

***“Passion for the Divine Beloved:”  
Dialogue, Respect, & Peace in Rumi***

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Known in Turkey as Mevlana Celaleddin Mehmed Rumi, this great Muslim mystic is known in Persia as Mawlana Jalal-ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. Throughout the Western world he is simply known as Rumi, the mystic poet. 2007 marks the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in Balkh, today in Afghanistan, then part of the Persian world. When he died some 66 years later in Konya in Anatolia in modern day Turkey, he was widely known as a Sufi Muslim throughout the Islamic world. As Rumi wrote:

Lord, ...why did you create these two worlds?  
/... O prisoner of time, /  
I was a secret treasure of kindness and generosity,  
and I wished this treasure to be known,  
so I created a mirror:  
its shining face,  
the heart...<sup>1</sup>

Regarded by many as the foremost poet and mystic of the Muslim world, he was a figure of some controversy within his own time. Following his death, his

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<sup>1</sup> From “Be Lost in the Call,” [www.armory.com/~thrace/sufi/poems/html](http://www.armory.com/~thrace/sufi/poems/html).

followers founded the Mevlevi Order, which became known for its unique path to union with Allah: a form of dance/worship/meditation known as *sema/sama*. But the popular name for the Order was the “Whirling Dervishes.”

## ***II: The Journey***

Poets and mystics may be born, but they all need to be awakened to their calling. And this was certainly the case with Rumi. Mongol invasions in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century forced his father, Baha’ ud-Din Walad, to head West, towards Anatolia. According to some accounts of Rumi’s life, the father, family and followers had not gotten further than Nishapur in Iran when Attar, a well known mystic poet, presented his ***Asrar-nama*** (Book of Secrets) to Rumi. Legend has it that Attar exclaimed: “Here comes a sea followed by an ocean,” acknowledging the spiritual stature of both father and son.<sup>2</sup> Rumi would only have been 10-12 at the time, but his future calling had already been seen. It would still need to be realized.

Rumi’s father was a man of significant stature. When they reached Konya, in Anatolia, Baha’ ud-Din Walad was embraced by the Seljuck king Ala ad-Din Kayqubad and his vizier, Mu’in al-Din Parawanah. The King gave Rumi’s father, Baha Walad, the title “Sultan of the Men of Knowledge.” Most commentators acknowledge that Rumi began studying the sciences of the Muslim world at an early age: Arabic grammar, prosody, the Qu’ran, jurisprudence, the science of the Shari’ah/Law, hadith (the sayings of the

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<sup>2</sup> See A. J. Arberry, ***Discourses of Rumi*** (London: John Murray, 1961), pp. 1-9 and William C. Chittick, ***The Sufi Path of Love*** (Albany: SUNY, 1983) pp. 1-5 for accounts of Rumi’s early life. Arberry asserts that Rumi “has long been recognized as the greatest mystical poet of Islam” and, arguably, “of all mankind.” p. ix.

Prophet), mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and logic. Given his father's position, this was to be expected. And he had obviously advanced in those studies to a significant degree. For when his father died in 628/1231, Rumi assumed his father's position, despite being only twenty-one at the time. And over the next dozen years, Rumi established himself among his contemporaries as a man of stature. He was a Doctor of Law in the Hanafi school and he was widely considered to have achieved mastery in the many exoteric sciences of the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup>

### ***II: Awakening to His Poetic/Ecstatic Vocation***

However, it was only after the appearance of the mysterious Shams of Tabriz that Rumi fully awakens to his vocation. It is in 1244 that Shams al Din of Tabriz comes to Konya and for much of the next three years, the two are almost inseparable. The influence is decisive. As Rumi later wrote: "I was the country's sober ascetic, I used to teach from the pulpit—but destiny made me one of Thy hand-clapping lovers." Or, again, "Passion for the Beloved took me away from erudition and reciting the [Qu'ran] until I became as insane and obsessed as I am." Or, yet again, "My hand always used to hold a Koran, but now it hold's Love's flagon."<sup>4</sup> Scholars have long puzzled over the exact nature of Rumi's transformation, but all are agreed that that transformation occurred in relation to Shams, literally meaning the Sun.

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<sup>3</sup> See William C. Chittick, **The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi** (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 2. Professor Chittick is one of the foremost English-speaking scholars of Rumi. I have also learned a great deal from Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, **Rumi & Sufism** (Sausalito, California: The Post-Applo Press, 1987). But perhaps the most important volume for me is Annemarie Schimmel, **As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). I am indebted throughout this essay to their studies of Rumi.

