup> Quran 2:23-24

to understand the underlying reasons that present Rumi as a Sufi mystic drawn in the sea of Gnosis.

# A Mystic or an Ascetic

As it was mentioned before, Rumi was first a religious scholar, then a mystical poet. This mysticism, that many believe was injected into Rumi's soul after meeting Shams, created a different Islamic motion that was more like monsoons of the time. This revolution in Rumi's Islamic identity provoked the anger of his conservative followers that were not ready to welcome the change. The Islam that Rumi was practicing was not the same as what he was mentoring before Shams. Unlike the majority of the Muslim beliefs of the time, he would meditate, dance, recite poetry to worship the love of God.

On the other hand, he was different from dervishes and ascetics who abandoned the worldly life for the sake of the spiritual one. Rumi was like a seesaw hoping to introduce the beauty of the inertia to people who were either on the ascetic end or the conservative end. The following verses of Attar could completely demonstrate Rumi's life at this point.

---

که هر دو بر من مسکین حرام است

ره میخانه و مسجد کدام است

Which way shall I go? To the winehouse or the mosque? Both are forbidden to poor me.

نه در میخانه کین خمار خام است

نه در مسجد گذارندم که رند است

They don't let me into the mosque, saying, "He's a hypocrite," Nor in the winehouse, saying, "He's a novice."

بجوئید ای عزیزان کین کدام است

میان مسجد و میخانه راهی است

---

There is a path between the mosque and the winehouse. Search for it, O dear ones, which path you pick.

نمی‌دانم که آن بت را چه نام است

به میخانه امامی مست خفته است

In the winehouse, a saint is passed-out drunk. I don't know what is to call that idol.

حریفم قاضی و ساقی امام است

مرا کعبه خرابات است امروز

Today, the winehouse is my Kaaba. My drinking companion is the Judge, and my cupbearer, is the saint.

که سرور کیست سرگردان کدام است

برو عطار کو خود می‌شناسد

Go, Attar, that He (God) is the only one that knows, who is the master, and who is bewildered.<sup>7</sup>

---

In this poem, Attar emphasizes his helplessness by mentioning that he does not fit in any of the two categories.

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<sup>7</sup> Author's translation

# The Origins of the Stories in the *Masnavi*

Going back to *the Masnavi*, it is now time to elaborate on what is inside this book of Rumi that makes it the greatest Sufi book ever written. As it was mentioned previously, *The Masnavi* is a collection of narratives and folktales that come from different origins. Some of them have precisely come from the holy Quran, some have minor changes, some from the famous *Hadiths*, and some even come from ancient civilizations.

Franklin D Lewis in his book of *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West* brings many references from Iranian Rumi scholars and their elaboration on the parallels between the Quran and Rumi's *Masnavi*. From the book of *Az Daryâ be Daryâ* written by *Mohammad Taqi Ja'fari*, he quotes, "It is estimated that some 2,200 separate verses of the Quran are alluded to, quoted or explained in Rumi's *Masnavi*". Later he adds, "Another observer has calculated that as many as 6,000 lines of *The Masnavi* either quote, paraphrase or allude to the Quran." (Lewis 19) Below are two examples of the intertextuality of Rumi's *Masnavi* with the Quran. In the first example, Rumi is directly quoting a Quranic verse, and in the second one, he is paraphrasing one.

Example 1<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>8</sup> (Bita Naghmeh-Abbaspour)

In these two lines, Rumi directly refers to the story of the Moses in Quran, in Surah Al-Baqarah.

---

بی ادب گفتند کو سیر و عدس

در میان قوم موسی چند کس

ماند رنج زرع و بیل و داسمان

منقطع شد خوان و نان از آسمان

(But then), in the midst of the people of Moses, some persons spoke rudely: "Where (are) garlic and Lentils?"

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَى لَنْ نُصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ فَادْعِ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُثْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ مِنْ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسِهَا وَبَصَلِهَا ۗ قَالَ

أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ ۗ اهْبِطُوا مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مِمَّا سَأَلْتُمْ ۗ وَصُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا

يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيَّ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ (بقره ۶۱)

And (remember) when Musa (Moses) asked for water for his people, We said: "Strike the stone with your stick." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each (group of) people knew its own place for water. "Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not act corruptly, making mischief on the earth." (Surah 2. Al-Baqarah: V. 61)

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#### Example 2:

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پی بریدندش ز جهل آن قوم مر

ناقهی صالح به صورت بد شتر

Saleh's she-camel seemed no different, So wretches maimed her who were ignorant:

نان کور و آب کور ایشان بدند

از برای آب چون خصمش شدند

With water these vile wretches were so mean, For God's bestowal of water they'd not seen;

آب حق را داشتند از حق دریغ

ناقۀ الله آب خورد از جوی و میغ

God's camel then drank from some distant pools, God's water they'd refused to God—what fools!

ناقه‌ی صالح چو جسم صالحان      شد کمینی در هلاک طالحان

The camel, like the bodies of good men, Brought the destruction of the evil then,

تا بر آن امت ز حکم مرگ و درد      ناقه‌ی الله و سقیاها چه کرد

God's she-camel, her share thus you can see Caused death and pain to this community.

شحنه‌ی قهر خدا ز ایشان بجست      خونبهای اشتری شهری درست

The officer of God's wrath then laid down Her blood-price as the people of that town.

روح همچون صالح و تن ناقه است      روح اندر وصل و تن در فاقه است

Spirit is Saleh, body his maimed steed, Spirit's in union, body's filled with need,

روح صالح قابل آفات نیست      زخم بر ناقه بود بر ذات نیست

Saleh's pure soul can't be a sufferer, The essence wasn't maimed, they harmed just her,

روح صالح قابل آزار نیست      نور یزدان سغبه‌ی کفار نیست

And Saleh's spirit doesn't suffer grief—God's light is not harmed by men's unbelief.

حق از آن پیوست با جسمی نهان      تاش آزارند و بینند امتحان<sup>9</sup>

God joined it with the body in one place. So grief and trials Man would have to face.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Masnavi 1, 2509-2519

<sup>10</sup> Mojaddedi 155-156

This poem is an adaptation of the following verse in the Quran from Surah Al-Shams.

---

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا

And the messenger of Allah [Salih] said to them, "[Do not harm] the she-camel of Allah or [prevent her from] her drink." (Al-Shams 13)

---

In the aforementioned distiches, Rumi by referring to a Quranic verse, first, interpret the story of Prophet Salih and the Thamūd (Arabic: تَمُود) -- were an ancient Arabian tribe or tribal confederation--then uses it to introduce a Sufi concept.

Besides the Quranic verses, some of the stories came from old texts such as *Kalīlah and Dimnah*, also known as *The Panchatantra* in Sanskrit. This book is originally an Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, arranged within a frame story.<sup>11</sup> *Kalīlah and Dimnah* was first translated into middle Persian, then to Arabic, and later was translated to new Persian by Rudaki. At the very last line of the story of *The Jewish King and Anti-Christian fire*, Rumi directs his readers to read the origin of the following story in *Kalīlah and Dimnah*.

---

و اندر آن قصه طلب کن حصّه را<sup>12</sup>

از کلیله بازجو آن قصه را

Look up this tale in *Kalīlah and Dimnah* And find the page to which this part is similar<sup>13</sup>

---

Below are some lines from the story of *How a Hare Killed the Tyrannical Lion* that comes from *Kalīlah and Dimnah*.

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<sup>11</sup> [Panchatantra: Indian Literature](#), Encyclopaedia Britannica

<sup>12</sup> Masnavi 1, 899

<sup>13</sup> Mojaddedi 57



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بودشان از شیر دایم کش مکش

طایفه‌ی نخجیر در وادی خوش

Once in the Valley all the beasts ran scared: A lion preyed on them none were spared.

آن چرا بر جمله ناخوش گشته بود

بس که آن شیر از کمین درمی‌ربود

It used to hide, then pounce and seize its prey That's why they couldn't face another day;

کز وظیفه ما ترا داریم سیر

حیله کردند آمدند ایشان بهشیر

Once, with the lion they agreed a deal: 'Each day we'll satisfy you with a meal,

تا نگردهد تلخ بر ما این گیا<sup>14</sup>

بعد از این اندر پی صیدی میا

But you must not attack us anymore! This means our grass won't taste bad like before.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Masnavi 1, 900-904

<sup>15</sup> Mojaddedi 57-58

# Rumi's Approach to Storytelling

## What are narratives and why are they effective?

Now that we have a strong historical backbone of *The Masnavi* and a thorough understanding of its format and the origins of the stories, it is time to go back to Rumi and his gift of spiritual teaching. Rumi as a spiritual teacher, uses the format of storytelling as a tool to convey his mystical lessons. At this point, readers might ask how storytelling might be effective in conveying mystical lessons or even complex life lessons?

The 20th-century communication scholar, Walter Fisher, declares that human beings are *homo narrans*, or narrative beings (Fisher 2). Fisher believes that "the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation". (8) In his scholarly theory of "narrative paradigm," Fisher explains that narratives are more convincing than sound arguments. He elaborates on the communication power of storytelling and introduces the principle of narrative probability and narrative fidelity. He believes the evaluation of these two principles are essential for human beings to choose the narrative by which they will live. Fisher defines "narrative probability" as the degree to which a story makes sense or is coherent. He later adds to his initial definition that narrative probability includes "material as well as formal features". (Fisher 364) Meaning that as much as the content, both the structure of the story and the way it is delivered must make sense. In case that a story contradicts itself or has an inconsistent frame of meaning, it will not have a narrative probability (Devine 275) . Narrative fidelity, however, is the degree that the story connects with the receiver's experiences. Meaning that the story does not

contradict the receiver's actual life lessons. Therefore, the story needs to contain both elements of probability and fidelity to get accepted by the story's recipient.

Given that stories are a good source of transmitting information, the categories that stories fall within would not change the degree of their conduction. Although many would argue that narratives and stories can be solely fiction, Fisher has his own explanation. He defines narration as "a theory of symbolic actions, words and/or deeds, that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination" (Fisher 2). Perhaps, this definition is the reason that he does not distinguish between the word narrative and story, and uses them interchangeably. For the purpose of this thesis, I, too, do not differentiate between these two words.

Returning to the origins of the stories of Rumi, we can rarely distinguish fiction from non-fiction. We know that *The Masnavi* is a collection of stories that fall under the category of fables, folktales, allegories, or any number of other names. Campbell (Campbell) refers to these types of stories as "Myths of man" and states, "Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind." This statement corresponds well with the stories of *The Masnavi*. The longevity of Rumi's *Masnavi* and the inspiration of his words affirm their narrative probability and fidelity for those who are reading, re-telling, and recognizing those stories.

There are two levels of narrative learning, micro and macro narrative. For this thesis, I solely focus on macro-narrative, which is defined as "those stories, fables, and myths that are

common across multiple cultures and contain universal themes and lessons." (Devine 273). Rumi uses this macro-narrative to teach his mystical or moral lessons. The use of these fables helps him to connect with the readers from different cultural backgrounds. Even if they do not know the cultural connection of the tales, they may know a story with similar morals. As White argues "We may not be able to fully comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us." (5-6) He continues, "narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted." (6)

## Why are we attracted to stories?

Understanding narratives, their structures, and divisions are important steps toward learning why they can be a beneficial learning approach. Yet, here arises another question: why are we so attracted to stories? In better words, why do our brains love stories?

Paul J Zak, the author of the article "How Stories Change the Brain", gives the answer to the questions mentioned above. "As social creatures who regularly affiliate with strangers, stories are an effective way to transmit important information and values from one individual or community to the next. Stories that are personal and emotionally compelling engage more of the brain, and thus are better remembered than simply stating a set of facts." (2)

Zak believes two factors make a story compelling. "First, it must capture and hold our attention. Second, "transport" us into the characters' world." (3) Let us examine these two factors in the following story of Rumi.

