

Mostafa Vaziri

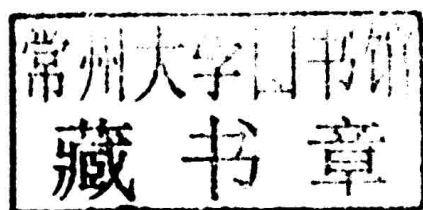
Rumi and Shams' Silent Rebellion

Parallels with Vedanta, Buddhism, and Shaivism

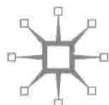


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AND SHAIVISM

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RUMI AND SHAMS' SILENT REBELLION

This book is enthusiastically dedicated to the iconoclastic
pioneers of mind and heart.

RUMI'S ICONOCLASTIC UNIVERSALISM

At his core, Rumi was a Universalist thinker and a cosmopolitan. His philosophy embraced equanimity in human affairs and inspired coexistence despite diverse religions and cultures throughout world history. He took an inclusive approach to bring Zoroastrians, Hindus, Jews, Christians, pagans, and idol-worshippers with the Muslims; the Arabs with the Persians; the Turks with the Indians; and the Romans with the Ethiopians, all humanity under the same banner of equality. Everyone, even the sectarian, religious, and non-universalist thinkers, were included in his Universalism. But Rumi refused to entertain the limited definition of Universalism, especially when a community claimed the monopoly of the truth while ostracizing those who did not belong to their particular assembly or believe in their particular god. To Rumi, everyone carries a burning flame of Love in his or her heart, and it is an urgent necessity that this fact becomes deeply recognized. He deftly rebelled against bigoted and condescending intolerance and paved the way for enlightenment, as well as prompting a spiritual and intellectual evolution.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The core of this book offers not just an analysis of Rumi's poetry and Shams' discourses, but also aims to create a fresher narrative of Rumi with a new historiographical and philosophical approach.

In this approach, we disentangle Rumi from his traditionally accepted role as founder of the Mevlevi order, because the anachronistic nature of this claim makes it a highly suspect conclusion. Since the order was created decades after Rumi's death, and the Islamic-Sufi-Ottoman background of the order does not reflect much of the textual study of the original Shams and Rumi narrative, alternative conclusions can thus be drawn from the poetry and discourses of the two men, and the exploration of those alternatives is the goal of this book.

After historically disentangling Rumi on one hand, we should include him more fully in the field of philosophy on the other, rather than viewing him from the limited perspective of being "just" a poet and mystic. It is true that he was a poet and a mystic, but of a different genre—a mystic who poetically formulated and articulated his affirmative experiences, seeking the truth of existence, as well as expressing his skepticism about the theory of creation, anticlericalism, and his profound ideas about human society.

Thus one could say that the proposition of this book is to remove the rigidity and the politics of Islamic Sufism that has blocked other, broader perspectives on Rumi and his work. Based on the primary sources that survive, we will reimagine the time when Rumi and Shams developed a highly evolved consciousness that was not lost, but has only been clouded over the centuries because of historical and religious constraints.

This book results from years of fascination with Rumi's message. As children growing up in Iran, my friends and I memorized Rumi's words in school. Years later, a continuing personal interest in Rumi's philosophical and spiritual approach led me first to translate and publish some of Rumi's poems in 1998, and to follow that work with another coffee-table book offering an introduction to Shams and

Rumi in 2008. I was influenced by the usual depiction of Rumi found in secondary sources: Rumi as Sufi poet, and Islamic mystic, transformed by his master Shams.

But that picture of Rumi turned out to be incomplete. The initial jolt came after I made several trips to India over the years and delved into a study of Buddhism. This led me as a social scientist to pursue research on the interconnection of the Iranian world with Buddhism, resulting in the book *Buddhism in Iran: An Anthropological Approach to Traces and Influences* (2012).

During these Indian trips I also studied *advaita* Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism, both non-dualist schools. Meanwhile, in rereading almost all of Rumi's poems and of course Shams' discourses (*Maqālāt*), I began to suspect that my approach and understanding of Rumi had been both limited and somewhat sentimentalized and flawed. I was now seeing Rumi through different philosophical and anthropological lenses. Not only did I become aware of the anachronistic post-construction of Rumi's world by the Mevlevi hagiographers, followed by later authors, but also I discovered numerous surprising parallels between Rumi's writings and other spiritual schools of thought.