<sup>4</sup> See Chittick, **The Sufi Path**, op.cit., p. 3.

Sultan Walad wrote concerning his father, Rumi, that “his supreme guide on the mystical path had been Shams of Tabriz.”<sup>5</sup> A. J. Arberry remarks that the relationship with Shams “transformed Jalal al-Din from the sober divine into an ecstatic wholly incapable of controlling the torrent of poetry which now poured forth from him.”<sup>6</sup> And Chittick rightly observes that Rumi was, after his encounter with Shams “transformed from a sober jurisprudent to an intoxicated celebrant of the mysteries of Divine Love.”<sup>7</sup>

It was in 1247 that Shams disappears. Some say he was murdered by Rumi’s own jealous followers, others have other views. Rumi was forty at the time. Whatever the circumstances of Shams disappearance, there is agreement that after this, Rumi abandons his public career and gives himself over to the teaching, indeed training, of Sufi initiates. It is over the remaining twenty-six years that we have the “profuse outpouring of inspired poetry”<sup>8</sup> that is Rumi’s legacy to subsequent generations.

### ***III: The Legacy/Writings***

Chittick observes that Rumi’s “outpouring of inspired poetry” is found in two principal works: “the *Diwan-i Shams-i* of some 40,000 verses and the *Mathnawi* of about 25,000 verses.”<sup>9</sup> The *Diwani* spans nearly thirty years of Rumi’s life, from the time of his encounter with Shams until his death. The *Mathnawi* was composed “at the request of his favourite disciple Huam al-Din

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<sup>5</sup> See Vitray-Meyerovitch, **Rumi & Sufism**, op.cit., p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> A. J. Arberry, **Discourses of Rumi** (London: John Murray, 1961), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Chittick, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Chittick, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Chittick, p. 5. There is some confusion around the size of these collections. Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch says that the *Mathnawi* “is a vast poem of about 45,000 verses.” p. 69. However, she does not cite the *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabriz* as a separate work but includes it in the *Mathnawi*. Some refer to the text as the *Diwan*, others as the *Diwani*

Chalabi.” It was composed beginning in 1260 and continued until his death in 1273. According to his biographers, Rumi would recite the poetry, Chalabi would write it down and read it back. Chittick sees the *Mathnawi* as a “rambling collection of anecdotes and tales” that run “the whole gamut of Islamic wisdom, with particular emphasis upon the inward or Sufi interpretation.”<sup>10</sup> It is, in Chittick’s opinion, more sober than the *Diwani*.

Chittick sees the poetry of the *Diwani* as “a collection of individual and separate crystallizations and concretizations of spiritual states undergone on the path to God.”<sup>11</sup> In the *Diwani*, says Chittick, the “overall feeling” is “one of spiritual intoxication and ecstatic love.”<sup>12</sup> But Chittick’s point is not to rank one text higher than the other, but rather to see their inner relationship. He explains that relationship in the following way:

...One could say that the *Diwan* comprises so many flashes and gleams from the inward dimensions of Rumi’s spiritual life. Each poem is a symbolic image of a mystical state he has experienced on the path to God or after having attained to the Goal. But the *Mathnawi* is a commentary upon these mystical states and stations. ...It represents a reasoned and measured attempt to explain the various dimensions of spiritual life and practice to disciples intent upon following the Way. ...It is aimed at anyone who has time to sit down and ponder the meaning of life and existence.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Chittick, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Chittick, p. 6. Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch sees the *Diwan* as containing poems/odes which have a “beauty and power...beyond comparison.” p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Chittick, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Chittick, p. 6.

Thus the two works complement each other on the Way, on the journey to God. They constitute, in the language of poetry, a grammar of the spirit in its journey to itself which is, at the same time, a journey to God.<sup>14</sup>

One final point before we turn to the Path, the Way, we find in Rumi. It is not accidental that Rumi's work consists, almost wholly, in poetry. Indeed, it is essential since what Rumi is seeking to express exceeds the language of prose, of essay, of discursive thought. Rumi's transformation, following his encounter with Shams, was inward, spiritual, and ecstatic. It is poetry and poetry alone that can evoke the ecstatic, the experience of awakening to the truth of self-in-God, the Divine Beloved. Rumi, however, understands his poetry in a traditional rather than a modern way. For Rumi, it is the poetry that speaks through him. He would not see his work as self-expression, as do many modern poets, but rather that it is the Unseen Reality that plays him. These are not verses of self-expression but of inspiration. As Schimmel remarks, "his lyrics were born spontaneously out of the agitation of his heart."<sup>15</sup> Or, again in Schimmel's words, "this experience of inspiration continues into the **Mathnawi**" where Rumi writes: "I think of rhymes, but my beloved says: Don't think of anything but of my face!"<sup>16</sup>