---

A petty thief carried off a snake from a snake-catcher and in his folly was accounting it a prize.

وارهید آن مارگیر از زخم مار      مار کشت آن دزد او را زار زار

The snake-catcher escaped from the snake's bite; the man who had robbed him was miserably killed by the snake.

مارگیرش دید پس بشناختش      گفت از جان مار من پرداختش

The snake-catcher saw him; then he recognized him and said, "My snake has emptied him of life.

در دعا می‌خواستی جانم ازو      کش بیابم مار بستانم ازو

My soul desired of Him in prayer that I might find him and take the snake from him.

شکر حق را کان دعا مردود شد      من زیان پنداشتم آن سود شد

Thanks to God that that prayer was rejected: I thought that it was a loss, but it has turned out to be a gain.

بس دعاها کان زیانست و هلاک      وز کرم می‌نشنود یزدان پاک<sup>16</sup>

Many are the prayers which are loss and destruction, and from kindness the Holy God is not hearing them.<sup>17</sup>

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The first line in the above story narrates the main purpose of the story and draws the reader's attention. The reader instantly knows that the story is about a thief carrying off a snake from a snake-catcher. Not only is he introduced in the first line to the topic of the story, but he also gets to know the main characters of the narrative. Thus, he is transported to the character's world and curious to know what happens next. Perhaps, we all can relate to this story to some extent. It has happened to all of us to start questioning the misfortune of losing something valuable. Yet, Rumi

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<sup>16</sup> Masnavi 2, 135-140

<sup>17</sup> Translated by R. Nicholson

uses this allegorical story to teach an important lesson: everything in life happens for a reason, even though we might not always be aware of that reason.

Stories are an excellent way to attract and maintain our attention, develop empathy and increase our motivation. "Any Hollywood writer will tell you that attention is a scarce resource. Movies, TV shows, and books always include "hooks" that make you turn the page, stay on the channel through the commercial, or keep you in a theater seat." (Zak 3) I also used the same trick and started my thesis by giving you a story of Rumi prior to introducing him and giving you all this information.

Stories trigger our attention because they are mainly informative. In the aforesaid story of *The thief and the Snake-Catcher*, readers attend to the story because they understand that this is a scenario that might also happen to them. They realize that they can use this to learn how to develop their own deep resolve.

In storytelling, maintaining attention is the key factor to sustain a longer and stronger connection with the readers. "In the brain, maintaining attention produces signs of arousal: the heart and breathing speed up, stress hormones are released, and our focus is high." (Zak 4) This is the start of an emotional response that resonates with the characters of the story. The main goal of any storyteller is to trigger that emotional response. "Narratologists call this "transportation," and you experience this when your palms sweat as James Bond trades blows with a villain on top of a speeding train." (Zak 4)

This emotional stimulation is significantly important as it is the foundation of empathy, another factor that makes a story even more convincing. To this end, Zak identifies oxytocin as

the neurochemical responsible for empathy and narrative transportation (5). Then, he elaborates on the role of oxytocin and the effect of that on the brain:

"My lab pioneered the behavioral study of oxytocin and has proven that when the brain synthesizes oxytocin, people are more trustworthy, generous, charitable, and compassionate. I have dubbed oxytocin the "moral molecule," and others call it the love hormone. What we know is that oxytocin makes us more sensitive to social cues around us. In many situations, social cues motivate us to engage to help others, particularly if the other person seems to need our help."

Stories can be motivational, and this might be the boldest purpose of them. After watching a donation commercial, empathy driven by the release of oxytocin, is the key that motivates us to donate to that starving child in Africa.

Let us now examine the aforesaid factors of effective storytelling in short sections of Rumi's well-known story of the king and the slave-girl.

---

خود حقیقت نقد حال ماست آن	بشنوید ای دوستان این داستان
ملک دنیا بودش و هم ملک دین	بود شاهی در زمانی پیش از این
با خواص خویش از بهر شکار	اتفاقا شاه روزی شد سوار
شد غلام آن کنیزک جان شاه	یک کنیزک دید شه بر شاه راه
داد مال و آن کنیزک را خرید	مرغ جانش در قفس چون می‌طیبد
آن کنیزک از قضا بیمار شد	چون خرید او را و برخوردار شد
یافت پالان گرگ خر را در ربود	آن یکی خر داشت، پالانش نبود
آب را چون یافت خود کوزه شکست	کوزه بودش آب می‌نامد به دست
گفت جان هر دو در دست شماست	شه طبیبان جمع کرد از چپ و راست

---

Now here's a tale for you to contemplate, It tells the Truth about our present state:

There was a king, most glorious and refined, With spiritual and temporal power combined; Once he was riding on his favorite steed Out hunting with his friends, whom he would lead, When he beheld a slave-girl near the fray—His soul became her servant

His old heart fluttered like a caged young bird, He met the asking-price without a word, But just when he had signed and sealed this trade By fate an illness overcame the maid: Like buying saddles for your mule one day To find that wolves have chased it far away!

Or fetching water with your finest pot For it to smash, as if there's been a plot!

The king brought healers from all distant lands: 'Our lives are both now in your expert hands, My life is over till she's well again, For she's my medicine, distinguished men;<sup>19</sup>

In the first line, Rumi invites the reader to listen to this story that he believes is our present state's truth. Rumi's strong hook has already taken readers' attention by triggering the reader's curiosity in the second hemistich. Not only are readers curious to know about "the truth of their present state," but also, they are convinced that the story would be informative.

From the second to fifth line, readers are introduced to two of the main characters of the story. This is the first step toward holding their attention. By the end of the fifth line and the news of the slave-girl's sickness, readers are transported into the character's world. They are now emotionally involved and interested to know what happens to the life of the poor slave-girl.

In the seventh and eighth lines, however, there is a short moral lesson that triggers the reader's empathy. This is the place that strengthens the connection between the readers and the

<sup>18</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 35-44

<sup>19</sup> Mojaddedi 35-44



story. Readers can easily put themselves into the story and think of the time that they went through the same thing. This dramatically transforms their feeling of empathy to sympathy, as they can now have a stronger understanding of the king's feelings.

The story continues as the king calls for the best doctors of the time, and none of them can cure the slave girl. Devastated and helpless, he runs toward a mosque lamenting for a miraculous solution from God. Soon after, a spiritual Hakim appears to him and tries to heal the girl.

---

رنگِ روی و نبض و قاروره بدید      هم علاماتش، هم اسبابش شنید

Her pulse and pale complexion first he checked, Discovering the cause through its effect.

گفت: هردارو که ایشان کرده اند      آن عمارت نیست، ویران کرده اند

The drugs that they'd prescribed were like a curse, Sapping her strength and making her feel worse

دید رنج و کشف شد بر وی نهفت      لیک پنهان کرد و با سلطان نگفت

He saw her pain, her secret was revealed, But from the king he kept it all concealed

رنجش از صفرا و سودا نبود      بوی هر هیزم پدید آید زدود

Her pain was not from bile the doctor learned, The scent of wood is from its smoke discerned

دید از زاریش، کو زار دل است      تن خوش است و او گرفتار دل است

عاشقی پیداست از زاری دل      نیست بیماری، چو بیماری دل<sup>20</sup>

Her grief revealed that it was from her heart—Physically fine, her heart was torn apart<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 103-109

<sup>21</sup> Mojaddedi 101-107

In this section, by illustrating details, Rumi makes the readers more engaged with the story and interested to know what is wrong with the sick girl. By the end of the last line, the readers know that the girl's sickness is nothing physical. As the Hakim of the story phrases it, her pain is not from the bile but from the heart that is torn apart. Rumi's allegorical description is what distinguishes this method of storytelling from any other stories. He is well aware of the fact that he can settle his story in the minds of the readers by manifesting more of the details.

Readers following the story might still have the same feeling toward the king. Up to this part of the story, the king appears more as a lover doing everything in his power to save his beloved girl. However, the story takes a shocking turn as it continues.

After the sickness of the girl becomes known to the Hakim, he continues investigating the girl's emotional state. Finally, he finds out that the girl is, indeed, in love with a good-looking young goldsmith from Samarkand. He immediately goes to the king and gives him his only solution. He asks the king to call for the goldsmith and persuade him with abundant gold to leave his city and his children and dwell with them. Then, offer him to the slave girl and let her enjoy his companionship.

For six months, the slave-girl and the goldsmith lived happily, and she had fully recovered from the sickness. At this point, Hakim goes back to the king and advises him that now it is time to get the goldsmith sick by offering him a poisonous drink. When the goldsmith gets sick, he loses his amiability gradually. The slave-girl that was in love with the attractiveness of the goldsmith loses her interest. Eventually, when the goldsmith dies, his love also dies in the heart of the slave- girl.

After reading this part of the story, the reader might change their perspective toward the king. Their former sympathy transforms into a feeling of anger. This is important because any emotional feeling, whether it is happiness, sadness, anger, or empathy, creates a wave of attention to the brain. This attending and maintaining attention keeps the readers going through the story. Rumi, indeed, needs the reader to keep reading to get to the last section of the story. Now that the reader starts questioning the cruelty of the king and take pity on the love of the poor slave-girl and the life of the goldsmith, Rumi states:

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شاه آن خون از پی شهوت نکرد      تو رها کن بد گمانی و نبرد

The king did not commit that bloodshed because of lust: cease from thinking evil and disputing.

تو گمان بردی که کرد آلودگی      در صفا غش کی هلد پالودگی

You thought that he committed a foul crime, (but) in (the state of) purity how should the sublimation leave (any) alloy (behind)?

بهر آن است این ریاضت وین جفا      تا بر آرد کوره از نقره جفا

The purpose of this (severe) discipline and this rough treatment is that the furnace may extract the dross from the silver.

گر نبودى كارش الهام اله      او سگى بودى دراننده نه شاه

If his act were not the inspiration of God, he would have been a dog that rends (its prey), not a king.

پاك بود از شهوت و حرص و هوا      نيك كرد او ليك نيك بد نما

He was unstained by lust and covetousness and passion: (what) he did (was) good, but good that wore the aspect of evil.

گر خضر در بحر كشتى را شكست      صد درستى در شكست خضر هست

If Khadir stove the boat in the sea, (yet) in Khadir's staving there are a hundred rightnesses.

شاه بود و شاه بس آگاه بود      خاص بود و خاصه‌ى الله بود

---

He was a king and a very heedful king; he was elect and the elect (favourite) of God.

آن کسی را کش چنین شاهمی کشد      سوی بخت و بهترین جاهی کشد

One who is slain by a king like this, he (the king) leads him to fortune and to the best (most honourable) estate.

گر ندیدی سود او در قهر او      کی شدی آن لطف مطلق قهر جو

Unless he (the king) had seen advantage to him (the goldsmith) in doing violence to him, how should that absolute Mercy have sought to do violence?

بچه می لرزد از آن نیش حجام      مادر مشفق در آن غم شاد کام

The child trembles at the barber's scalpel (but) the fond mother is happy at that moment.

نیم جان بستاند و صد جان دهد      آن چه در و همت نیاید آن دهد

He takes half a life and gives a hundred lives (in exchange): he gives that which enters not into your imagination.

تو قیاس از خویش می گیری و لیک      دور دور افتاده ای بنگر تو نیک<sup>22</sup>

You are judging (his actions) from (the analogy of) yourself, but you have fallen far, far (away from the Truth). Consider well!<sup>23</sup>

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In the lines above, Rumi, by defending the king's action, has an important lesson for the readers. He invites the readers to look at the story not from their judgmental perspective, but from a different angle. He is informing them that there is a deeper layer to the story. By giving the example of the mother and the child, he tries to make this more tangible. These explanations motivate the readers to look for a deeper understanding and a valuable lesson.

