

(A Talk on) THE POETRY OF LOVE by RUMI
by J M Jeffrey

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the Poetry of Rumi - the Sufi Master Poet of Love. As you all know, Sufi groups are a mystical branch of Islam and yet Rumi's poetry transcended any religion and was recognized by all. I am going to use selections from the CD compiled by Deepak Chopra, called "*The Gift of Love*". He uses the dulcet tones of various well-known actors to read the poems, which were translated by the American poet, Coleman Barks. I am so grateful for the inspired work of Coleman Barks.

First of all, I will present each of the selected Rumi poems myself, exploring the hidden Sufi symbolism of his verses. Then I shall play *some* but not all of the poems from the CD. I can give you much insight into the story of Rumi's growth, from Sufi philosopher to a Master or Great Sage. And how did he achieve this? - through an experience of great LOVE.

Who was Rumi? His full name was Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī. He was born in the year 1207 in present day Afghanistan, then part of the Persian Empire. When he was 11, his family had to move (due to Mongol invaders) and they eventually settled in Konya in Anatolia, now Turkey. I must add that Rumi was *born* an illumined soul who progressed even further. It was said that when he was only a child, he could communicate with angels and souls who had passed over. His father was a Sufi Teacher & scholar, who was steeped in the ageless wisdom and owned a huge library of books, which took a whole camel train to relocate. He shared this wisdom with his whole community.

For it was the Islamic *Sufis*, who kept alive the writings of the Greek philosophers -- who had all the Gnostic Christian texts we were denied (i.e. all those who inferred that Mary Magdalene was the beloved disciple). And the Sufis also studied Buddhism and Taoism (which Rumi often referred to). Afghanistan was one of the greatest cultural and religious centres along the Silk Road. (Hard to believe isn't it.) It contained Buddhist universities - and was a thriving centre for the Christian Church of the East which stretched from Egypt to Japan. Unlike the Church of the West, this Church was inclusive of other faiths and non-dogmatic. Thus Rumi had *exceptional* opportunities for study and mystical insight.

For example, when Rumi uses the word *God* or *Allah* in his poems, he knew that these words stood for the Divine Light behind all creation. While *Allaha* is an

Aramaic word (the language of Jesus) which denotes the Oneness of All Life, both spiritual and material.

There were several marked **stages in Rumi's life**, which can be portrayed by listening to his poems in the order I have arranged for you. For example:

Firstly, there are poems that could be seen to reflect his early adult life. He started his own Sufi Order at only age 24, after his father's death. He studied law, was a teacher and public speaker, was married with four children and was well-respected.

Secondly, there are poems that reflect his meeting with a Master or Great Sage called **Shams of Tabriz**, when Rumi was 37. I need to add here, that he dictated *all* of his poetry years after this significant meeting. For the memory of this dramatic turning point in his life, was a recurring theme.

Then there is **the last stage of his life**, reflected in poems that reveal how he transformed his devotion to *the significant other*, into a state of personal enlightenment.

I shall begin by reading a poem that reflects his work with his own Sufi Order. As you all know, Sufis do a whirling dance to music. Have you seen photos of Sufis with large brown wool hats? One hand up and one down. Whirling Dervishes still perform this dance which represents the turning of the universe. They become the STILL POINT in a turning world. The word Dervish means doorway or portal to the cosmos. While they are dancing, their leader (in this case Rumi) sings religious and mystical chants. *All of his poems were sung spontaneously and they rhymed!* On the CD you can hear a Persian singer in the background. Rumi was followed around by a band of scribes, the main one being Husam. (Thank you very much Husam for this great legacy.)

Here is the first poem about a moment of transcendence while Rumi was dancing. As I am reading the verses, I shall suggest *possible* meanings for the symbols (based on my understanding and experience).

"In my hallucination (*or vision*) I saw my beloved's flower garden. (*In Sufi poetry the Beloved is God and the garden is Creation*). In my vertigo, in my dizziness (*the Sufi dance*) in my drunken haze (*or intoxication with beauty*) whirling and dancing like a spinning wheel, I saw myself as the source of existence. I was there at the beginning and I was the Spirit of Love (*at one with God or the Divine*) Now I am sober (*back to the mundane*). There is only the hangover (*or the after-effect*), the memory of love and only the sorrow.