Thus I began the intellectual challenge of elucidating Rumi's broader, timeless, often non-religious universal message and connecting it with the sphere of the sages of Asia who had been pouring out a similar message in different eras and different cultures. It was also necessary not only to put Rumi's poetry into the context of the historical reality of his own time but also to open the way for a new alternative view of Rumi as an intercultural philosopher. It seemed a monumental task to go back and reread, select and translate the thousands of poems in Rumi's *Divan* and *Masnavi* as well as his utterances in *Fīhi mā fīh*. In addition, deciphering Shams' ideas in the multiple versions of his *Maqālāt* was a massive undertaking, as I sought the link between Shams' radical message and that of Rumi. Reading the poems of Rumi's son, Sultan Valad, also became important in constructing the circumstances of the years after Shams' interactions with Rumi.

Rereading all these writings through a wider transcultural lens led to fascinating breakthroughs of interpretation and the development of a new paradigm for understanding Rumi's message. As time passed, my central intention became to present Rumi's message based solely on the original content of his own poetry, not based on secondary sources. This book is intended for students, researchers, and admirers of Rumi, especially those who, like myself, desire an alternative to the traditional Sufi or Mevlevi depiction of Rumi and his message.

It also aims to present Rumi in relation to other philosophies, sages, and schools of thought cross-culturally, instead of studying each in an isolated manner, and particularly to explore the linkage of ideas and philosophies between the Indian and Iranian worlds. I hope others will pick up where I have left off and that this realm will be much more fully investigated, because it is my feeling that we are just beginning to uncover the interlinked wisdom in our world.

Mostafa Vaziri
Innsbruck, Dharamsala and White Salmon
November 2014

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Rumi is a cultural and literary gem whose ancestral roots, choice of language, cultural psychology, and intellectual style can be traced back to Balkh, Afghanistan. This book has come to epitomize my sincere love and admiration for both the Afghan people and Afghanistan as a cultural bedrock of many past achievements. Having lived and served there as a volunteer medical doctor for a number of years, my partner Allison and I have great respect and passion for that currently war-torn country. Allison, meanwhile, made an incredible contribution to this book by reading all the chapters to assure the flow of the text and restoring my confidence whenever I had doubts about continuing this project.

In understanding and putting into perspective the intellectual history of the East, I am thankful to my most patient and highly esteemed mentor, Professor Michael G. Morony of UCLA, who over the last two decades taught me an unbiased and critical approach. I am grateful to Professor Morony for reading the entire manuscript and providing sound suggestions that improved the narrative. I am indebted also to Professor Mehdi Aminrazavi, an expert on Islamic intellectual history, who generously made reading this work a priority, leading to a wonderful exchange of ideas that were extremely helpful in improving this book. Dr. Denis Hermann has been valuable in reading the manuscript and leading me to important sources and ideas. Professor Asef Bayat, a brilliant sociologist and a close friend, deserves many thanks for drawing my attention to important points about my method and definition of ideas. Professor Ahmad Karimi-Hakak also deserves thanks for providing helpful feedback on the manuscript. I am delighted to have received the benefit of a short but pointed critique from Professor Patricia Crone. It is my pleasant duty to thank Professor Reinhard Margreiter, who in the course of the last several years in Innsbruck nurtured me with his philosophical insights.

Chapters 6A and 6B would not have been viable had they not been read, improved upon, and endorsed by the prominent Sanskritist and the world's foremost scholar of Kashmir Shaivism and Tantra,

Dr. Mark S. G. Dyczkowski. I have also had the pleasure of attending his seminars on this subject in Varanasi. For our many discussions on Vedanta, Buddhism, and Shaivism in Varanasi and Dharamsala, and his feedback on these chapters in the present book, I have the pleasure of thanking my dear friend Mr. Giteshwar Raj (known as “the old Indian Raj”), who is fluent in various Indian philosophical schools and languages, including Sanskrit and the language and Buddhist-Tantrism of Tibet. On that note, I would also like to thank Dr. Bettina Bäumer, who in her seminars in India was the first to teach me about Kashmir Shaivism.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank the Philosophy Department at the Universität Innsbruck for hosting me all these years and providing me with intellectual support.

Still, despite the enormous support from all these wonderful people and sources, I am solely responsible for the content of this book.