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<sup>22</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 230-246

<sup>23</sup> Translation by Nicholson

There are many analyses of this story of Rumi and this is, indeed, the beauty of the story that lets the readers have different takeaways. When the slave-girl's love toward the goldsmith vanishes by the destruction of his attractiveness, it symbolizes a type of love that focuses solely on the superficial surface. Despite the spiritual love, this material love is worthless in Sufism. A Sufi mystic needs to sacrifice the exterior (*Zaher*) to achieve the beauty of the hidden treasure (*Baten*).

Stories are supposed to motivate us, like the characters in them, to help us look inside ourselves and make changes to become better people (Zak 7). In the case of the above story, when readers kill their "exterior" to achieve the "inner value" of the interior, they take the first step toward becoming a better person. Whether becoming a better person is donating to a charity or replacing a bad behavior with a positive one, it makes us happier. In the case of charity donation, "This shows there is a virtuous cycle in which we first engage with others emotionally that leads to helping behaviors that make us happier." (Zak 7) In the case of Rumi's story, readers first get transported to the world of the characters. Then get emotionally involved and travel through the story, and finally, leave that with a suitcase full of moral lessons. These moral lessons help them to reflect on themselves and eventually become happier and more at inner peace.

## **A Story of Rumi: Forty Rules of Love and Coleman Barks'**

### **Translation**

Stories open windows to the imagination and let us picture the new information in a way that we can experience through our own lens and interpret meaning independent of rote information. Perhaps, this is why even learning about Rumi's life and his spiritual lessons is more

enjoyable through a story. There are many novels written based on Rumi's poetry and his character, but *Forty Rules of love* (Shafak) is different. Written by a Turkish author, Elif Shafak, this book was published in 2009 by Penguin Press. As a narrative within another narrative, this book gives a biography of Rumi and his beloved Shams. It connects the life of Rumi, a thirteen-century mystic and poet, to the life of a forty-year-old American woman Ella. This interconnection of Rumi with Ella, the female protagonist of the book, has been controversial in the eyes of many critics. Many have criticized this as an act of Americanization of Rumi. Elif Shafak has been accused of placing the myth of Rumi through a massive structural transformation to make her book more engaging for the American audiences (Furlanetto 201).

Previously, Coleman Barks faced the same criticism for his translation of Rumi in 1995. *The Essential Rumi*, Barks' translation, continues to be the best-selling book of Rumi for many years. This book, indeed, made Rumi's poems the best-selling foreign poetry in the U.S. Barks could neither speak nor read Persian, and his translation was based on an outdated English translation. Therefore, the original text of Rumi was not taken into consideration in his translation (Furlanetto 203). As Clinton and El-Zein have pointed out, "Barks's translations have little linguistic or academic value, as he merely paraphrased Rumi from outdated English translations into a more accessible form suitable for the tastes and sensitivities of the contemporary American readership" (Clinton 153).

Despite the criticisms, *The Essential Rumi* created a storm in the American literary market known as the "Rumi phenomenon," the posthumous literary success of Rumi (Furlanetto 201). Yet, critics believe *Forty Rules of Love* contributed to "Rumi phenomenon" and has a major role in the success of Rumi as a pop-culture narrative among the American readership. To this end, it is

noteworthy that although Barks' translation is not the best translation of Rumi, it was the reason that Rumi's stories were initially heard among the Anglophones. The same applies to the book *Forty Rules of Love*. As Elena Furlanetto points out, this book is full of oversimplification and decontextualization (Furlanetto 201). However, despite these imperfections, it still introduces Rumi to people that might never have heard of him if it was not for this book.

*Forty Rules of Love*, in addition to the American literary market, successfully found its place among Persians and Turks. It was the best-seller book in both Iran and Turkey. At this point, a question might arise: If Shafak's narration of Rumi is well Americanized and oversimplified, why is it still popular among Turkish and Persian readers that are not far away from Rumi's poetry?

In Iran, *Forty Rules of Love* was translated by Arsalan Fasihi in 2018. Shortly after the publication of the book, it became famous among the young generation and was among the best-seller books of the year. The forty rules of love (elaborated by Shams in the book) are very popular among Persians and are posted daily on their Instagram and Facebook pages. Interestingly, this book got also popular among the group of people that might not even be interested in classical Persian poetry. Perhaps, the reason that, despite all the deficiencies, this book is popular and remembered is related to nothing but the magic of storytelling. "Stories humanize our world and provide a framework that allows people to relate at their own level. We engage our senses, experience, hearing, and....smell" (Devine 286). More importantly, stories are more compelling than rote information, which makes them more effective as cognitive science research tells us that "memorable information is more likely to be acted upon" (Swap 103). Therefore, information transformed by stories has a greater chance of changing our social standards, behaviors, mindset, and in general, the way we live our lives.

# What is Sufism?

The therapeutic effect of Sufism has been the center of discussion in many scholarly articles. *The Masnavi*, known as a Sufi masterpiece, does a great job of introducing the elements of Sufism and mysticism. The mystical elements conveyed in the body of stories in Rumi's *Masnavi* can have spiritual healing effects that are often compared with the psychological principles of Mindfulness. To make this comparison, it is first essential to take a closer look at the core values and elements of Sufism as well as the models of Mindfulness. It is noteworthy that Sufism has many branches. This thesis exclusively focuses on Rumi's Sufism and also interchangeably refers to it as mysticism.

Sufism is the mystical and inward path of Islam (Sayar). As Sedwick in the book of *Sufism, the Essentials* points out; it is "the emotional and generally fun part of Islam" that adds a poetic texture to its body(7). Kaya uses the metaphor of a circle to give a general basic understanding of Sufism. He likens the outer, practical dimensions of Islam (Sharia and its Prohibitions and Rules) to the circle's perimeter. He recognizes the center of it as the inner Truth. Then, he defines the "radius" of this metaphoric circle as the line that connects the center to *Tariqat* or Sufism. Sayar describes Sufism as "the spiritual way, heading not only to the implementation of external worship and belief but also to the inner satisfaction and precise knowledge that is integrated with experience (55). This spiritual way is often referred to as the mystical path that, through several steps, guides the *Salik* (devotee or the person who goes through the Sufi path) toward the ultimate goal of unity with the Divine. These mystical steps are very much similar to what Attar calls the seven valleys in *The Conference of the Birds*. In the below poem, Attar introduces these seven valleys:



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چون گذشتي هفت وادي، درگه است

گفت ما را هفت وادي در ره است

He said there are seven valleys on our way, when you shall pass the seven valleys, there is a doorway

وادي عشق است از آن پس، بي کنار

هست وادي طلب آغاز کار

the first valley is the valley of the Quest, right after that comes the valley of Love

پس چهارم وادي استغني صفت

پس سيم واديست آن معرفت

The third valley is gnostic and the fourth is unity

پس ششم وادي حيرت صعب ناک

هست پنجم وادي توحيد پاک

Then the valley of contentment and after that the difficult valley of wonderment comes

بعد ازين روي روش نبود ترا

هفتمين وادي فقرست و فنا

The seventh is the valley of true poverty and absolute nothingness, After this you will not have the strength to proceed anymore

گر بود يک قطره قلزم گر ددت

درکشش افتي، روش گم گر ددت

When you get stuck in it, you will lose the path. Then if you are a droplet, you will become an ocean<sup>24</sup>

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To go through this complicated path, Salik needs the help of a Saint (the spiritual master) who has already transcended this Sufi path. In Islamic mysticism, this Sufi saint is referred to by multiple names such as *Pir*, *Morshed*, or *Sheikh*. This spiritual Sufi master has gone through intense training and has successfully attained the state of *Fana fi Allah*, the last step of Sufism (Wilcox). Sufis believe that Prophet Muhammad was the first Sufi. "The Prophet is not actually called a *Shaikh* or a Sufi, if only because there is no higher title than *Rasul* and because the

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<sup>24</sup> Translated by the author

Prophet's role was much larger than that of being the first Sufi. But no examination of Sufism can start with anyone else" (Sedgwick 13). It is noteworthy that in Sufism, Saint can be chosen from *Awliya* (friends of God) or *Anbiya* (Prophets).

In Rumi's spiritual development, Shams appears as a Saint. Their relationship, however, is different from the Shaikh-Salik relationship. "In one sense, Shams was [Rumi's] "conversation Sheikh," while in another Rumi was the "Murshid," or teacher" (Can 319). Unlike the usual vertical relationship of the Saint and Salik, they had a horizontal relationship. "They transcended positions such as sheikhdom, discipleship, and successorship to become mirrors for one another." (Can 57)

As stated in the section *Who is Rumi?* Rumi's father, Bahā ud-Dīn Walad, was also a mystic. There is not enough information to know whether Rumi or his father were a member of any formal Sufi order. After Rumi's death, his son Sultan Veled and Husameddin Chelebi (who inspired and helped Rumi to write *The Masnavi*) established the *Mevlevi* (*Mawlawi*) order (Schimmel 347). They also built the mausoleum of Rumi, a pilgrimage place for many Muslims and non-Muslims. Sufis of the Mevlevi order are famous for their practice of *Sema*, spiritual dance. Hence, they are also known as "whirling dervishes." The dervishes of *Mevlevi* perform their worship in the form of this spiritual dance of Sema. "The [whirling] dervishes turn around with open arms, the right hand facing the sky and the left hand the earth, thus 'distributing to Man what they receive from God.' Sema comes from the words 'to hear' and 'to listen.' It is listening to music with one's full being." (Mirdal 1203-1204)

"It is said that the hammering of the goldsmiths in the bazaar of Konya inspired [Rumi] to dance and to recite verses, as did the sound of the watermills in the gardens of Meram." (Schimmel 339). Some scholars, however, believe that Rumi must have learned whirling from Shams of

Tabriz. The day of Rumi's death, also known as his marriage to God (*Shab e Arusi*: the wedding night), is the annual celebration in which the Dervishes of the *Mevlevi* order practice the spiritual dance of *Sema* in front of pilgrims coming from all over the world. This celebration is observed for one week and with the final night occurring on the anniversary of Rumi's death (Baler 1).

# The Commonality between Sufism and Psychotherapy: Mindfulness

Salik, to go through his spiritual development, needs to overcome many challenges. He needs to win the battle between worldly desires and immaterial matters. He needs to be aware of the elements of Sufism and practice them constantly. All these sacrifices, eventually, lead him toward the ultimate goal of Sufism, the unity with the Divine. The last step of mysticism transforms the Salik into a perfect human being or *Ensan e Kamel*. This perfect human being's perception of life parallels spiritual and positive psychology as well as mindfulness-based theories. These principles of psychology will not be differentially presented here. The aim of this thesis is to highlight the commonality and parallels between the psychotherapy methods in general and their connections to Rumi's Islamic mysticism. Eventually, this will lead us to answer the former question: How can reading Rumi's *Masnavi* promote our mental wellbeing and help us feel more content with our lives?

According to Mirdal, in the last two decades, due to scientific advances and social changes, the role of religion and spirituality has become more visible in psychological treatment (Mirdal 1201). "Neuroscientific evidence that ideas and beliefs affect human physiology and that

emotions have a broad range of effects on brain function and structure". (Mirdal 1202) This statement approves that the Sufi ideas and beliefs manifested in Rumi's stories can trigger the readers' emotions and therefore have an effect on their psychology and wellbeing. To understand the nexus between Rumi's mystical elements and the readers' psychology, I get the help of mindfulness theories and their implications. Therefore, it is first necessary to define Mindfulness.

## **What is Mindfulness?**

According to Shapiro and Carlson, Mindfulness can be defined as "the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, kind and discerning way." (Shauna L. Shapiro 4) Kabat-Zinn introduces Mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment." (147) Almost all mindfulness practices include meditation techniques that help with the training of mind, heart, and body to be fully present with life. Thus, it is often referred to as a consciousness discipline.

