

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE MAWLANA JALALUDDIN RUMI

8-12 May 2007, Istanbul-Konya, Turkey

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The year 2007 marks the 800th anniversary of the birth of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. To celebrate this occasion the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism organized an International symposium. The symposium was held on 8-12 May in Istanbul and Konya. More than 150 scholars participated in the symposium from nationalities as diverse as America, Mexico, France, Spain, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Singapore, Egypt, Syria, Bangladesh and Pakistan. To name some of the most prominent participants: Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, William Chittick, James Morris, Carl Earnest, Omid Safi, Abdulkarim Soroush. The scholars from Pakistan included Dr. Javed Iqbal, Mr. Suhyl Umer, Dr. Shahzad Qaiser, Dr. Arif Naushahi and Dr. Safir Akhtar.

The Papers read at 34 parallel sessions of the symposium covered scores of dimension of Rumi's Thought, its meaning and significance for the contemporary world. Some of them included, for example, the structure and various themes of the Mathnavi, the place of Qur'an, Sunnah, and the Prophet in it, Rumi's relationship with other important Islamic figures like Ibn 'Arabi, Sadruddin Qunawi, Bayzid Bistami and others, his concepts of Love, Reason, Justice and Generosity and the diffusion of his teachings in the contemporary world.

The opening ceremony was chaired by the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, while the keynote addresses were delivered by Professor Dr. Kenan Gursoy and Prof. Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The latter emphasized in his address the importance of Rumi's message for the present day world. He said that it is with help of Rumi's teachings that we can fight against the dangerous trends that threaten the world today. As examples of these threats he mentioned the environmental crisis, deviational intellectual tendencies like fundamentalism, secularism and feminism. He said that if we want to present to true image of Islam to the world today, Rumi is the key. Dr. Nasr also emphasized the need to recognize the universality of his teaching and stop limiting him to Afghanistan, Iran or Turkey due to his relationship to certain cities in these countries. 'We must save Rumi from our own pettiness' Dr. Nasr said. At the end he said that every lover of Rumi should be grateful to the Turks for preserving Rumi's heritage for eight hundred years.

In the inaugural session of the Konya symposium Mr. Tahir Akyurek, the Mayor of central city of Konya, said that Rumi is an important asset against Islamophobia. He hoped that the symposium will contribute to peace and humanity.

In what follows we present a gist of some of the papers read in this international symposium.

1- Dr. Javed Iqbal compared the Satanology of Rumi with that of Allama Muhammad Iqbal concentrating of Rumi's treatment of "Iblis and Mu'awiyah, r.a.a" and Iqbal's famous poem "The Parliament of Iblis". He maintained that according to the mystical interpretation, the Satan is a lover in sufferance who aspires to take revenge from his rival due to him he was veiled from his Beloved. He said that according to Rumi divine mercy must prevail over everything including Satan. One the other hand, Iqbal depiction of Satan is quite different from the mystical interpretation. Satan appears in the said poem as cunning and cruel adversary of human being, though a lover of God's unity but diplomacy and deceit are his characteristic features.

2- Professor Carl W. Ernst elaborated in his paper the Structure and Meaning in Prefaces of Rumi's Mathnavi. He said that according to Rumi's own contention the subject matter of Masnavi is the root of the root of the

root of religion. In his prefaces to the Mathnavi, Rumi sets his goals of the Sufi education. Dr. Ernst highlighted Rumi's complain, like other mystics, of the inadequacy of language in spiritual matters because of the absolute transcendence of the divine essence. Dr. Ernst said that in Rumi's views it is love that can provide remedy for this inadequacy. Dr. Ernst also noted that one characteristic feature of Rumi's style is 'brevity of text and richness of meaning. Regarding Rumi's preface to Book II, Professor Earnest said that in it Rumi emphasized the necessity of reveling wisdom in proportion to the capacity of the receptacle. Another scholar in the same panel, Dr. Muhammad Isa Waley also talked about the content and message of the prefaces to the six Books of Mathnavi. He said that as Rumi is not a systematizer, it cannot be said that his prefaces encapsulate the entire message that the Mathnavi delivers. He said that the prefaces also do not deal with the themes of the following Books. Dr. Waley mentioned the essential themes of some of the prefaces. Thus he told the audience that the central theme of the preface to Book III is the attainment of science of Divine Transcendence, preface to Bk. IV talks about the sources of hope and holds thankfulness to God as the key. The preface to Bk. V elaborates the distinction between Shari'ah, Tariqah and Haqiqah. In this very panel Seyed Safavi presented a theory of coherence in the contents of Mathnavi according to which it Book III is divided into 12 discourses which are further divided into three groups in line with the division of *Aql* into *Aql Juz'î*, *Aql Rabbani* and *'Aql kulli*.