#### ***IV. The Path: Rumi's Grammar of the Spirit & the Sama***

Rumi is always spoken about as a Sufi, as one who knew and practiced the inner, or esoteric way, of Islam. But what/who is a Sufi? Is he one who knows Islamic Law? One who performs the Five Pillars of Islam? Is it enough to

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<sup>14</sup> There are some additional prose works and letters. The major prose work is *Fihi ma fhi* which has been translated into English by A. J. Arberry as **Discourses of Rumi**, op. cit. the other is *Majalis-i sab'ah* or Seven Sessions which is an early, pre-Shams, writing by Rumi.

<sup>15</sup> Schimmel, **As Through a Veil**, op.cit., p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Rumi as quoted in Schimmel, p. 95.

know? Or to practice? Knowledge of the Law can be a knowing without realizing, just as practice can be an action without presence. In a word, they can remain external to who and what one is. What distinguishes the Sufi is a third element: it is realization. It is an inward relatedness to the Truth of the Law and of Practice. In Rumi's terms: the Divine Beloved, "The Beloved is everything."

There are many definitions of Sufism. And Rumi's own interpreters have rightly said that Rumi had been instructed in the Sufi Way from an early age. So, why is the encounter with Shams of Tabriz so important? It is here that Rumi realized the Sufi Way, that he came to an interior relationship with the Divine Beloved. Chittick observes that there are three dimensions to Rumi's Sufism: knowledge ('ilm), works ('amal), and what Chittick calls "spiritual realization."<sup>17</sup> Chittick argues that Sufis take "Law or Shari'ah" to mean "knowledge in its widest sense," the "Way or Tariqah" as the "method of putting the Law into practice," and the "Reality or Haqiqah" as "the inward states and stations attained by the traveler in his journey to God and in God."<sup>18</sup> Thus Rumi's Sufism is best understood as a spiritual path, a Way towards the Divine Beloved. It is not, as Chittick rightly observes, a "system" or an intellectual construction, nor is it a series of guarantees – do X and Y must follow.<sup>19</sup> It is a poetry that invites us to enter a Way that centres on, again in Chittick's words, "a process of inward transformation."<sup>20</sup> It is a guidance that counsels a Way to realize the soul in God.

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<sup>17</sup> See Chittick, *op.cit.*, p. 10. Here Chittick notes that Sufi's often cite a saying of the Prophet: "The Law is my words, the Way is my Works, and the Truth is my inward states."

<sup>18</sup> See Chittick, *op. cit.* pp. 10-11. The entire volume is then devoted to unfolding these three elements of Rumi's teachings. But Chittick does so with the proviso that Rumi "did not present his teachings as a 'system.'"

<sup>19</sup> See Chittick, *op.cit.* p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Chittick, p. 11.

As Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch observes, Rumi did not intend “to elaborate on a metaphysical theory,” but to present a path which would “allow the disciple to ‘become what he is’ and to ‘give birth’ to the spirit hidden in his innermost self.”<sup>21</sup>

The paradox of the mystical Way given in Rumi is that the goal – a vital and transforming relationship to the Divine Beloved – is to realize or awaken to what we already are. In Rumi’s words, “The Beloved said: I am your own soul and your own heart,” as he calls his hearers to discover, says Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch “that all duality can be transcended.”<sup>22</sup> Says Rumi, “Go on a journey from self to Self, my friend... Such a journey transforms the earth into a mine of gold.”<sup>23</sup> And in that journey one will discover, says Rumi, that “In your own self, the seer and the seen are one and the same.”<sup>24</sup> Other Sufi mystics have sought to chart the mystical way and see seven stages as we move from the “carnal soul” to the “inspired” soul and finally to the “realized” soul, or see the journey as “toward” God, “with” God & finally “in” God.<sup>25</sup> And while we can find these stages and moments in Rumi, his writings are not aimed at a systematic outline of the path, but more to evoke moments from that journey to God.