Mindfulness consists of three core elements: intention, attention, and attitude (Shapiro). Intention is the stage that one knows the reason for what he is doing. This is the place that he envisions the ultimate aim and the aspiration. Attention is the stage of being fully immersed in the present moment without getting distracted by thinking about the past or future. Attitude, the last stage, is how one pays attention, enables one to stay open, kind, and curious. These three steps are interwoven, meaning that each step nurtures and informs the other (Shauna L. Shapiro 3).

The step of intention in Mindfulness very much is the same as the first step of Rumi's mystical path, the valley of Quest. Rumi, in his poem of *Masnavi, Song of the Reed*, introduces this valley.

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از جدایی‌ها حکایت می‌کند

بشنو این نی چون شکایت می‌کند

Listen to this reed how it complains, telling a tale of separations—

در نفیرم مرد و زن نالیده‌اند

کز نیستان تا مرا ببریده‌اند

Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, man and woman have moaned in (unison with) my lament.

تا بگویم شرح درد اشتیاق

سینه خواهم شرحه شرحه از فراق

I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire.

باز جوید روزگار وصل خویش<sup>25</sup>

هر کسی کاو دور ماند از اصل خویش

Everyone who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it<sup>26</sup>

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In this poem (only a short section of it is mentioned above), Rumi narrates the story of the separation of the human being from his beloved, the Divine. He likens the human being to a reed separated from its origin, the reed bed. Then, he illustrates the lamentation of the human being from this separation. In the fourth line, he describes the Quest of human beings to get back to his origin. This is, indeed, the ultimate goal of mysticism which is the unity with the Divine. The valley of Quest, similar to the stage of intention, is when the Salik knows the reason that he is

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<sup>25</sup> Masnavi 1, 1-4

<sup>26</sup> Translated by Nicholson

devoting himself to the path of mysticism. It is then that Salik recognizes his ultimate aim of unity and is ready to go across the path.

The second step is the valley of love. This is the spark that excites the Salik and fuels him to go through this complicated Sufism path. Rumi describes the importance of Love in the following lines:

---

هر که را جامه ز عشقی چاک شد  
او ز حرص و عیب کلی پاک شد

He (alone) whose garment is rent by a (mighty) love is purged entirely of covetousness and defect.

شاد باش ای عشق خوش سودای ما  
ای طبیب جمله علت‌های ما

Hail, our sweet-thoughted Love —thou that art the physician of all our ills.

ای دوائ نخوت و ناموس ما  
ای تو افلاطون و جالینوس ما

The remedy of our pride and vainglory, our Plato and our Galen!

جسم خاک از عشق بر افلاک شد  
کوه در رقص آمد و چالاک شد<sup>27</sup>

Through Love the earthly body soared to the skies: the mountain began to dance and became nimble.<sup>28</sup>

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Love in Sufism is like the attention in Mindfulness. This is deep and clear attention that helps the person to be fully centralized in the present moment. In the following lines, Rumi stresses the importance of living in the current moment.

---

صوفی ابن الوقت باشد ای رفیق  
نیست فردا گفتن از شرط طریق

The Súfī is the son of the (present) time, O comrade: it is not the rule of the Way to say 'Tomorrow.'

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<sup>27</sup> *Masnavi 1*, 22-25

<sup>28</sup> Translation by Nicholson

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تو مگر خود مرد صوفی نیستی

هست را از نسیه خیزد نیستی<sup>29</sup>

Art not thou indeed a Súfī, then? That which is (in hand) is reduced to naught by postponing the payment."<sup>30</sup>

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In another place, he emphasizes this stage of love and describes it as a miracle and the cure of any sickness. To highlight the power of love or this spiritual attention, he illustrates it as an extraordinary power that can shake the mountains or transcend the earthly body of human beings to the skies. In the story of *The Slave Girl and the King*, Rumi introduces love as the ultimate solution and the astrolabe to find out God's mysteries.

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علت عاشق ز علتها جداست

عشق اصطرلاب اسرار خداست<sup>31</sup>

The lover's ailment is separate from all other ailments: love is the astrolabe of the mysteries of God.<sup>32</sup>

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The third component of Mindfulness is attitude which is, indeed, very similar to the valley of *Marefat*, the spiritual knowledge or Gnosis. Spiritual knowledge is different from book learning. It is the stage that the Salik with the power of Love can distinguish between *Baten* (esoteric or the hidden meaning) and *Zaher* (the outer, the surface meaning). Rumi gives an example of this in his story of *The Bald Parrot and the Monk*.

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<sup>29</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 133-134

<sup>30</sup> Translation by Nicholson

<sup>31</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 110

<sup>32</sup> Translation by Nicholson



Once there was a grocer who had a beautiful parrot in his shop. The beautiful green amusing parrot would either entertain the customers with his human words or look after the shop in the absence of the grocer. One day, while the grocer was gone, he hopped down from its perch and spilled a flask of rose oil on his way. When the grocer came back and noticed what had happened, he got mad and struck the parrot's head which left him bald. After that day, the parrot stopped speaking until he saw a bald monk. He pointed to the monk's head and said:

---

بانگ بر درویش زد که هی فلان

طوطی اندر گفت آمد در زمان

Thereupon the parrot cried to the dervish, as rational persons (might have done).

تو مگر از شیشه روغن ریختی

از چه ای کل با کلان آمیختی

How were you mixed up with the bald, O baldpate? Did you, then, spill oil from the bottle?"

کو چو خود پنداشت صاحب دل را

از قیاسش خنده آمد خلق را

The bystanders laughed at the parrot's inference, because it deemed the wearer of the frock to be like itself.

گر چه ماند در نبشتن شیر و شیر

کار پاکان را قیاس از خود مگیر

Do not measure the actions of holy men by (the analogy of) yourself, though shér (lion) and shír (milk) are similar in writing.

کم کسی ز ابدال حق آگاه شد<sup>33</sup>

جمله عالم زین سبب گمراه شد

On this account the whole world is gone astray: scarcely any one is cognisant of God's Abdál (Substitutes).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Masnavi 1, 260-264

<sup>34</sup> Translation by Nicholson

Rumi uses this allegorical story to present the comic analogy of the parrot as an example of the distinction between *Zahir* and *Baten*. Through this story, he introduces the concept of *Marefat* or spiritual knowledge. Attitude in Mindfulness, likewise, distinguishes between the qualities of the attention. According to Shauna et al, "Attention can have a cold, critical quality, or an openhearted, curious, and compassionate quality." (4) Meaning that if one attends without the attitudinal qualities such as acceptance, openness, and curiosity, this may result in attention that is unpleasant and undervalues the experience. How we pay attention is indeed the attitude, which is the core of Mindfulness. Correspondingly, *Marefat* is the foundation of how the *Salik* perceives the world. It is the ability to pay attention to life matters in a meaningful way. Same as attitude, it invites the *Salik* to avoid making things be a certain way but attempts to relate to realities despite any difficulties. It educates the *Salik* to take the experience merely as an experience without the distinctions of good or bad. *Marefat* is not only the knowledge of the mind. It can indeed be felt in the heart.

## **Sufi Healing: Using the Mindfulness Based Therapy**

After the understanding of Mindfulness, along with its three core elements and the similarities they share with the three initial valleys of mysticism, let us now focus on their therapeutic aspect. Mindfulness was traditionally inspired by Buddhism (Mirdal 1202). According to Mirdal, psychology has always been fascinated by the philosophy of Buddhism and Taoism, to the point that they have combined these two philosophies with the scientifically therapeutic methods and used them in psychotherapy (1203). Since Islamic thoughts and mysticism have many similarities with these philosophies, they can also be used in psychotherapy and support mental health, especially among Muslim populations. As a master of Islamic mysticism, Rumi, can be a

great source of inspiration for the culturally sensitive therapeutic method. According to Kiliç (Kiliç), "Rumi's poetry is read more than any other writing except for the Quran in Islamic cultures. He influenced Turkish, especially Anatolian Islam substantially, and many Turkish homes still have his famous sayings framed and hanging on their walls." Therefore, among Muslims, Rumi's famous sayings and metaphors based on his teaching have a meaningful background that can be used in transcultural therapy with Muslim clients (Mirdal 1203). Yet, this does not mean that Rumi's spiritual teaching and healing methods can merely benefit the Muslim population. If the Buddhist-inspired method of Mindfulness can work for anyone with any cultural background, then Rumi's spiritual healing can work too.

### ***From Psychospiritual Self to “Nothingness”***

According to O'Riordan, Shafii, and Wilcox (Wilcox), "Notions of Sufi healing involve the psychospiritual self, of ridding one's self of physical and material problems, to change one's state of mind. Concepts of wellbeing are grounded in theological discourse, whereby Sufis feel that separation from the Divine predisposes one to emotional 'sickness.'"(199) This separation from the Divine manifested in Rumi's *Song of the Reed* is the start of the Sufi path. Recalling the Valley of the Quest and the element of intention in Mindfulness, it is when Salik realizes that his *Nafs*, self, has been separated from its origin. It is noteworthy that in the Quran, *Nafs* literally means "self" and has been translated as "psyche," "ego," or "soul" (Bragazzi and Khabbache 315-321). There is a complex philosophical debate on the distinction of *Nafs* and soul and the concept of *Nafs* in general. Going into the depth of this concept is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, the general understanding of that can help present the interconnection of Sufi values with psychotherapy and wellbeing. Islamic mysticism believes that a human being's soul, as a creature, is not different from

God's soul, as the creator. In the Quranic story of creation, God has made humankind out of clay and has blown part of his soul into it. Below is the Quranic reference from Surat Al-Hajir:

---

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration (Surat Al-Ĥijr 15:29).

---

If God has created humankind from his soul, does this mean that human beings are part of the Divine? If one agrees to this statement, then the Sufi ultimate goal of unity is nothing but to get back to his true self. Thus, in the last step of Sufism, when the Salik reaches unity with the Divine, his self (his being) merges to God's being and they become one. To this end, the last step of Sufism is referred to as annihilation.

Salik, to get through the Sufi path, needs to understand the compartments of himself. He needs to be able to extract his heavenly *Nafs* from his animal and satanic nature (ego). This phenomenon is called cleansing the soul or *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in Sufism. Salik can win this battle by getting rid of the vices such as hubris and greed. The importance of controlling the *Nafs* is so significant that it has received the title of *Greater Jihad* from Prophet Mohammad. "There are two types of struggles, *Jihad*, for Muslims: The *Lesser Jihad* against the enemies of Islam on the battlefield, as opposed to the *Greater Jihad* against *Nafs*." (Sedgwick 9) Rumi calls this eternal battle with *Nafs*, the holy war, and the true *Jihad*.

---

ماند خصمی زو بتدر در اندرون

ای شهان کشتیم ما خصم برون

O kings, we have slain the outward enemy, (but) there remains within (us) a worse enemy than he.

شیر باطن سخره‌ی خرگوش نیست

کشتن این کار عقل و هوش نیست

To slay this (enemy) is not the work of reason and intelligence: the inward lion is not subdued by the hare.

کاو به دریاها نگردد کم و کاست

دوزخ است این نفس و دوزخ ازدهاست

This carnal self (nafs) is Hell, and Hell is a dragon (the fire of) which is not diminished by oceans (of water).

طبع کل دارد جزوها

چون که جزو دوزخ است این نفس ما

Inasmuch as this self of ours is a part of Hell, and the parts always have the nature of the whole,

روی آوردم به پیکار درون

چون که واگشتم ز پیکار برون

When I turned back from the outer warfare, I set my face towards the inner warfare.

با نبی اندر جهاد اکبریم

قد رجعنا من جهاد الاصغریم

We have returned from the lesser Jihád, we are engaged along with the Prophet in the greater Jihád.