A NOTE ABOUT THE SOURCES

RUMI'S *DIVAN* AND *MASNAVI* AND THEIR NUMBERING

The number following “D” stands for the *ghazal* as numbered by the editor, without the line number(s). The symbol “D: r.” followed by a number stands for the *rubāʿī* as numbered in the *Divan*. Of the two numbers following “M,” the first is the roman numeral for one of the six books of *Masnavi*; the second is the page number, without the line number(s).

ABBREVIATIONS AND TITLES OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES

D: *Divan: Kullīāt Shams-e Tabrizī*, by Rumi

M: *Masnavi* (or *Mathnawi* in Arabic transliteration), by Rumi

Maqālāt: Maqālāt Shams-e Tabrizī (Discourses of Shams)

Fīḥi mā fīḥ by Rumi

Ebtidā Nāmeḥ by Sultan Valad

The abbreviation “D” in the text and footnotes stands for *Divan: Kullīāt Shams-e Tabrizī*. “M” stands for *Masnavi* or *Mathnawi* in Arabic transliteration, both books by Rumi edited by B. Forouzānfar (see bibliography for details).

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CHAPTER 1



THE NEED FOR A NEW NARRATIVE OF RUMI

Around thirty years ago, Marilyn Waldman presented arguments to explain why flexible oral teachings of religions, such as Islam, have often taken on a fixed nature and inflexible narrative over time. She explained that theological formation was at the root of this evolution, particularly the techniques of storage and utilization of once-upon-a-time oral information based on social-cognitive differences as well as changes in segments of human society.¹ As oral narratives came to be written down, perspectives on religions and religious topics became more and more rigid because of the concrete nature of the written word. Thus, the tumultuous and dynamic past was reduced to the confinement of written words—an impulse that deflected attention from non-religious past events while at the same time creating a crisis of religious historicism by rejecting non-contextualized interpretations. This seems to be what has happened to the narrative of Rumi's life and teachings.

In light of the great number of books written about Rumi's Sufism and his approach to Islam over the years, these books have paradoxically made it quite difficult to think or look in different directions to acquire an alternative understanding of him. The non-religious interpretation of Rumi's writings has been displaced and clouded by many religiously minded authors simply through fixation on the dogma of religion instead of his poetry. There are two such categories of writings about Rumi: the first is the work of the early Ottoman hagiographers, such as Fereydoun Sepahsalar and Shams al-Din (Ahmed) Aflaki, who themselves were involved with the newly formed Mevlana Sufi sect; the second category is the assessment of the Orientalists,

such as E. G. Browne, R. A. Nicholson, A. J. Arberry, A. Schimmel, and other similar authors, who have framed Rumi as an Islamic mystic. Rumi's uniquely complex experiences have been arbitrarily given an Islamic designation, a rather definite designation for indefinable truths, as if Rumi's reality was exclusively an Islamic one. The result is a one-sided theme that has been propagated over time, and has found its way to all the secondary and tertiary sources.

Nevertheless, a new narrative of Rumi is demanded by the secular-minded emergent generation that feels the urge to go back to the original poetry and give Rumi's "static texts" (borrowing Waldman's term), themselves stemming from the "dynamic utterances" of Shams, a new life. In other words, the oral teachings and mental experiences of Rumi were locked into written words that now need to be released into a dynamic interpretation. That said, Rumi's writings may not have a single meaning and purpose; readers can interpret and relativize the meaning for themselves, but without implicating Rumi in a fixed structure of interpretation. In other words, a one-dimensional religious or Sufi interpretation of Rumi would be sheer injustice in assessing the monumental works of this multifaceted sage. Furthermore, the oral transmissions from Shams to Rumi were produced spontaneously, without having followed a written text, and thus one should also avoid freezing these ephemeral teachings into fixed theories.²

The framework applied in this book is meant to provide an additional or alternative narrative for studying Rumi; the intention is not to reject the existing and dominant narrative but to broaden it. A secular and humanist study of Rumi, particularly exploring the philosophical aspects of his message, is the primary theme, even though "secular" and "philosophical" are not part of the classical conceptualization of Rumi. This book also aims to introduce a paradigm shift, but in fact it must be admitted that the original paradigm shift was already introduced by Shams and then transmitted to the young Rumi. This shift has only been blurred and eschewed in the course of history.

The other important aspect of this study is to view Rumi's writings from the perspective of non-dualism, which requires an introduction before we examine other key topics.

