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History, Culture, Peace: Rumi Mevlana

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Abstract: Along the history, for so many centuries, Rumi Mawlana – perhaps the most loved mystical poet of all times – has been alive and talking to people of all cultures through the language of love, peace, faith and true kindness. This remarkable man has always transcended the boundaries of time, space, race, religion, considering that “Love is the very meaning of creation and life”. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that the history of humankind would have been a paradise if human beings had followed such principles like peace, love and understanding. Rumi Mawlana created a splendid, humanitarian and universal type of art, culture and mentality; his message is God’s message to humankind: friendship, hope, generosity, peace, beauty, in one word: Love and happiness in all forms. Thus, he used his huge poetic talent not only in order to touch people’s hearts, but also to reach the most splendid goal of the human race: that of making people more sensitive to the eternal and most important human values.

Keywords: Sufism; God; peace; love; faith; poetry; creation

Motto: “In compassion and grace be like the sun.”

(Rumi Mevlana)

Rumi Mevlana may be considered one of the most important representatives of love and peace, being a great spiritual teacher from whom mankind should learn essential things about life, humanity, true faith, acceptance and tolerance. He is one of the most loved poets both in the East and West. However, in the 18th century, very little was known about Rumi and Sufism in Europe and America. Since then, well-known Western scholars have brought their contributions to making this spiritual leader and mystical poet famous in their countries and abroad.

Peter H. Cunz said that “*to write about Rumi and his contributions today is sending a drop of water into the ocean.*” (Rumi and His Sufi Path of Love, 2011, p. 92). He considered that Mevlana “*was far more than a poet and far more than a mystic. He is a holy man whose spirit illuminates the hearts of his followers even today.*” (Peter Cunz, *op. cit.*, p. 95).

At the end of the 18th century, J. de Wallenbourg – who was a French ambassador living in Istanbul – translated *Masnavi* into French, but unfortunately, it was burnt by the fire in 1799. Joseph Hammer was a very appreciated Austrian orientalist who knew Turkish, Arabic and Persian and translated the *Divan* by Hafiz into German. He considered that *Masnavi* by Rumi should be read by all lovers of Sufism, from India to Turkey. Hammar wrote about *Divan-I Kabir*:

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“Rumi found the Supreme and Everlasting Being and on the wings of highest spiritual joys and pleasure, he rose to levels that other poets (including Hafiz) could not reach. Rumi not only transcends the sun and the moon but also time, space and creation.” (Sefik Can, in *Rumi and His Sufi Path of Love*, 2011, p. 97)

Another name which is worth mentioning is Friedrich Ruckert, who died in the latter half of the 19th century. He was a Sufi and is considered to be the most appreciated German orientalist. Hammer helped him in his passion and thus Ruckert learnt Turkish, Arabic and Persian. After he had read *Masnavi* and the *Divan-I Kabir*, he became fascinated by Rumi and translated his odes into German. Later, he continued his love for the Oriental poetry by translating Sa’di and Hafiz; this is how Rumi Mevlana became known in Germany. Hans Meinke was also an adorer of Rumi, fascinated by the Divine Love and he decided to dedicate his poetry to this mystical poet. Another famous orientalist who loved Rumi was Professor Annemarie Schimmel, born in Germany; actually, she wrote a huge number of articles and books about her favourite poet (in German, English and Turkish).

Another scholar was Hippolyte Taine, specialist in English literature. Sefik Can mentions that: *“Unlike the French who are theoretical and Italians who are artists and ponderous in nature, the determined and pragmatic British also have a strong inclination toward mystical thought.”* (Sefik Can, in *Rumi and His Sufi Path of Love*, 2011, p. 101). Sir James Redhouse translated the first volume of the *Masnavi* into English in 1881 and E. H. Whinfield also translated some selected passages from *Masnavi* and published them seventeen years later. R.A. Nicholson was another important orientalist and believers; he translated many Sufi works, among which six volumes of the *Masnavi* with commentaries.