تا به سوزن بر کنم این کوه قاف

قوت از حق خواهم و توفیق و لاف

I pray God to grant me strength and aid and (the right of) boasting, that I may root up with a needle this mountain of Qáf.

شیر آن است آن که خود را بشکند<sup>35</sup>

سهل شیری دان که صفها بشکند

Deem of small account the lion (champion) who breaks the ranks (of the enemy): the (true) lion is he that breaks (conquers) himself.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Masnavi I*, 1373-1375, 1382, 1386-1389

<sup>36</sup> Translation by Nicholson

The victory of this *Greater Jihad* helps the Salik to proceed through his spiritual development. Rumi points out this suffering of the cleansing of the soul and the sacrificing of worldly desires and considers them vital for the Salik's spiritual development. He believes that only through this suffering can Salik understand his imperfection and distance from the desired qualities such as wholeness, balance, and wisdom. Through these sufferings, the Salik understands the existential poverty of human beings, which Ibn Arabi, the pioneer in Sufism, calls the basic concept of Sufism (Kaya 16). As Rumi states:

---

بی‌عنایات خدا هیچیم هیچ

این همه گفتیم لیک اندر بسیج

We have spoken all these words, but in preparing ourselves (for the journey before us) we are naught, naught without the favors of God.

گر ملک باشد سیاه استنش ورق

بی‌عنایات حق و خاصان حق

Without the favors of God and God's elect ones, angel though he be, his page is black.

ت با تو یاد هیچ کس نبود روا

ای خدا ای فضل تو حاجت روا

O God, O Thou whose bounty fulfils (every) need, it is not allowable to mention any one beside Thee.

تا بدین بس عیب ما پوشیده‌ای<sup>37</sup>

این قدر ارشاد تو بخشیده‌ای

This amount of guidance Thou hast bestowed (upon us); till this (present time) Thou hast covered up many a fault of ours.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Masnavi 1*, 1878-1882

<sup>38</sup> Translation by Nicholson

"Rumi described this poverty based on the metaphysical reality that results as a necessity of the fact that there is no real existence other than God. He utters in a quatrain, 'I am nothing! I am nothing! I am nothing!'" (Kaya 16)

Contrary to this quatrain<sup>39</sup> of Rumi, Mansur al-Hallaj, a Persian mystic of the tenth century, in a controversial saying, claimed: I am the Truth. To many, this saying of *Hallaj* was considered as a claim to divinity and resulted in his execution. Yet, what appeared as heresy in the saying of Hallaj was not any different from the aforesaid statement of Rumi. When the Salik carries the belief of *Tawhid*, the oneness of God, to his ultimate conclusion, they realize there is no separation between the individual and God (Lings). As Shafii mentioned (Shafii), "devotees such as Mansur al-Hallaj recognized this, but it is said he did not take heed of the warning to internalize it and grow, and instead pronounced it and was executed for heresy." (Mitha 196) The Sufi notion of "nothingness" and "being the pure mirror of God" is well illustrated in the story of *Chinese and Greek painters*.

In this story, a king forms a competition of art between two groups of Chinese and Greek artists. When competition is over, and they are asked to represent their art, the Chinese artists present their spectacular painting on one side of a corridor. The Greeks, however, represent the empty walls, well-polished to the consistency of a mirror. While everyone gets surprised by the empty wall, they remove the curtain separating the two halves of the corridor and get amazed by what they see; the Chinese artists' painting is reflected on the wall. In this story, "[Rumi], likens

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<sup>39</sup> Quatrain or Rubā'ī is a classical form of poetry in Persian literature that consists of four lines.

Sufis to the Greek artists in this parable: the ones who 'polish their hearts are liberated from colors and smell, seeing beauty effortlessly in every breath.'" (Kaya 16)

The Sufi notion of "Nothingness" can have many spiritual healing effects. According to Mirdal "Shifting attention from the self to the other manifested in Rumi's teachings is similar to the process of "disidentification" where one ceases to identify with one's own thoughts, feelings, and images. Psychologists have called this process multiple names such as deccentration, detachment, or observing self (1208).

In mindfulness therapy, this concept of decentering is used to remove the focus of attention from self to other things (or others). During the notion of "nothingness," Salik's attention is lifted from himself to God. To achieve this step, he had to cleanse his soul from any darkness and the animal and satanic nature of himself, which helps him become less egocentric. In cognitive therapy, they use the same process calling "cognitive-shifting," a method used in awareness management and describing the mental process of redirecting one's focus of attention away from a fixed idea or recurring thought toward a different focus of attention (Mirdal 1209). This faith in God, and more importantly, believing in being part of his ultimate soul, lifts some of the pressure of living in this complicated world from the Salik's shoulder. In case of complications, Salik knows that he is not alone. As it is mentioned in Quran:

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وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ ۗ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein (Surat Qaf 16)

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This Quranic verse mentions that God is as close as the jugular vein to human beings and acknowledges the inner self-talk that can be the source of any dark thought in a human's mind. One of the most critical mindfulness outcomes is recognizing this wandering thought referred to as self-talk and trying to minimize it as much as possible (Mirdal 1209). As Larry and Tate mention (Leary), "Only by quieting self-chatter—the running flow of mental commentary, thoughts about the past and future, self-evaluations, judgments, and other extraneous reactions—can people remain highly attuned to their present experience." (1209) Rumi also acknowledges this self-talk and states:

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می‌کشاند هر طرف در حکم مر<sup>40</sup>

عقل تو همچون شتریان تو شتر

Your thinking is like a camel driver, And you are the camel; It drives you in every direction under its bitter control<sup>41</sup>

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"In mindfulness methods, Self-talk is reduced by continually returning attention to breathing or by mentally describing experiences with concrete, non-evaluative labels." (Mirdal 1209) In Sufism, saying remembrance of God, *dhikr*, is the practice of returning the attention that is distracted by self-talk (Lings). According to Lings and Shafii (Shafii), recitation, *dhikr*, of the name of the Prophet or Allah is said to allow one's self to be submerged into the nature of the Prophet or Allah and slowly personify their attributes (Mirdal 196).

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<sup>40</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 2497

<sup>41</sup> Translation by Nicholson

These recitations help the Salik focus solely on God or Prophet Mohammad and result in one of the most important notions of Sufism, *Itesal* or the spiritual connection. If it were not for this connection, the Salik would never achieve the level of "nothingness."

As Mitha quotes Prophet Muhammad by Abu Huraira: "Allah has ninety-nine names, i.e., one-hundred minus one, and whoever knows them will go to Paradise." This reward of paradise shows the importance and value of recitation. For a Sufi, this connection to God through the recitations can happen both in private or public, in the form of group sessions (*Sindima*). These recitations benefit Salik by minimizing self-talk. Also, the remembrance of God and his holy messenger keep the Salik away from the darkness of the vices. As Arasteh mentions, "those who reach Love as imagined by Rumi and are aware that they are already "nothing" would be naturally humble and away from qualities like arrogance, bigotry, and selfishness. Nothingness and Love are treasures for spiritual development in this regard." (18)

### ***Tavakol, Trust in God***

In the Sufi path, Salik faces many obstacles that he is not able to comprehend. To cross the path and go beyond these barriers, he needs to have *Tavakol*, the trust in God. For this trust in God, he can have the capacity to accept whatever darkness he may face. He needs to have patience, *Sabr*, which is intertwined with this acceptance. Based on this mentality, Salik perceives these darkneses and hardships as a spiritual test that he needs to pass in order to go forward in his mysticism. There are numerous verses in the Quran that emphasize the importance of *Tavakol*.

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وَاللَّهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ وَ مَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ.

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To Allah do belong the unseen (secrets) of the heavens and the earth, and to Him goeth back every affair (for decision): then worship Him, and put thy trust in Him: and thy Lord is not unmindful of aught that ye do (hood 123).

---

In the above Quranic verse, it is mentioned that there are many secrets that we are not aware of. Believing that life is full of the unseen secrets that only God is aware of helps Salik accept the unpleasant truth that he might not be able to comprehend. Trusting in God and believing that whatever comes from him has meaning can help Salik look at the problems from another angle. In the previous story of *The Thief and the Snake-Catcher*, Rumi uses the story to teach how one can reframe an unfortunate occurrence only by looking from another perspective. Like the snake-catcher of this story of *The Masnavi* one might not always be aware of the secrets hidden inside an unfortunate incident. However, by accepting that there is another side to the story that we cannot see, we can go through many difficulties. Rumi acknowledges life as a melting pot of good and bad experiences. He invites the readers to be open to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences as well as thoughts and emotions.

According to Mirdal, "a series of mental disorders and much human suffering are exacerbated by efforts to avoid unpleasant thoughts or escape from painful memories or bodily sensations. Accepting and containing what arrives at us, for Rumi, is an act of courage and a means of gaining insight."(1207) Rumi analogizes thoughts to an honored guest and states:

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آید اندر سینهات هر روز نیز

هر دمی فکری چو مهمان عزیز

Every day, too, at every moment a (different) thought comes, like an honored guest, into thy bosom.

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زانک شخص از فکر دارد قدر و جان

فکر را ای جان به جای شخص دان

O (dear) soul, regard thought as a person, since (every) person derives his worth from thought and spirit.

کارسازیهای شادی می‌کند

فکر غم گر راه شادی می‌زند

If the thought of sorrow is waylaying (spoiling) joy, (yet) it is making preparations for joy.

تا در آید شادی نو ز اصل خیر

خانه می‌روبد به تندی او ز غیر

It violently sweeps thy house clear of (all) else, in order that new joy from the source of good may enter in.

تا بروید برگ سبز متصل

می‌فشاند برگ زرد از شاخ دل

It scatters the yellow leaves from the bough of the heart, in order that incessant green leaves may grow.

تا خرامد ذوق نو از ما ورا

می‌کند بیخ سرور کهنه را

It uproots the old joy, in order that new delight may march in from the Beyond.

تا نماید بیخ رو پوشیده را

غم کند بیخ کز پوشیده را

Sorrow pulls up the crooked rotten (root), in order that it may disclose the root that is veiled from sight.

در عوض حقا که بهتر آورد

غم ز دل هر چه بریزد یا برد

Whatsoever (things) sorrow may cause to be shed from the heart or may take away (from it), assuredly it will bring better in exchange,

که بود غم بندهی اهل یقین

خاصه آن را که یقینش باشد این

Especially for him who knows with certainty (intuitively) that sorrow is the servant of the possessors of (intuitive) certainty.

رز بسوزد از تبسمهای شرق

گر ترش‌رویی نیارد ابر و برق

Unless the clouds and the lightning show a frowning aspect, the vines will be burnt by the smiles of the sun.

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Good and ill fortune become guests in thy heart: like the star (planet), they go from house to house.<sup>43</sup>

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In this poem, Rumi welcomes the sorrow and puts it beside the jubilation, and acknowledges the former as a precursor to the latter. Likewise, in mindfulness-based therapies, one is encouraged to accept what comes to mind with an unbiased vision. Therefore, use this receptivity toward all types of thought to shine light on the side of reality hidden from his sight and consciously experience what he feels (Mirdal 1207).

### ***The Case Study of a Mexican Nun***

Facing reality with the ability to perceive it from a different angle leads to the restatement, which is used in many cognitive mindfulness therapies (Mirdal 1207). "The techniques of looking at a problem from a different angle, of re-interpreting it, re-diagnosing and giving it a novel character, have always been part of any creative therapeutic practice." (Mirdal 1207). Lester, in her case study of dissociation in a Mexican nun, explains how reframing the situation could help the 19-year-old Celeste to cope with her episodes of leaving her body.