1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF NON-DUALISM AND HOW RUMI FITS IN

Non-dualism,³ through which this book presents a new philosophical understanding of Rumi's ideas, derives from certain Indian

philosophical and spiritual schools of thought. This new narrative at the same time presents a secular and humanistic approach to Rumi's poetical construction. Rumi took an intellectual, intuitive, and philosophical approach to describing how all phenomena, despite their plural façade, share a singular root. Rumi depended neither on hidden religious knowledge nor on his ecstatic, esoteric trance state. He soberly took on a non-rejectionist position by not denying the reality of the world and its affairs, or even moved further away from taking a moralist position, considering that sin would debase the opportunity of final knowledge and enlightenment. The multifaceted world, in Rumi's ultimate perspective, emerged and repeatedly refreshes itself from a single, undivided source of energy. By this non-absolutist position, he also implied that the world is in a continuous state of re-creation and modification. His highest goal was to transmit that the multiplicity and duality of the physical world is linked to its non-plural and non-dual source—all that can be lived and conceptualized in an enlightened consciousness. He did this without resorting to a religious or moral position. Rumi's formulation of the ultimate and unchanging state of existence as genderless, without opposite forces or binary states, was a well-contemplated philosophy that took the shape of poetry in his worldview—a source for his social universalism as well.

Here there is no room for two; what is the meaning of I and you—
consider these two as one, so long as you are in our assembly. (D: 2964)

The concept of non-dualism is applicable to many realms, from social to spiritual and philosophical. Its application in the philosophical and spiritual framework refers to the highest reality, a reality that is not subject to division, nor does it have any opposites. In the real and visible world, all dual pairs are branches of their one and non-dual source. Dualism, in contrast, holds that the world is made out of two opposite forces; that human beings are composed of body and spirit, mind and matter; that there is a Creator separate from the created, the believer (in God) and the unbeliever, and good distinct from evil. Some religious thinkers agree only on God's oneness but maintain the dualisms of believer and non-believer, good and evil, and so on. Dualism underlies many myths, religions, spiritual-philosophical schools, and even Cartesian science and structuralist sociology. Dualism and dualistic thinking has provided an impression that things stem from two or more sources.

From the poststructuralist point of view, which in nature challenges and rectifies the structuralist approach, the term "non-dual" may

imply negating the existence of dual phenomena and pairs of opposites. Poststructuralists argue labeling phenomena and cultural symbols leads to fixed dichotomous structures, and that even a label like “non-dualism” can lead to rigid definitions, which can be misleading. Certainly the complexity and relativism of the world of phenomena and human perceptions of them have led social scientists to reject a single hypothesis about the hierarchical structures. Similarly, the phenomenologist philosophers argue that the reality of life is just as it happens, but only in the perception of the person who experiences it. The liberation from a structured plurality to a pure contemplative oneness that is “non-plural” or “non-dual” is not a negative event. *Non-dualism*, furthermore, has been used by several Indian schools of thought to mean undivided “oneism” (not monism). “Monism” is not used in this book as a substitute for non-dualism because monism has been used in the last three centuries to describe the European formulation of mystico-philosophical concepts rather than Eastern ones, despite the similarity and overlapping of the two traditions. The label of “non-dualism” should be understood here as an alternative for describing the oneness of reality, without the term’s negative post-structuralist implication.

Non-dualism, from the Indian philosophical point of view, however, rejects the notion that the world, its source, and the consciousness that perceives them are separate entities: in a nutshell, the objects, the perceiver, and all other mental perception are one and the same entity (as is clear from the Sanskrit term for non-dual, *advaita*). *Advaita* in this case actually means “non-dual,” but not necessarily “one” per se, though they in fact share the same intended meaning of a timeless and undivided entity. Understanding the ultimate reality is a transcendence from the world of dualities and pluralities—it is the understanding of unique principle, but through the channel of dualities and pluralities. It is the colorless water that goes in the ground that causes the blossoming of different-colored flowers.⁴ Colorless water and multiple-colored flowers are connected at a higher level and originate from a non-multiple source. Raindrops and ocean seem to represent two things, but actually follow a similar non-dual pattern. Questions about God and creation, about the source of human existence, about good and evil, the believer and the unbeliever, heaven and hell, seem to stem from a dualistic cultural perspective. Non-dualism rejects the dualistic or plural façade of things and perceives it as a case of mistaken identity. In other words, this school perceives that all things have a common denominator even if their appearance does not reveal it. This common denominator is unborn, undying, immutable; without