I yearn for happiness, I ask for help, I want mercy. And my love (or inner voice) says. Look at me and hear me, because I am here just for that." Then the poem continues with Jesus speaking. Rumi wrote many poems about him.

"I am your moon (*a reflection of The Divine Light*) and your moonlight too. I am your flower-garden (*beauty*) and water too (*nourishment*). I have come all this way, eager for you, without shoes or shawl. I want you to laugh, to kill all your worries. To love you, to nourish you. Oh sweet bitterness, I will soothe you and heal you. I will bring you roses. I too have been covered with thorns."

PLAY TRACK from CD *The Gift of Love* called *Bittersweet*.

The interpreter Coleman Barks captured the essence of Rumi, writing in free form verse and not in rhyme, like Rumi did, which was impossible in English.

To the next poem: "There is some kiss we want for our whole lives - the touch of spirit on the body. The sea water (*or the Ocean of Love*) begs the pearl (*the product of transformation*) to break its shell. And the Lily (*or the flowering of the soul*), how passionately it needs some wild darling (*or loved admirer*).... At night I open the window (*of my mind*) and ask the Moon to come, to press its face against mine (*to be at one with a reflection of the Divine Light*). To breathe into me. Close the language door (*to words*) and open the Love Window (*to God*). The moon won't need the door, only the window (*to the soul*)."

PLAY TRACK - *There is Some kiss we Want*.

The next poem (which uses the metaphor of the weather) suggests the times when Rumi unexpectedly unites with the Oneness of all Life, but it is not yet a permanent state of mind. Coleman Barks said that the word *You* is a very poor English translation for a Persian word, which means *everything* plus God.

"When it's cold and raining, *You (God in everything)* are more beautiful. The snow brings me even closer to your lips. The inner secret, that which was never born (*the un-manifest at the heart of all*) *You* are that freshness. And I with You now. I can't explain the goings or the comings. You (*God consciousness*) enter suddenly and I am nowhere again, inside the majesty (*of divine glory*). This Persian word for *You* stands for you, me and all life Itself.

PLAY TRACK - *The Freshness of the weather*.

We come to the turning point in Rumi's life when at 37, he met a Master, called Shams of Tabriz, who was much older than Rumi and became his pathway to God or the Divine. Shams was a Dervish, who taught Rumi the disciplined twirling dance as a mystical path. The next poem describes the *total awakening* to the Divine that changed Rumi forever -- but also shattered his former way of life. Years after this meeting, the following poem was one of the thousands that spontaneously poured from Rumi's lips, as the fruit of his soul-union with Shams.

The word *passion* in his poems means *many* things, but mostly it means *a fierce devotion*. As I read this poem, think of when John the Baptist first met Jesus, as being a very similar event to Rumi's meeting with Shams.

"From the beginning of my life, I have been looking for Your face (*or the Divine*), but today I have seen it (*reflected in Shams of Tabriz*). Today I have seen the charm, the beauty, the unfathomable grace of the face that I was looking for. Today I have found you. And those who laughed and scorned me yesterday (*as with John the Baptist*) are sorry that they were not looking as I did.

"I am bewildered by the magnificence of your beauty and wish to see you with a hundred eyes. My heart has burned with passion (*a fierce devotion*) and has searched forever for this wondrous beauty that I now behold. I am ashamed to call this love human and afraid of God to call it divine. Your fragrant breath, like the morning breeze, has come to the stillness of the Garden (*of creation*). You have breathed new life into me. I have become your sunshine and also your shadow. (*For later, there was a shadow-side after-effect from this experience.*)

"My soul is screaming in ecstasy. Every fibre of my being is in love with you. Your effulgence (*or light*) has lit a fire in my heart. You have made radiant for me the Earth and Sky. My arrow of love (*the search for Self-Realization*) has arrived at the target. I am in the house of Mercy (*the temple of the Light*) and my heart is a blaze of prayer."