Celeste, a postulant of a Roman Catholic convent in Mexico, experienced episodes of what she described as leaving her body as if the time and the space were broken. At first, she thought of these episodes as a way of spiritual connection with God. When these episodes got more frequent, she started feeling anxious that these experiences might be signs of a psychiatric problem like

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<sup>42</sup> *Masnavi* 5, 3676-3685

<sup>43</sup> Translation by Nicholson

dissociation or physical brain problems such as epilepsy. Although she had the understanding of these possible sources of her out-of-body experiences, she could not find either of them satisfying.

"Celeste's greatest fear was that her experiences were, indeed, psychiatric in origin and were rather run-of-the-mill dissociative states.... She knew the clinical definition of dissociation and how it is believed to be related to trauma. And she was painfully aware of the fact that her own personal history seemed to make her a textbook case." (Lester) Celeste was a survivor of two rape attacks as a child. Although she was not blamed by her parents and others, she could not deal with the fact that it happened to her twice. She thought that it was something in her that invited the misfortunate incidents, and maybe it was a punishment for her sins. She considered herself not pure anymore and lost her faith in God for a long time after the second attack.

In high school, she gradually began to turn back to her faith, and by the end of her senior year, she decided to become a nun. It was in this year that she started having her episodes. At first, she looked at the episodes as if they were spiritual connections with God, and she found it pleasant. Yet, when she realized that they might have a psychiatrically or pathological origin, she found it harder to deal with. Looking at the story closely, the sources of the episodes would not make a difference. She would still feel the same strange out-of-body experience. However, framing it as a spiritual experience would make her feel gifted instead of mentally or physically sick. Due to her past traumas and feeling of not being pure enough anymore, she found these episodes as a way to get closer to the God that she once lost her faith for.

Eventually, Celeste re-interprets her episodes by going back to what had happened to her initially. When she was raped for the second time, and started to self-blame and saw herself as unworthy, she started questioning God. "How could there be a God who lets things like this

happen? And I know I am not the only one--it happens to girls all the time. I just couldn't imagine a God would permit that." (Lester 60) When she started having the episodes and realized they might not have a spiritual reason, she struggled even more. Yet, when she began to rephrase it again, a new window was opened to her.

"I think God is trying to show me that events in our lives don't necessarily mean one specific thing. They happen. Things happen. Good things and bad things happen. But the significance of those events is in what you do with them, how you use them in your life to either dissolve in your own misery or help other people. I've come to think of it like this: God gives us the raw materials, but it's up to us to make the cake."

In working through the ambiguity of her experience, she comes to an understanding that does not deny the tragedy that had happened to her but tries to use the connection between her trauma and her religious belief and look at her tragedy with another eye. She uses her out-of-body experience to come back to peace with her body that experienced a sexual assault. As Lester states, "she came to view her body--and specifically, her female body--as material locus of complex spiritual dynamics (70).

She comes to see her rape attack as a spiritual experience that put her on the path of helping others. Instead of thinking that what had happened to her was God's punishment for her mistakes, she started thinking that it only happened to her because God knew she could handle it. Therefore, she transformed the experience that once weakened her into an experience that showed off her strength. She moved on and put her past beneath her feet and made herself taller to see the beauty inside of the darkness.

## ***Jahd and Tavakol at the Intersection of Free will and Predestination***

Returning from the acceptance and the therapeutic effect of reframing the experiences, it is important to discuss another aspect of *Tavakol* in Sufism that has raised some challenging philosophical questions. If we trust in God and accept whatever comes from him with an open arm, what is the need for endeavors? If God is omnipotent and omniscient, why do we need to go through the struggle of learning, working, and making sense of life? Doesn't have God created this world, the past, the present and future, for us to live in? If everything is predestined, then why struggle to accomplish anything?

These questions give rise to the ongoing discussion of predestination, *Jabr*, and free will, *Ekhtiyar*, and their interconnection with *Tavakol* and *Jahd*, endeavor. Going in the depth of the philosophical aspect of concepts such as predestination and free will is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, understanding the narrow border of predestination and free will at their intersection with *Tavakol* and *Jahd* will help us to perceive Rumi's poetry from the lens of psychotherapy.

In the story of *Omar and the Emissary from Byzantium*, Rumi helps the reader distinguish between predestination and compulsion and then introduces the importance of free will. He starts by narrating the story of creation and then, in one line, makes the distinction between predestination and compulsion. It is noteworthy that in Persian, there is only one word for both of the terms, which is a borrowed word from Arabic. The distinction between premeditation and compulsion is significantly important to understand the true meaning of the lines. In English translation, however, this has often been oversimplified by using one of the two different terms.

Rumi is introducing the type of *Jabr* that he praises by narrating the story of creation. He has specifically distinguished between the two types of *Jabr* and has referred to them as admirable



and unadmirable. Based on the admirable Jabr, one believes that he is a creature of an omnipotent creator. As Küçük (Küçük) mentions, "Rumi [Believes] human beings are mirrors that can detect divine attributes and names and can reflect them into one's life." In other words, human beings are the reflection of God and therefore prove that there is an omniscient creator that gets the credit for the existence of the entire universe. As one of God's attributions, *Jabbar* comes from the Arabic root *Jabr*, and is the Quranic proof that God is the ultimate creator.

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هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيَّمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْكَرِيمُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ  
(سورة الحشر آية ٢٣).

He is Allah—there is no god except Him: the King, the Most Holy, the All-Perfect, the Source of Serenity, the Watcher 'of all', the Almighty, the Supreme in Might, the Majestic. Glorified is Allah far above what they associate with Him 'in worship'!

Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran,( Al-Hashr:23)

---

Rumi emphasizes this admirable Jabr that goes hand in hand with monotheism. On the other hand, he repels the unadmirable Jabr that totally denies the concept of free will. The distinction between predestination (the admirable Jabr) and compulsion (the unadmirable Jabr) is manifested in the following line of Rumi.

---

لفظ جبرم عشق را بی صبر کرد و آن که عاشق نیست حبس جبر کرد<sup>44</sup>

My illustration of Jabr made the Love impatient. Whoever is not a lover confines Jabr.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 1463

<sup>45</sup> Translated by the author

Rumi believes that only people who can genuinely fall in love with the Divine can distinguish between predestination and compulsion. Nicholson calls the poem above one of the most challenging poems of Rumi to interpret. However, by looking closely at this line and its interconnection with the lines before and after, one can make sense of this complicated line. As mentioned earlier, in the lines prior to this line, Rumi is narrating the story of creation, which means he is describing God as the only creator of the universe. In the lines after, he describes the admirable Jabr that promotes free will. Therefore, when he says that my expression of Jabr had made Love impatient, he is referring to predestination that credits God's omnipotence, and the aforesaid Love is nothing but the spiritual love that is the precursor of Gnosis. Then, he mentions that if it was not for this Love, one could not comprehend the difference between predestination and compulsion. Thus, his "free will" would be in the prison of the compulsion and would deny his will.

After making this distinction, Rumi defines free will and deems it essential for the creation of human beings. As he explains:

---

کرد ما را هست دان پیداست این

کرد حق و کرد ما هر دو ببین

Consider both the action of God and our action. Regard our action as existent. This is manifest.

پس مگو کس را چرا کردی چنان

گر نباشد فعل خلق اندر میان

If the action of created beings be not in the midst (obviously existent), then say not to any one, "Why have you acted thus?"

فعل ما آثار خلق ایزد است<sup>46</sup>

خلق حق افعال ما را موجد است

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<sup>46</sup> *Masnavi* 1, 1480-1482

---

The creative act of God brings our actions into existence: our actions are the effects of the creative act of God.<sup>47</sup>

---

This poem is the answer to the previous question: If God is omnipotent and omniscient, why do we need to go through the struggle of learning, working, and making sense of life? Indeed, free will is what makes human efforts meaningful. Rumi denies the misuse of Tavakol, and he introduces Tavakol as an empowering concept and contrary to surrender. In the story of *How a Hare Killed a Tyrannical lion*, he extensively analyzed the difference between Tavakol and Jahd, self-exertion.

The story happens in a meadow and is in the form of a conversation between a lion and animals. There were a group of animals living in a beautiful meadow. Their only concern was the lion who lived nearby. One day, they gathered together to find a solution. They thought they would ask the lion to stop hunting and wait for them to bring him the food. This way, every day, they wouldn't be in the worry of being hunted. Therefore, they asked the lion to trust in God that the animals would bring him the food. The lion, however, repelled the idea and said, The Trust in God does not deny self-exertion. If he wants to be fed up, he needs to both trust in God and put effort into making his living possible. In this poem, Rumi uses the characters of the lion and animals to convey the mystical perspective of Tavakol and the importance of Jahd.

---

الحذر دع ليس يغنى عن قدر

جمله گفتند ای حکیم با خبر

They all said: "O knowing sage, let precaution alone: it is of no avail against the Divine decree.

رو توکل کن توکل بهتر است

در حذر شوریدن شور و شر است

---

<sup>47</sup> Translation by Nicholson

---

In precaution is the embroilment of broil and woe: go, put thy trust in God: trust in God is better.

با قضا پنجه مزنی ای تند و تیز      تا نگیرد هم قضا با تو ستیز

Do not grapple with Destiny, O fierce and furious one, lest Destiny also pick a quarrel with thee.

مرده باید بود پیش حکم حق      تا نیاید زخم از رب الفلق

One must be dead in presence of the decree of God, so that no blow may come from the Lord of the daybreak.

گفت آری گر توکل رهبر است      این سبب هم سنت پیغمبر است

"Yes," he said; "(but) if trust in God is the (true) guide, (yet use of) the means too is the Prophet's rule (Sunna).

گفت پیغمبر به آواز بلند      با توکل زانوی اشتر ببند

The Prophet said with a loud voice, 'While trusting in God bind the knee of thy camel.'

رمز الکاسب حبیب الله شنو      از توکل در سبب کاهل مشو<sup>48</sup>

Hearken to the signification of 'The earner (worker) is beloved of God': through trusting in God do not become neglectful as to the (ways and) means.<sup>49</sup>

---

If it weren't for free will and the ability to put effort and make a difference, then the person's individuality would be questioned. There was no motivation to fight for solving problems and even reaching achievements. The person would remain unchanged, and he had no development toward becoming a better person or, as Sufis demand, a perfect human being. Rumi welcomes this change in thought and acting, and he starts this revolution within himself. Rumi learns from Shams that

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<sup>48</sup> Masnavi 1, 908-914

<sup>49</sup> Translation by Nicholson

he can go beyond what he has become, both as a religious scholar and a person, only by destroying what he has become.

Shams educates Rumi that he needs to return to his interior to discover his inner Truth. Meaning that he needs to change the public identity of his individuality to change what it is within. As Arasteh mentions [qtd.in Kaya], "Rumi has described his level of excellence as 'individuality in non-individuality.'" He continues, "A person in this state has reached a level of conscious being and is no longer just an "I" having a social and intellectual life but a whole universal human being characterized with spontaneity and meaningfulness benefitting from intuition." (Kaya 18) This unlearning of what we have learned, is encouraged in psychotherapy." "One of the goals of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy as well as of Rumi's teachings is to identify and change such background books, such "petrified," "distorted" or "unrealistic" ways of thinking, and thereby to influence emotion and behavior." (Mirdal 1208)

# Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to illustrate the compatibility between Rumi's elements of mysticism, conveyed in stories of *The Masnavi*, and psychotherapy, specifically the mindfulness-based therapies, to answer the following question: How does reading Rumi's *Masnavi* promote our mental wellbeing and help us to feel more content with our lives? To answer this question, it was essential to know Rumi's biography as a mystical poet and a spiritual teacher, the reason he uses the approach of storytelling, and how it could be effective to convey his mystical lessons.

Besides being a mystical poet, Rumi is a spiritual teacher, and similar to a psychotherapist, can help the readers come to inner peace. He teaches the mystical elements such as Love, Quest, spiritual knowledge, Trust in God, Predestination, Compulsion, Free will, and self-exertion to give meaning to the life. To find values in Rumi's perspective of life, one does not need to be a Muslim or even a Sufi. Readers with any religious background can relate to his models of living. Perhaps because what he calls spirituality is indeed what we all need to see the beauty within the darkness.