3- Professor Annabel Keeler illuminated Rumi's relationship with the great Sufi, Bayazid al-Bistami. She said that Rumi's reverence for the latter can be easily seen from the lavish titles he gives in the Mathnavi and from the fact that Bistami is the person to whom the largest number of lines is devoted in the Mathnavi. Rumi devotes 300 lines in his masterpiece to Bistami. One of the reasons for Rumi's fascination for Bistami might be that Bistami is the most charismatic figure in history. Rumi just mentions Bistami's name, quotes some of his sayings or some times relates certain anecdotes about him. She said that the five anecdotes thus related by Rumi represent stages in the life of Bistami and his procession from Shariah to Tariqah to Haqiqah. In Dr. Keeler's view, these anecdotes from Bistami are included by Rumi not as pieces of factual information but as illuminative examples for everyone. She said that Rumi tries to explain the ecstatic sayings attributed to Bistami in a

number of ways. At times he refers to the latter's being 'intoxicated' in divine love while sometimes he likens him to someone who is possessed by the jinn. Still at other occasions he declares Bistami as a self-less and annihilated mystic.

4- Omid Safi, from Harvard University, spoke about Rumi's relation to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Safi started by saying that the teachings of Mawlana help us turn to the deepest and loftiest meanings of the Islamic Tradition. Dr. Safi said that the modern Islamic world in which the slogans of 'return to Qur'an and Sunnah' are raised the term 'Mohammedanism' is not liked as identical to 'Islam'. However, if we see with Rumi, who speaks of the Sufis as the inheritors of the light of Muhammed and emphasizes the adorning of the self with the 'Mohammedan morals' *Akblaq e Muhammadi*, we can see a justification in the use of this term. Dr. Safi then proceeded to elaborate how one sees the marvelous reflection of the character traits of the prophet peace be upon him in the personality of Rumi. Dr. Safi concentrated particularly on humility and related several anecdotes from Rumi's life, for instance his bowing down in respect before a Christian monk for more than thirty times, while the latter bowed only once in the beginning. Dr. Safi contrasted this to the attitude prevalent in the Modern Islamic world. At the end he pointed to another dimension of the relationship of Rumi to the Prophet, namely the Prophet as a cosmic being and purpose of the creation of the whole universe.

5- Mariana Malinova spoke on the "The Dynamics in the image of Muhammed in the writings of Jalal ad-Din Rumi: From the prophecy to the station of seeing. She said that according to Rumi, because the Prophet Muhammed is personification of Islam, following the example of Muhammed is the first step of the sufi path and the *Mi'raj* is the archetype of the spiritual journey. His message contains all divine messages. She said that in the context of the problem of unity and multiplicity the concept of *al-haqiqah al Muhammadiyyah* is the key which is Universal spirit of everything and father of all creatures.

6- Clara Jane Nadal's paper was titled *From the Spinning of Stars to the Spinning of the Words*. She started by mentioning Rumi's predicament after his separation from Sham Tabrizi and the transformations his heart went

through, as a result of which, she maintained, it became ‘attention personified’ and became one with Shams and then the macrocosm. She moved on to elaborate the element of *movement* as the essence of life, as represented in the traditional dances. This movement also represents the idea that human heart, which is the centre of human being, thanks to its theomorphic nature, is capable of assuming all forms.

7- Nasrullah Pourjavady spoke about Rumi’s *Nay Nama* and mentioned some of the actual and possible sources. He mentioned many interpretations of the flute as to what or whom does it represent in Rumi: according to Farnafoori it stands for Rumi himself; in the opinion of Khawarzami it represents *al-Qalam al-a’ala* (the Supreme Pen); Nicholson says that it speaks for the spirit of the saint. Pourjavady disagreed with all these opinions and sided with Jami who says that it simply stands for itself and nothing else. Pourjavady enumerated several other examples from the mystical literature that revolves round the neo-platonic theme of *separation* from the source.

8- Muhammed Said al-Mawlawi read a paper titled ‘A personal interpretation of Rumi’s Teachings and the Philosophy of Rotation’. In the beginning he shed light on the three phases of Rumi’s life: as jurisconsult, meeting with Shams and after separation from Shams. Al-Mawlawi said that the sole target of Rumi’s writings and teaching was the production of perfect human beings. The steps Rumi proposed for that task, said al-Mawlawi are first, the emancipation of reason, second, freedom of the will and third, contemplation in the depths of the human self. Al-Mawlawi elaborated that Rumi allowed his disciples to marry and engage in occupations and trade unlike other mystics and emphasized that an ascent to God cannot be made except with power. He concluded that ethics was at the center of Rumi’s teachings.

9- Dr. Alice Husnberger compared the concept of reason in Rumi and Nasir Khusraw. She started by mentioning that the precedence of love over reason was a controversy in the 13th century Sufism. She said that though Rumi and Nasir Khusraw come from two different intellectual traditions, there are certain similarities between the two, for instance, both wrote in Persian for religious purposes and both were spiritual leaders. She said that Khusraw’s main source was neo-platonic philosophy and Ikhwan al-Safa so

according to him reason was at the highest level and love was inferior to it. On the other hand Rumi, a sufi rather than a philosopher developed his own intellectual vocabulary. He believed in the supremacy of love over the reason and said that lovers are selfless and, unlike the philosophers fearful of death, dies to be drowned. Rumi says that the rationalists have wooden legs and he criticizes the four juristic schools for having failed to understand the power of love. In Khusraw's view reason is a gift from God and a means of understanding divine secrets and his whole philosophy including cosmogony, ethics, epistemology, politics, prophecy and soteriology is founded upon reason. Dr. Hansberger concluded that when Rumi criticizes reason he is not against the idea of universal reason but that of particular and individual reason, therefore Rumi and Nasir Khusraw are not absolutely different on the question of the place of reason.