PLAY TRACK - *I was Looking for Your Face.*

Isn't that beautiful. The next poem could be seen to apply to when Rumi tried to describe his subsequent states of bliss of working with Shams at their Sufi centre every day.

"Both light and shadow are the dance of Love. Love has no cause (*it just is*). It is the 'astrolog' of God's secrets (*like the movement of the stars*). Lover and loving are inseparable and timeless. (*The Lover is often a metaphor for a disciple.*) Although I may try to describe Love, when I experience it, I am speechless. Although I may try to write about Love, I am rendered helpless. My pen breaks and the paper slips away at the inevitable place where lover, loving and loved are One. Every moment is made glorious by the light of Love."

In this next poem, Rumi playfully imagines that his God-Self speaking to him. Creative imagination was a very powerful tool that Rumi used to attune to the Universal Self. This a part of strong Sufi tradition, also used by the Master **Ibin El Aribi** of Spain. They believed there was a sympathetic relationship between the archetypal world of the angels (light beings) and our world. For example Rumi chanted this:

This is his Higher Self saying:

"I am your *Lover (in this case the Divine Self)*. Come to my side. I will open the gate to your Love. Come settle with me. Let us be neighbours to the stars. You have been hiding so long, endlessly drifting in this Sea of My Love. (*The Ocean is also a Taoist symbol for Oneness, well known to Rumi.*) Even so, you have always been connected to me, concealed, revealed, in the known and in the un-manifest. I am Life itself. You have been a prisoner of a little pond. I am the Ocean and its turbulent flood. Come merge with me. Leave this world of ignorance. Be with Me. I will open the gate to your Love."

PLAY TRACK - *I will Open the Gate to Your Love.*

The following poem *could* apply to Rumi's close connection with Shams, for which he began to be heavily censored by his family and pupils. No doubt he was neglecting his other responsibilities, temporarily.

"My heart is burning with love. All can see this flame. My heart is pulsing with passion (*or devotion*) like waves on an Ocean. My friends have become strangers and I'm surrounded by enemies. Yet I'm free as the wind - no longer hurt by those who reproach me. I'm at home, wherever I am and in the room of Lovers (*the disciples of the Sufi Order*) I can see even with closed eyes the beauty of dancers (*his dervish dance*). Behind the veils, intoxicated with Love, I too dance the rhythm of this moving world. I have lost my senses in my world of Lovers (*disciples*).

PLAY TRACK - *My Heart is Burning with Love.*

The next poem speaks of the immersion of the mind with that of the Master. "The lover (*in this case Shams*) asked his beloved (*disciple*) do you love *yourself*, more than you love me. (*This is a question about self-respect.*) The lover (*Rumi*) replied. I have died to myself and I live for you. I have disappeared from myself and my attributes. I am present only for you. I have forgotten all my worries, but from knowing you, I have become a Scholar. (*A scholar in the Islamic tradition is a person of profound wisdom.*)

"I have lost all my strength (*previous certainties*) but from your power I am able. I love myself. I love you. (*His previous approach to life was in the process of being washed away.*)

PLAY TRACK 7 - *I have Died to Myself.*

We now come to a significant event in Rumi's life, when he lost contact with Shams of Tabriz in the year 1247, when he was 40. No doubt he had thought they would work together forever, but it lasted three years. It is thought that his own disciples hounded Shams away, due to jealousy and disagreements over Dervish dancing. Many accounts say that Shams was killed. Others say that a Great Sage of the stature of Shams would have just left the city. Rumi was thrown into a state of profound and soul-shattering grief, similar to how the disciples of Jesus must have felt after his death. Rumi left his family and went in search of Shams in nearby countries. Later, his sons brought him back home.

This next poem would have been sung later by Rumi, when he remembered this time of tremendous grief.