Rumi's poetry might have become the best-selling poetry in the U.S because of Coleman Barks' translation, but what has kept him alive in the heart of readers from different cultural backgrounds is indeed in the magic of his words within the stories. There are many critics about the translation of Coleman Barks and Shafak's book of *Forty Rules of Love* and at the core of all of them is one word, oversimplification. However, what has slipped from the minds of the critics is the fact that Rumi was also criticized for oversimplifying the religion. There are still many controversies about the type of Islam that he was practicing. Centuries after, he is still being blamed

for dancing and worshiping. Therefore, if the words of Rumi, through that oversimplification, could still pass through these thick walls of culture that we, humans, have built, let us set his words free to cross the borders as if there were no boundaries. Let us see the world through Rumi's unbiased eyes:

---

نه ترسا و یهودیم نه گیرم نه مسلمانم

چه تدبیر ای مسلمانان که من خود را نمی دانم

Why think thus O men of piety I have returned to sobriety. I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew.

نه ارکان طبیعیم نه از افلاک گردانم

نه شرقیم نه غربیم نه بریم نه بحریم

I am neither of the West nor the East. Not of the ocean, nor an earthly beast. I am neither a natural wonder nor from the stars yonder.

نه از عرشم نه از فرشم نه از کونم نه از کانم

نه از خاکم نه از بادم نه از آبم نه از آتش

Neither flesh of dust, nor wind inspire nor water in veins, nor made of fire. I am neither an earthly carpet, nor gems terrestrial nor am I confined to Creation, nor the Throne Celestial.

نه از ملک عراقینم نه از خاک خراسانم

نه از هندم نه از چینم نه از بلغار و سقسینم

I am not from India, nor China, nor Bulgaria, nor Turkestan; I am not from the kingdom of Iraq, nor from the land of Khurasan.

نه از آدم نه از حوا نه از فردوس رضوانم

نه از دنیا نه از عقبی نه از جنت نه از دوزخ

Not of ancient promises, nor of future prophecy. Not of hellish anguish, nor of paradisaic ecstasy

Neither the progeny of Adam, nor Eve. Nor of the world of heavenly make-believe.

نه تن باشد نه جان باشد که من از جان جانانم<sup>50</sup>

مکانم لامکان باشد نشانم بی نشان باشد

My place is the no-place. My image is without face Neither of body nor the soul I am of the Divine Whole<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> *Divan-e Shams*, Ghazal 116

<sup>51</sup> 1-3, 5-6 translated by Shahriar Shahriari. 4 translated by the author.

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# Appendix A: Song of the Reed

Now listen to this reed-flute's deep lament  
About the heartache being apart has meant:  
'Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me  
My song's expressed each human's agony,  
A breast which separation's split in two  
Is what I seek, to share this pain with you:  
When kept from their true origin, all yearn  
For union on the day they can return.  
Amongst the crowd, alone I mourn my fate,  
With good and bad I've learnt to integrate,  
That we were friends each one was satisfied  
But none sought out my secrets from inside;  
My deepest secret's in this song I wail  
But eyes and ears can't penetrate the veil:  
Body and soul are joined to form one whole  
But no one is allowed to see the soul.'  
It's fire not just hot air the reed-flute's cry,  
If you don't have this fire then you should die!  
Love's fire is what makes every reed-flute pine,  
Love's fervour thus lends potency to wine;  
The reed consoles those forced to be apart,  
Its notes will lift the veil upon your heart,  
Where's antidote or poison like its song,  
Or confidant, or one who's pined so long?

This reed relates a tortuous path ahead,  
Recalls the love with which Majnun's heart bled:  
The few who hear the truths the reed has sung  
Have lost their wits so they can speak this tongue.  
The day is wasted if it's spent in grief,  
Consumed by burning aches without relief  
Good times have long passed, but we couldn't care  
When you're with us, our friend beyond compare!  
While ordinary men on drops can thrive  
A fish needs oceans daily to survive:  
The way the ripe must feel the raw can't tell,  
My speech must be concise, and so farewell!  
Unchain yourself, my son, escape its hold!  
How long will you remain a slave of gold?  
You've tried to fit inside a jug the sea—  
It only has a day's capacity:  
A greedy eye is never satisfied,  
Shells only when content grow pearls inside,  
While men whose clothes are ripped to shreds by love  
Are cleansed of greed like this to rise above.  
Be joyful, love, our sweetest bliss is you,  
Physician for all kinds of ailments too,  
The cure for our conceit and stubborn pride Like  
Plato here with Galen, side by side;  
Through love the earthly form soars heavenward,  
The mountain dances nimbly like a bird:  
Love made Mount Sinai drunken visibly,  
So Moses fell and swooned immediately!

With my own confidant if I'd been paired  
Just like the reed, such stories I'd have shared:  
Without a kindred spirit there to hear  
The storyteller's voice must disappear,  
And if the rose should vanish from its sight  
The nightingale will keep its beak shut tight—  
The loved one's all, the lover's just a screen,  
A dead thing, while the loved one lives, unseen.  
When shunned by love you're left with emptiness,  
A bird without its wings knows such distress:  
'How can my mind stay calm this lonely night  
When I can't find here my beloved's light?'  
Love wants its tale revealed to everyone,  
But your heart's mirror won't reflect this sun,  
Don't you know why we can't perceive it here?  
Your mirror's face is rusty—scrape it clear!

**Appendix B: The Slave Girl and the King****How a king fell in love with a sick slave-girl and tried to cure her**

Now here's a tale for you to contemplate,  
It tells the truth about our present state:  
There was a king, most glorious and refined,  
With spiritual and temporal power combined;  
Once he was riding on his favourite steed  
Out hunting with his friends, whom he would lead,  
When he beheld a slave-girl near the fray—  
His soul became her servant straight away!  
His old heart fluttered like a caged young bird,  
He met the asking-price without a word,  
But just when he had signed and sealed this trade  
By fate an illness overcame the maid:  
Like buying saddles for your mule one day  
To find that wolves have chased it far away!  
Or fetching water with your finest pot  
For it to smash, as if there's been a plot!  
The king brought healers from all distant lands:  
'Our lives are both now in your expert hands,  
My life is over till she's well again,  
For she's my medicine, distinguished men;  
Light of my life, whoever makes her well  
More treasure wins than he could ever sell.'  
As one they said, 'Our lives we'll sacrifice,  
We will confer and seek from all advice,  
We're the messiahs for the world's distress,  
A salve for every wound we each possess.'

They skipped 'If God wills' through their arrogance  
 So God revealed through them  
 Man's impotence: I mean omission from inside one's heart  
 Not just the utterance—that's the lesser part—  
 Many have failed to say, 'If God should will,'  
 Although their souls were in accord still.  
 The more these men produced a salve or cure  
 The more distress the girl seemed to endure:  
 That girl became much thinner than a hair,  
 The king wept tears of blood in his despair,  
 The drugs they gave her made her feel more ill  
 And almond oil just made her drier still,  
 Fruit made her constipation even worse,  
 Water increased the flames, as if a curse.

**The inability of the healers to cure the slave-girl becomes apparent, and so the king turns to God at the mosque, where he subsequently dreams about a saint**

After he watched them fail each single day  
 The king ran barefoot to the mosque to pray,  
 Confessing at the prayer-niche all his fears  
 He drenched the rug beneath him with his tears;  
 When from annihilation's trance he woke  
 With prayers the Lord he started to invoke:  
 'O you whose smallest gift is the whole world,  
 Words can't describe this mystery you've unfurled!  
 Our refuge when we find ourselves in need,  
 Once more we've strayed by failing to take heed;  
 You did say, "Though I know your secrets well  
 It doesn't mean I don't want you to tell!"



When from his inmost depths he raised a scream,  
The sea of bounty surged and sent a dream:  
In tears, the king was overcome with sleep,  
An old man then appeared whose voice was deep:  
'Greetings, your wish is granted, humble king,  
Tomorrow to your aid our man we'll bring,  
Trust him, as one who's mastered how to cure,  
Accept his word for he's sincere and pure,  
Witness amazing magic and applaud,  
See in his temperament the might of God.'  
The next day came, the promised meeting neared,  
The sun shone bright, the stars had disappeared,  
The king gazed from the watchtower eagerly  
To see what had been promised secretly,  
Beyond the crowd he saw a virtuous one,  
Among the shadows he was like a sun!  
Just like a crescent moon he came to view—  
A non-existent image seen by you,  
In form existing only in one's mind—  
The world is turned by forces of this kind:  
Their war and peace are based on fantasy,  
And shame and pride are both illusory,  
While images that saints may often love  
Are visions of the moon-faced ones above;  
The image which while dreaming he'd just seen  
The king saw in him just as it had been,  
And so, instead of chamberlains he went  
Himself to greet this guest who had been sent.

Both swimmers used to seas of union,  
 Their souls without a thread were sewn as one:  
 The one I love is not that maid but you;  
 One thing led to another, as they do,  
 You're Mostafa and I'm Omar your friend,  
 Prepared to serve you till the bitter end!'

**From God, who grants success, we ask for success in maintaining good manners always; explanation of the harm in being ill-mannered**

Let's pray to God for manners in their place  
 Since those who lack them lose out on his grace,  
 It's not as though it's just themselves they harm,  
 They set the world on fire, disrupt the calm:  
 A feast was sent down from above one day  
 Without demands or any price to pay  
 Moses had men who still bemoaned their lot,  
 'Why weren't some lentils spiced with garlic brought?'  
 The host then cleared the feast that had been laid  
 And each was forced to farm with scythe and spade;  
 Jesus once interceded for a man,  
 A bounteous feast was sent down in God's plan,  
 But then some greedy brats who lacked respect  
 Like beggars grabbed the most they could collect,  
 Even though Jesus cried, 'It's infinite,  
 You greedy fools, you'll not run out of it!'  
 Regard this lust and faithless attitude  
 Before God's feast as sheer ingratitude:  
 When blinded by their greed these low ingrates  
 Cause God to shut to all his mercy's gates:

If you withhold zakat , then rain won't fall  
 And fornication spreads a plague to all,  
 So what's the source of your deep misery?  
 Acting without respect conceitedly!  
 Whoever fails to show respect to God  
 For robbing other men deserves the rod!  
 Good manners are what made the heavens bright  
 And angels sinless, purer than the light,  
 Irreverence caused eclipses of the Sun  
 And Satan, through his pride, to be undone.