French scholars were also interested in Rumi Mevlana. C.L. Huart visited Konya at the end of the 19th century and wrote a book about this city. Maurice Barres is analyzed by Mehmet Onder in *The Life and Works of Rumi*; the latter one quotes the beginning of Barres’s memoirs: *“I can’t wait. I want to see Rumi’s lodge, whirling hall and shrine, experience his Divine rapture and hear the melodies of his poetry. He is such a genius that odour, light, music and a little bit of bohemianism emanate from him. It enraptures the reader. Only the reader? No. Jalaladdin Rumi himself is in rapture and whirling in his poems. (...) How fortunate I am!”* (Mehmet Onder, *Life and Works of Rumi*, 2007, p. 232). With so much fascination and appreciation, Barres also said that: *“The life of no poet, whom I consider to be the messengers of the world of enthusiasm, light and joy, compares to the life of Rumi. After seeing the dervishes whirling and singing to his rhythm, I noticed that there is something lacking in Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe and Hugo.”* (Asaf Celebi, *The Life and Personality of Rumi*, 2007, p. 50)

Sefik Can mentions that in the United States *“there is great admiration for Rumi and he deserves the title of the most read poet in America.”* (Asaf Celebi, *The Life and Personality of Rumi*, 2007, p. 105). In Washington there is even an institution (*Rumi Forum for Interfaith Dialogue*) and an annual Rumi Festival held in North Carolina.

Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch was another researcher, writer and translator who loved Rumi Mevlana; she approached the work and life of this unique poet in her PhD thesis and translated many of his works into French. In 1987, she was awarded the title *Doctor Honoris Causa* from Selcuk University of Konya, for extraordinary services offered to Rumi and to the Turkish culture. She considered Rumi to be *“the greatest mystic genius of all times, my spiritual leader”* and perhaps that is why she embraced Islam and took the name of Hawwa. Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch’s wish was that of promoting Rumi’s works in the whole world and spreading the Ultimate Truth. In an international congress in Konya, she expressed her mission: *“What I wish to do is to identify Rumi’s messages (...)*

and present them to Western youth who are deprived of spirituality and thirsty for meaning.” (Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch, 1st International Rumi Congress, May, 1987, Konya)

Being a Sufi, Mevlana gave up his ego and hopes for perfection; his ultimate purpose was to reach God and the true love (both for Divinity and humans). His awe for God found its perfection in *Masnavi*, a work finished in eight years; this is a huge poetic work in six large volumes, written in couplets. *Masnavi* provides insight into every issue, starting with the Sufi religion, mysticism and social relations: children’s education by means of toys, food, illnesses and herbal cures, psychotherapy, the body composition and others. In his *Diwan*, Rumi reflected divine love in accordance with the peculiarities of that time and expressed it by symbols such as: lover - beloved, rose - nightingale, vineyard - garden, wine – cupbearer, sea – drop. In some of his poems, he approaches some social issues apart from the soul of ghazals: he criticizes the officials who take bribes, warns the leaders, despises the deeds of some scholars, talks about wedding customs, children playing in the street, the marketplace. In the foreword of the oldest copy of *Diwan-I Kabir*, it is said:

“The words in this Diwan-I Kabir are the spiritual secrets. They are the arc of Noah for the lovers of All Truth. They are sacred breaths. They are breezes enjoyed by the soul. And they are divine inspirations. They are the explorations of the blessings those open the eye of the hearts at dawn. They are the infusions those come from Allah who is beyond any kind of impurities. They are big pearls of the sea of unseen. This Diwan is the diwan of lovers. It is the source of spiritual pleasures. It is the light of hearts. It is the key of people of peace. It is the flower of gardens of heart. It is a gift of journey for those who set out on the way of Lord.” (Rumi, Diwan-I Kabir, v.I, p. 2)

Mevlana also uses the metaphor of the *reed-flute*, standing for longing, the music of the soul, full of love and harmony: *“It’s the flames of love in this reed-flute burning/It’s the ferment of love in this wine enrapturing.” (Rumi, 2002, p. 57)*