"My heart is on fire. In my madness I roam the desert. The flames of my passion (*or emotion in this case*) devour the wind and the sky. My cries of longing, my waves of sorrow are tormenting my soul. You wait patiently, looking into my intoxicated eyes. You accept my passion with the serenity of love. You (*in this case Shams*) are a Master of Existence. One day, I shall be a Lover like you" (*or Master of the personality*). (*This was certainly true, as he did transcend fear, loss and attachment.*)

PLAY TRACK 8 - *My heart is on Fire.*

Here is a poem in the same vein: "My love for you has driven me insane (*i.e. deep into the subconscious*). I wander aimlessly in the ruins of my life. My old self a stranger to me. Because of your love I have broken with my past.

"My longing for you keeps me in this moment. My passion gives me courage. I look for you in my innermost being. I used to read the myths of Love *(from an intellectual viewpoint)*. Now I have become the mythical Lover *(who goes beyond ego and the intellect)*."

He was thrown into an abyss in the subconscious. Then he had to integrate what Shams represented to him, into his own life independently - i.e. turn the mirror to the soul around, to see the glory of God within himself.

This is what happens whenever we fall "in love". Another person becomes a mirror to our Soul, when we project the powerful energy of the Self onto them. Yet it can be tragic to turn a person into a god. Therefore it has to develop into a more-mature *conscious* love, or it will cause us suffering. The less-conscious the projection of the Self onto another, the greater the suffering. The more centred and conscious our love, the greater our happiness. This is why Rumi said that "the wailing of broken hearts is a doorway to God."

PLAY TRACK 9 - *The Mythical Lover.*

The following poem reflects a state of jaded resignation, perhaps when he returned home with his sons.

"In the orchard and rose garden *(the beauty of life)* I long to see your face. In the taste of sweetness I long to kiss you. *(He longed for a human connection despite his visions.)* In the shadows of passion *(in this case, suffering)* I long for your love. *(His reaction of depression and self-pity was profound.)* Oh Supreme Lover *(or Master)*, let me leave aside my worries. The flowers are blooming *(the fruit of experience)* in the exultation of your spirit. *(Remember he could communicate consciously on the inner planes.)* By Allah *(God)* I long to escape the prison on my ego and lose myself in the mountains and the desert. These sad and lonely people tire me *(those around him)*. I long to revel in the drunken frenzy of your love *(the ecstatic state of Sama or dervish dancing)* and feel the strength *(or energy)* in my hands.

"I'm sick of mortal games. I long to see the Light. With lamps in hand, the sheiks and mullahs roam the dark alleys of this town not finding what they seek. *(This could mean those who become lost in the alleys of blind religious faith.)* You are the essence of the essence *(of God)*, the intoxication of Love *(for the Divine)*. I long to sing your praises, but stand mute with the agony of wishing in my heart."

No other poem I have ever read could describe a state of sadness with such profundity. Next is a poem which describes Rumi talking to Shams in spirit.

"In the early dawn of happiness (*a memory on waking up*) you gave me a kiss, so that I would *wake up* to this morning of *Light (i.e. leave self-pity and depression behind)*. I tried to remember during the night what I had dreamt, but the Moon (*the subconscious*) took me away. It lifted me up to the firmament (*into God consciousness*) and suspended me there. I slowly recalled everything. You awoke me (*healed me*) with your touch (*of spirit*) though I cannot see your hand. You are hidden from me, but it is You that keeps me alive."

Rumi's healing process continued, mostly by using the Sufi spiritual practice of *Calling Dialogue*, i.e. using creative imagination to call to the Masters and chant a response. They taught (from the Sufi Master Ibin el Arabi onwards) that the inner worlds are connected sympathetically to ours - one influencing one another. Here is an example:

The following poem could refer to any of the Great Masters, The Christ or the Buddha and so on - those who unite opposites within their being. This poem doesn't need any comments or explanations.

"You come to us from another world, from beyond the stars and the Void of Space - transcendent, pure, of unimaginable beauty, bringing with you the Essence of Love. You transform all who are touched by you. Mundane concerns, troubles and sorrows dissolve in your presence, bringing joy to ruler and ruled, peasant and king. You bewilder us with your Grace. All evil is transformed into goodness. You are the Master Alchemist. You light the fire of Love in earth and sky, in the heart and soul of every being. Through your Love, existence and non-existence merge, all opposites unite, all that is profane becomes sacred again."