**The meeting of the king with that saint who had appeared in his dream**

The king embraced his guest and wouldn't part,  
 He welcomed him like love inside his heart;  
 Kissing his hand and forehead fervently  
 He asked about his home and family  
 Then led him to his dais with this thought:  
 'The greatest treasure patience here has brought!  
 The light of God, defence against all harm,  
 Showed patience is the key to joy and calm :  
 The answer to our needs is meeting you,  
 All faults you fix before we ask you to,  
 Translating what we keep inside our souls,  
 Stretching your hand to lift those trapped in holes.  
 O chosen one with whom God's pleased, don't leave ,  
 For then you'd make us suffocate and grieve !  
 Since you're our master, he who shows disdain  
 Will be destroyed if he does not refrain .'   
 They served the feast, the king then took his hand

And led him to the harem as was planned,  
**The king leads that doctor to the patient so he can see how she is**  
Recounting all the sick girl had been through,  
He sat him down so he could witness too;  
Her pulse and pale complexion first he checked,  
Discovering the cause through its effect.  
The drugs that they'd prescribed were like a curse,  
Sapping her strength and making her feel worse:  
They'd failed to see the ailment deep within—  
God save us from what they are dabbling in!  
He saw her pain, her secret was revealed,  
But from the king he kept it all concealed,  
Her pain was not from bile the doctor learned:  
The scent of wood is from its smoke discerned;  
Her grief revealed that it was from her heart—  
Physically fine, her heart was torn apart:  
Being a lover means your heart must ache,  
No sickness hurts as much as when hearts break,  
The lover's ailment's totally unique,  
Love is the astrolabe of all we seek,  
Whether you feel divine or earthly love,  
Ultimately we're destined for above.  
To capture love whatever words I say  
Make me ashamed when love arrives my way,  
While explanation sometimes makes things clear  
True love through silence only one can hear:  
The pen would smoothly write the things it knew  
But when it came to love it split in two,

A donkey stuck in mud is logic's fate—  
 Love's nature only love can demonstrate:  
 Sunshine reveals its nature in each ray,  
 So if it's proof you want just look this way!  
 Shadows can indicate what's shining bright  
 But it's the sun which fills your soul with light,  
 Shadows like late-night chat make people doze,  
 The moon was split when that divine sun rose!  
 Eternal sun—there's nothing quite so strange,  
 The soul's sun has no past, it doesn't change,  
 There's only one sun there before your eyes  
 But similar suns you still can visualize,  
 The soul's sun though is from a loftier sphere,  
 You'll not find any similar suns down here—  
 How can his essence ever be perceived  
 For things comparable to be conceived!  
 When news about my Shamsoddin first came  
 The heaven's highest sun withdrew through shame!  
 I'm now compelled through uttering Shams's name  
 To tell you of his gifts and spread his fame:  
 Hosamoddin has flung me by my skirt  
 So I can breathe in scent from Joseph's shirt:  
 He asked me, 'Life-long friend, please share with me  
 From your rich stock a single ecstasy,  
 To raise a smile from both the land and sky,  
 To make each person's soul expand and fly.'  
 'Don't give me duties now I've passed away,  
 My senses dulled, I've no clue how to pray,

For anything a drunk might sing is wrong  
 Whether he's meek or boastful in his song :  
 Since all my veins now pulse with drunkenness  
 How can I represent his loftiness?  
 Describing separation's torture then is best postponed until we speak again'  
 He said, ' I'm hungry and must now be fed!  
 " Time is a cutting sword " the Prophet said,  
 The sufi is the present moment's son ,  
 Talk of "tomorrow" sufis learn to shun—  
 Are you not then a sufi as I'd thought?  
 Delaying payment turns your wealth to naught!' '  
 The loved one's secret's best kept veiled,' I said,  
 'Listen to it in ecstasy instead,  
 The lover's secret that's been kept concealed  
 Is best through tales of other loves revealed.'  
 'Tell it unveiled and naked, candidly,  
 You tricky man, don't try distracting me!  
 Be frank and lift the veil, you ditherer,  
 I wear no nightshirt when in bed with her!'  
 I said, 'If the beloved strips for you,  
 You'll be effaced, your waist and body too!  
 Please don't request what you can't tolerate:  
 A blade of straw can't hold a mountain's weight,  
 And if the sun which gives us light should near,  
 All things would burn and leave no traces here—  
 Don't try to make more strife for everyone,  
 Ask nothing more about Tabriz's Sun!'  
 The tale is incomplete, begin anew,

Narrate the rest, as only you can do!

**The saint asks the king to let him spend time alone with the slave-girl in order to discover her ailment**

The doctor said, 'Vacate your house today,  
Even your family must be sent away,  
So no one's listening from the corridors  
While I interrogate the girl indoors.'  
The house was emptied, no one else remained,  
Alone now with the girl who looked so pained,  
He gently asked, 'From which town did you come?  
The cure depends on where the patient's from;  
Which relatives do you have living there,  
Who's family? Whose friendship do you share?'  
Feeling her pulse he went through one by one  
Questions about the course the stars must run:  
When someone stumbles barefoot on a thorn  
He stops and checks what he has trod upon,  
To use a needle to dislodge its head,  
Or failing that, by moistening it instead:  
If in your foot it proves so hard to find  
Imagine one that's pierced your heart and mind!  
If such thorns could be traced by any fool  
How then could sorrow ever hope to rule!  
If someone pricks a donkey near its tail  
The helpless beast will buck and start to wail,  
But this will serve to drive it further in—  
A sage is needed to remove the pin;  
The donkey would continue with its fit  
And prick itself a hundred times with it!

Our thorn-removing doctor is the best,  
He presses first all over as a test:  
Through sharing stories with the poor sick maid  
He asked about her friends and where she'd stayed,  
And she divulged to him the history  
Of all her past friends and her family;  
While listening to what the girl would share  
He monitored her pulse with utmost care—  
Whoever's name would raise her pulse would be  
The one for whom she suffered constantly.  
Once she had named her friends from home, he'd then  
About another town inquire again:  
'After you left your home where did you go?  
Where did you stay the longest, let me know!'  
She mentioned further places by their name,  
Her pulse and her complexion stayed the same,  
She listed every detail of each town  
From local bread to features of renown—  
Of town by town and home by home she'd speak  
Without a quiver in her veins or cheek,  
Her pulse felt stable to his knowing hand  
Until he asked the girl of Samarkand—  
Her pulse increased to rates beyond compare,  
She'd been kept from a certain goldsmith there!  
Once the physician solved this mystery  
He found the source of her deep agony.  
'So where precisely is this man's abode?'  
'It's near the bridge, on the Ghatafar road.'



'I recognize your illness, count on me—  
 My magic will provide the remedy,  
 Be joyful, maiden, carefree and secure,  
 As rain revives the grass, I'll find the cure!  
 I'll take your suffering on, so grieve no more!  
 I'm kind like fathers who their girls adore,  
 Make sure to keep this secret safe with you,  
 I mean in case the king should ask you too,  
 For if a soul entombs its secret love  
 Fulfilment comes more quickly from above.  
 The Prophet said, "Whoever hides his dream  
 Attains it sooner through the Lord Supreme":  
 When seeds are hidden deep beneath the ground  
 Their secret turns to verdure all around,  
 Silver and gold are hidden in the mine  
 To nurture them and purify their shine.'  
 The doctor's soothing words and promises  
 Relieved the girl of countless illnesses:  
 True promises give pleasure constantly,  
 False promises increase anxiety,  
 The promise of the pure's hard currency,  
 The promise of the base brings bankruptcy!  
**The saint identifies the affliction and explains it to the king**  
 Then he stood up and headed for the king  
 To share a bit of what was happening:  
 'What you must do is summon here that man,  
 To cure her pain this is the wisest plan:  
 Summon the goldsmith from that distant town,

With gold and robes of honour, bring him down!’

After this speech the king chose to obey

Each word that he had heard the healer say.

**The king sends messengers to Samarkand to bring the goldsmith**

The king then sent two men to Samarkand,

Both shrewd, experienced men at his command,

As soon as they arrived there they began

To read this message to the wanted man:

‘O gentle master, pure intelligence,

Talk everywhere is of your eminence!

Our king requests you for your peerless skill,

This vacancy no other man can fill,

Accept this robe of honour and this gold,

When you arrive a special rank you’ll hold.’

On seeing robes and wealth he was beguiled,

He left his townsfolk, even his own child,

He set off on the journey feeling thrilled

Without a clue the king would have him killed,

He proudly mounted an Arabian stud,

Not knowing that the price was his own blood:

Conceited fool, you failed to comprehend,

So eagerly you raced to your own end!

He dreamt of majesty that wouldn’t cease,

As Azrael said, ‘Come and grab your piece!’

He was escorted, after entering,

Up to the royal throne to meet the king,

The escorts treated him with special care,

They knew his love of pomp—it was a snare!

The king embraced him like a friend of old,  
Entrusting to him all his stores of gold,  
The doctor urged, 'There's more you can award:  
Why don't you give the girl as a reward?  
Through union with this man she could be nursed,  
Love's waters might revive her, quench her thirst.'  
The maiden then received a wedding band—  
They joined the couple just as they had planned!  
The first six months together how they thrived,  
The servant girl soon totally revived!  
But then the groom was poisoned in a plot,  
She saw the doctor's potion make him rot:  
Through sickness he lost all his youthfulness,  
Each day his looks got worse, her love grew less,  
He soon became so ugly, pale, and old  
That she could feel her heart becoming cold—  
Love which is based on just a pretty face  
Is not true love, it ends in sheer disgrace.  
Would that he'd been all over so debased  
And therefore spared the judgement he has faced!  
Instead of tears his eyes gushed blood in streams,  
His face became his enemy, it seems:  
Feathers became the peacock's bitter foe  
And kings were killed by their own love of show.  
He said, 'I'm like the deer for whose musk scent  
Hunters desire to catch and then torment;  
The desert fox, which when they capture her,  
They chop her head off just to keep the fur;

That elephant who's beaten savagely,  
 They shed his blood just for his ivory,  
 Those who would kill for secondary goals  
 Should know I'll take my vengeance on their souls,  
 I'm now the victim, your turn's coming soon,  
 Those hungry for my blood are not immune!  
 A lengthy shadow through a wall can cast;  
 That shadow will return to it at last:  
 The world's a mountain, actions like a shout,  
 Your echo will return to you, watch out!  
 These were his final words when he was slain,  
 The slave-girl now was purged of love and pain.  
 Love of the dead is not a lasting love  
 Because the dead don't come back from above,  
 Love of the living in your soul and blood  
 Each moment makes you fresher than a bud,  
 Save love for him, eternal and divine,  
 The Saqi with the soul-expanding wine!  
 Choose love of him, from whose resplendent face  
 The prophets find their mission and their grace—  
 Don't tell me 'From that king we have been barred,'  
 Dealing with noble men is not that hard!

**Explanation of how the goldsmith's murder by poisoning was in accord with God's instruction, not due to the passions and corrupt wishes of the carnal soul**

Although the healer's killing seems severe,  
 Be sure he didn't act through greed or fear,  
 Nor to placate the king's desire instead—  
 Divine command decreed he should be dead.

Think of the child whose jugular Khezr slit,  
Most people failed to see the good in it:  
For those in deep communion with their Lord  
Their every deed's correct, in full accord,  
He who gives life may kill, we must condone  
His deputy's act like his very own;  
Like Ismail lay your neck before his blade  
And smile for this brave sacrifice you've made,  
So that your soul will live on joyfully  
With God, like Ahmad's soul, eternally;  
Each lover drinks the wine of his own soul  
When slain by his beloved that's his goal.  
The king did not start scheming through desire—  
Now throw that false suspicion in the fire!  
You still think he committed sin, don't you?  
When God refines, no flaws can filter through;  
Religious discipline and suffering loss  
Is so the furnace burns the silver's dross,  
That's why for good and bad we scrutinize  
And gold is boiled so that the scum may rise—  
So if his deeds from heaven didn't spring  
He'd be a dog that bites and not a king!  
Already he's been purified from greed,  
His righteous act just seemed a wicked deed:  
When Khezr destroyed that boat out in the sea  
What seemed destructive was true piety,  
Moses stayed veiled, though he was wise and good—  
Don't jump without wings, till you've understood!

This red's a rose and not a bloody stain,  
He's drunk with gnosis, don't call him insane,  
If shedding Muslim blood was his sole aim  
I'd be an infidel to bless his name!  
When evil's praised the highest heavens shake,  
If pious men applaud that's their mistake!  
He was a glorious king, and circumspect,  
Hand-picked by God, one of the pure elect,  
Whoever such a king should choose to slay  
More grace and status soon will come his way.  
If good could not be caused through violence  
How could his soul have shown such vehemence?  
When children tremble near the barber's blade,  
Their mothers smile with joy though they're afraid:  
For half a life he gives a hundred more,  
Such gifts beyond your dreams he has in store,  
So stop comparing him with your low state,  
Reflect on this before it gets too late!