While Schimmel reminds us that “nothing could be more alien to him [Rumi] than a systematization of his thought,”<sup>26</sup> we do find in Rumi a spiritual path and a grammar of the spirit. But it is an ecstatic path and grammar that is

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<sup>21</sup>Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, pp. 117 & 121.

<sup>22</sup> Rumi’s words are quoted Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, **Rumi & Sufism**, op.cit., p. 26. Her words come from the same page.

<sup>23</sup> As quoted in Andrew Harvey, **Teachings of Rumi** (Boston: Shambala, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in **Rumi & Sufism**, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the Table in **Rumi & Sufism** where the soul, the journey, the world, consciousness, dwelling, law and light are all marked out in seven degrees/stages ending with the realized soul, the journey in God, the world of multiplicity & unity, permanence in God, dwelling in mystery, the universal essence, and colourless. p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Schimmel, p. 83.

more to be danced in the *sama* than thought as a system or delineated in a treatise. While the dance is to be danced – not simply outwardly described – the following account of the *sema/sama* is symbolically suggestive.

In Rumi's life, the *sama* was more spontaneous than it became in the Order of Whirling Dervishes that came after him. Nevertheless, the *sama* was understood to be "a dancing of the cosmic dance" done in the context of a religious ceremony. Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch offers this account of the *sama* ceremony:

the dancers enter wearing white robes, symbols of the shroud, enveloped in ample black coats, representing the tomb, and coiffed with high felt hats, images of the tombstones. The sheikh, who represents the intermediary between the heavens and the earth, enters last. He salutes the dervishes and they return the gesture. He then sits in front of the red carpet [representative of the setting sun on Rumi's death day]... The singer celebrates the praises of the Prophet...with a text written by Rumi..."It is you, the beloved of God, the envoy of the sole Creator"... It is a slow and solemn composition. Then the flutist begins improvising while the masker of the kettledrums plays them and the sheikh knocks on the ground. The dervishes then advance slowly and turn three times around the dance floor...symbolic of the three stages that take one nearer to God: the path of science, the path of the vision, and the path leading to union with God.

At the end of the third turn the sheik takes his place on the carpet. The dervishes let their black coats fall, springing out of them wearing white as if liberated from their earthly envelope for a second birth. They ask the sheikh for permission to dance and then start whirling slowly, spreading their arms like wings, the right palm turned upward toward the sky to gather the divine grace, and the left palm turned downward to give it to the earth. This grace has crossed their hearts and has been warmed by their love. The movement they perform around the floor represents the universal law, the planets turning around the sun and around their own center. The drums evoke the trumpets of the last judgment. The circle of dancers is divided into two semi-circles, one represents the arc of the descent, or the involution

of the souls into matter, and the other, the arc of the ascent of the soul towards God.

The sheikh enters the dance at the fourth turn as the rhythm doubles in time, becoming very rapid. The sheikh turns at the centre of the circle, he represents the sun and its rays. When he enters the dance the *ney* (flute) improvises again. This moment is the supreme moment of the achieved union. When the sheikh returns to his place, the *sama* is over and the singer recites the Koran...<sup>27</sup>

The cosmic dance is filled with symbolism and its end is an ecstatic encounter with the Divine Beloved. A. Schimmel remarks that Rumi's poetry "was born out of the whirling movement of ecstatic dance." She continues, that Rumi saw "Love as the great musician. Its breath fills the reed-flute to make it sing of its eternal home, and its hand touches the lute of man's body to make him speak of the beloved."<sup>28</sup>

### ***V. Contemporary Implications***

So, what are the contemporary implications of Rumi's life and work? Let me begin with a little story. This summer I was in Prague teaching a class on Dialogue in the Abrahamic Traditions. The class included Jewish, Muslim & Christian students. I had brought along several books on Rumi and was working on this contribution to these deliberations. One day I received an e-mail from a colleague back in Canada that had attached to it the following quote from Rumi,

*"Come on, deny your Ego. Get united with everybody. So long as you remain in yourself, you are a particle. But if you get united with everybody, you are a mine, an ocean. Believe that all spirits are One! And all bodies are One! Just like almonds in quantity hundred thousands; but there is the same oil in all of them. There are many languages in the world, in meaning all are the*

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<sup>27</sup> **Rumi & Sufism**, pp. 45-46.

<sup>28</sup> Schimmel, p. 132.

*same. If you break the cups, water will be unified and will flow together.*"<sup>29</sup>

The sender of this e-mail is a sociologist. When I asked her why she included it, she replied...