Using the reed-flute, Mevlana refers to the Sufi belief that our world is the realm of separation as our soul does not belong to the material world, where God is present *“behind the veil of cause and effect”*. The human spirit is actually part of the immaterial and metaphysical world where we can have a real and huge understanding of the divine reality. The *reed-bed* is chosen to be the symbol for the source of the spirit which is represented by God. Before coming to this material world, our souls lived in another realm called by him *“The World of Spirit”*. Huseyin Bingul considers that: *“Before the day of reunion with its Creator and the attainment of the utmost proximity with the Beloved after death, the self can free itself from this prison of the body, as Rumi says, with the ladder of love placed in front of it.” (Huseyin Bingul, in Rumi and His Sufi Path of Love, 2011, p. 124).*

For Mevlana, the attraction of all existence is the consequence of our attraction to the All-Loving God. According to him, the Hidden Treasure is the breath blown into the reed-flute which gives life to it; what we feel inside ourselves is God’s breath. Thus, our spirit carries the inborn love for His Essence, which remains a mystery as no human can truly understand the Essence of God. Our ego can come close to God only if it struggles to purify itself. It must be educated and improved by the Beloved in order to give up its egocentrism and find perfection. Of all creatures, only human beings have free will. This free will should make us choose the right and moral way in life and thus our ego will be able to carry the Divine Trust. Rumi Mevlana concludes in a philosophical way: *“My life can be summarized in these three phrases: I was raw, I got cooked, I burned.”*

Mevlana regards human beings as being the most honourable of all creatures, advising us: *“Do not look at Adam, created of clay, but rather see the breath that was breathed into him and be fascinated*

by it.” (Rumi, *Divan-I Kabir*, 3, 1576). Life is the expression of the light of God’s existence. Feeling attracted by God with an unceasing force, Rumi Mevlana lives in joy and happiness:

“When you seek love, by the grace of God

Your spirit turns into wine and your body into a jar:

When He increases the wine of His grace, the jar falls into pieces.

Every knowledgeable one knows without thinking,

That where there is disturbance, there is a Disturber.” (Rumi, *Masnavi*)

Rumi is subjugated by the Divine Love, as his heart beats with joy whenever he finds himself close to his Beloved. In *Divan-I Kabir*, he expresses this ecstasy: *“This is love: to fly toward a secret sky, to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.”* (Rumi, *Divan-I Kabir*, Ghazal no. 13). In a couplet in *Masnavi*, he states that: *“Love is the flame which, when it blazes up, burns everything except the Beloved.”*

As it is known, for Mevlana, music, dance and contemplation represents a perfect way of reaching our Master. In beautiful verses he defines music in the following couplet:

“Music is the nutrition of the souls of the servants of the Lord,

Since, in music, there is the hope of reaching God.” (*Masnavi*)

The *Sama* (i.e. the dance) represents the elevation of the spirit, the human being turning his face to see and understand the Ultimate Truth, finding peace and happiness in the Divine Love, losing itself in God, thus becoming pure and immaculate. During *Sama*, the dervish’s arms are wide open, with his right arm turned to the Sky and his left one turned down, thus receiving the gifts from God and giving them to humans. Sufis have always tried to answer the question: “What is human?” And Mevlana offered a beautiful, complete and unique answer, considering the human being to be an exponent for the whole universe. He defined love as being the essence of human creation, the holy fabric we are made of:

“Our mother is love! Our father is love!

We are born from love! We are love!

All loves constitute a bridge leading to the Divine love.

To love human beings means to love God.” (*Masnavi*)

We could state that there is no other “definition” of the human being as concise (yet comprehensive), poetical (yet realistic), perfect and unique as this one. Rumi actually touches the divine core which is inside each and every of us. In beautiful and suggestive words, Selahattin Hidayetoglu stated that: *“Rumi’s duty was to strive to lead people to attain eternal bliss.”* (*S. Hidayetoglu, op.cit., p. 65*). In other words, peace, love for God and humans, kindness and happiness must be the ultimate purposes of mankind.

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