PLAY TRACK - *The Alchemy of Love.*

The following poem is about God or Allah/Allaha:

"Is it your face that adorns this Garden? (*of Manifestation*) Is it your fragrance that intoxicates this garden? Is it your spirit that has made his brook (*or personality*) a River of Wine? (*someone in harmony with universal flow*). Hundreds have looked for You and died searching in this garden (*due to false paths that lead to danger*). They died searching in this garden where you hide behind the scenes.

"But this pain is not for those who come as Lovers (*or disciples*). You are easy to find here. You are in the breeze (*the flow of spirit*) and in this River of Wine (*or union with the Self*)".

It goes without saying, that Rumi did not drink alcohol and these are archetypal universal symbols, also used by Jesus when he said he was *the fruit of the Vine*.

PLAY TRACK - *God behind the Scenes.*

The following poem could reflect the *last stage of Rumi's life* when he is ready to leave personal attachments behind and merge with the Universal Self.

"The sky was lit by the splendour of the Moon, so powerful I fell to the ground (*the mind being irradiated by a powerful image*). Your love has made me strong. I am ready to forsake this worldly life and surrender to the magnificence of your being."

This second-last poem is about the total surrender of the personality to God consciousness.

"Die, die in this Love. If you die in this love, your soul will be revealed. Don't fear the death of that which is known. If you die to the temporal, you will become timeless.(*St. Francis also said this.*)

"Cut off those chains that hold you prisoner to the world of attachment. Die to the deathless (*the flow of manifestation*) and you will become eternal. Come out of this cloud (*of confusion*). When you leave the cloud you be the effulgent Moon (*a mirror to the Light*). Die to the din and noise of mundane concerns. In the silence of Love, you will find the spark of Life."

PLAY TRACK - *Die in this Love.*

The last poem is about those who have become Adepts or Lights of the World.

"The room (*of the Sufi Order*) has become a dancer at this Festival of Love. This dance of Light. This sacred blessing. This divine love beckons us to a world beyond that only Lovers (*or Disciples*) can see, with their eyes of fiery passion (*devotion*). They are the chosen ones who have surrendered. Once they were particles of Light. Now they are the radiant Sun (*of Truth*). They have left behind the world of deceitful gaze (*illusions and self-*

deceptions) They are the privileged Lovers (*Adepts or Masters*) who create a new world with their eyes of fiery passion (*dedication*).

PLAY TRACK - *The Privileged Lovers*.

As I final comment, I would like to add that when Rumi died at age 67 in the year 1273, he left behind a legacy of thousands of poems, most of which have never been translated into English. At his funeral, people came from all over the world, from every religion, to pay homage to him. His grave in Konya, Turkey is a sacred place or shrine where people go to pray or meditate.

Eleven years after his death, his son Sultan Valad began organizing the Mevlevi Sufi Order that followed Rumi's teachings and practised Sama or ecstatic dance. Thus it happened after all. This Order has been presided over by members of Rumi's family for over eight-hundred years. Now both men and women in Turkey perform this dance of devotion and Rumi's poetry has been spread by Coleman Barks (and others) all over the Western world. Coleman Barks actually met a remarkable Sufi teacher who also had the gift of spontaneous poetic utterance, following in this tradition.

Rumi is the top-selling poet in the world and likely to remain so for centuries to come. The year 2007 was designated by UNESCO to be The Year of Rumi.

Thus we have a lot to thank Shams of Tabriz for. The work of the Great Ones is always priceless and we still share in his ongoing treasure-house of Love.

THANK YOU

The CD, *The Gift of Love*, compiled by Deepak Chopra (new and used) is available from Amazon.com.

There is also the Andrew Harvey book on *The Way of Passion, a Celebration of Rumi* and another Audio CD called *The Rumi Symphony*, with music and beautifully read poetry by Andrew Harvey (a devotee).

The poems by Coleman Barks, have been praised in the East and the West for their simplicity and deep insight into Rumi's beauty of soul. His many books can be found on Amazon.com You can also view videos of Coleman Barks reading the poetry, with background music, on the internet.