As for the quote by Rumi, I am a fan of Rumi and Sufi poetry, philosophy and music. The message in this particular quote appeals to me because of the underlying message of spiritual unity that transcends various ontological differences. To me it speaks against a divisive chauvinism and beautifully articulates the power of uniting in our common humanity through the metaphor of the breaking cups and the flow of water and energy that emanates from a single divine source but then becomes artificially divided by ego and chauvinism.

Her response speaks to the continuing appeal of Rumi. He is seen as a spokesman for a "spiritual unity" that transcends our normal divisions. Rumi speaks for a relationship with the Divine Beloved free of egoism, chauvinism, jingoism, and exclusivism. Too often others evoke the Divine Name to clothe their own self-interest, or political agenda. But this is not true of Rumi. It is not accidental that so many of Rumi's stories involve a ruler, who we in our ignorance presume to rule the world, and a Sufi who speaks for the Love that is the world's true meaning.<sup>30</sup> In Rumi, religion is about love, it is not about power. His is a voice that rises above the divisions that marked his time – and that mark our world: East versus West, North versus South, Rich versus Poor, Male versus Female, Right versus Left. His is a voice for truth, love, and peace.

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<sup>29</sup> I have not been able to locate the source of this alleged quote from Rumi.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Discourses of Rumi*, edited by A. J. Arberry, *op. cit.*, p. 13 ff. Here Rumi chides the scholar who "visits princes" seeking favour rather than realizing that "his learning from first to last has been for the sake of God."

Truth, love, and peace are three interrelated goods and they are intimately related to dialogue, respect, and peace. Truth comes from dialogue – within the self, with others, and with the Divine Beloved – but it is not self-serving or self-centered. It rests on respect – for the true self, the Other, the world, and God – it never seeks its own interest. And its consequence is always peace: the peace that comes from struggle (dare I say ‘jihad’?) against the false self and rests in the truth of God, the Divine Beloved. Rumi’s understanding of his calling led him to be in conversation, in dialogue, with everyone – after his meeting with Shams he did not restrict his exchange to fellow scholars, nor with Muslims. According to Rumi, the Beloved is our neighbour, and it is the walls we build that keep us from seeing the Beloved in our neighbour. In Rumi’s words: “Come, come; here is where you find the Beloved. Your Beloved’s your nearest neighbor, just a wall divides you...”<sup>31</sup> Konya had its share of Christians and non-believers – and Rumi seems to have engaged them all as he crossed religious boundaries. Likewise, he crossed social boundaries that were impenetrable for others. He learned from the weaver as well as the wise, from the outcast as well as the learned. Rumi understood that God’s love was no respecter of social position but could transfigure the lives of all. Amir Hussain well expresses the appeal of Rumi when he writes concerning Rumi’s saying: “There are many ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

This refers to the specific Muslim practice of prayer, but it resonates with all who bow down to God in their own ways. The union with God that the mystic seeks transcends gender,

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<sup>31</sup> A. Harvey, **Teachings of Rumi**, op.cit., p. 23.

ethnicity, ego, or even religious tradition – those things that often cause division and strife among humans.<sup>32</sup>

Rumi remained rooted in the Muslim Way but, like the mystic poets of other traditions, he gave expression to the transcending, universal and transforming love of God in his writings.

But I must also include here a word of caution. Rumi has come to have a life in the virtual world of the internet. According to an internet source, Rumi is “the most widely read poet in the USA,” but the basis for such a claim is, like many things in the virtual world, unknown. When we look at Rumi’s life we see that his breakthrough to the Divine Beloved was preceded by years of study, training, reflection and spiritual discipline. And, after his breakthrough, the major challenge was to teach his followers a Path that could lead them to that wondrous moment when they too might experience the Divine Beloved. Although that breakthrough may come in an instant, it is often preceded by years of aspiration, discipline, and desire. This is the sobering message of Rumi for those that meet him on the internet alone.<sup>33</sup> Rumi expresses the paradox of the search for the Divine Beloved when he writes: “I will hunt for the Beloved with all my power and all my strength and passion until I know it is futile to look for Him. Yet how could I know His Presence near me/ without traveling across the world?/ How could I grasp its sublime mystery/ without risking a long journey?/ God has

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<sup>32</sup> Amir Hussain, **Oil and Water: Two Faiths: One God** (Kelona, BC: CopperHouse 2006), p. 162.

<sup>33</sup> After writing this I came across these words of Andrew Harvey in his introduction to **Teachings of Rumi**, *op.cit.*, “Rumi is indeed an ecstatic...he is also...the canniest, shrewdest, most unsentimental and sober of teachers, very un-New Age in his refusal to deny the power of evil, his candor about the limits of all worldly and earthly enlightenment, his Jesus-like suspicion of all forms of wealth and power and his embrace of the sometimes terrible and prolonged suffering that authentic transformation must and does demand,” pp. xv-xvi. It makes, in stronger language, an analogous point to mine.

told us He is with us/ but has sealed the heart/ so it cannot understand this/ except slowly and indirectly/ when you have accomplished many journeys and fulfilled the Path's duties..."<sup>34</sup>

Rumi was no wide-eyed idealist, nor was he a 12<sup>th</sup> century Mary Poppins. In his love for the Divine Beloved, he transcended the dichotomies and division that characterize most of our lives. He knew that peace, for example, is many splendored. There is peace within and without, there is peace in the family, and with our neighbours. There is peace between groups and societies. There is peace with nature and the cosmos. There is peace with ourselves in God. Peace is more than the absence of war – though that is a good never to be minimized – it is the rhythm of a just society. And as we enter the third millennium, our society has become global. It is no longer local, ethnic, religious or even national – though these too remain. We find our selves in an interlocking, interacting, interdependent, international, and global society. But can this global society become a *great* society, or a *good* society, a *just* society? Can we have a peace-able world? This is the question that haunts our time.

Rumi's Way is not a system, nor is his an easy way. Is it a Way that makes for peace? Yes, it is. But not in terms that we like to hear. For Rumi, peace is not just absence of conflict, nor is it wishful thinking. Peace grows out of a vital, intoxicated awakening to our lives in the Divine Beloved, from a realization of our lives dancing in the awareness of the Divine Beloved. Such a realization cannot be transformed into an ideology, nor can it be reduced to a series of dos and don'ts since it transcends all those things that characterize our

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<sup>34</sup> A. Harvey, op.cit., p. 27.

life in this world, including, in the end, our very cherished religious Ways. This is why Rumi was – and is – a controversial figure within Islam. Some within the Muslim world criticize the Sufi Rumi as the mystics in other traditions are criticized.<sup>35</sup> They are typically criticized for loosening the bonds to the inherited practices, beliefs, and traditions of a given tradition. Yet I have never found this to be true of mystics. Rather, they take us deeper into the practices, beliefs, and traditions of a given Way. Rumi, for example, does not counsel abandonment of the exoteric Ways of Islam. Indeed, he urges fidelity to those Ways even as he dances towards their esoteric heart. For it is, finally, the heart that knows itself in the Divine Beloved that is Rumi's goal – and his message to all. Annemarie Schimmel, one of the twentieth centuries great scholars of Islam writes

...Rumi's topics cover almost every aspect of life, but the centre of his thoughts is Love, which in sometimes interchangeable with the Beloved, and one often wonder whether is it Love or the Beloved that is intended by his words. *'I read the story of the lovers day and night, Now I have become a story in my love for you.'* That is the quintessence of the more than 35,000 verses of Rumi's **Diwan**.<sup>36</sup>

But in Rumi this love is, like peace, a many splendored thing. It is balm (as it soothes and heals), fire (as it consumes and transforms), and wine (as it intoxicates and dances),<sup>37</sup> it is "one with the Divine Essence."<sup>38</sup> It is not sentimental, nor is it warm and fuzzy. It rather calls us into the very heights and

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<sup>35</sup> The mystic understands the revelation given in a particular tradition in an esoteric or inner way, while others, if not most, understand it in an exoteric or external way. Thus mystics are always controversial in a given tradition for they know in their vital, ecstatic, and ineffable experience what the beliefs and practices are pointing us to. Rumi says, for example, "love is free from the narrowness of prayer niche and cross." Schimmel, **As Through A Veil**, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, **As Through a Veil, Mystical Poetry in Islam** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> See A. Schimmel's Chapter on "Rumi and the Metaphors of Love" in **As Through a Veil**, pp. 83-133.

<sup>38</sup> Schimmel p. 131.

depths of life. In a post 9/11 world where the Muslim is too often presented as a “terrorist” – an image that is wrong, unfair, and corrupting – we need to recover the voice of figures like Rumi who speak from the esoteric heart of Islam of the Divine Beloved. Such a message is both timely and timeless.