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The Journey Of The Soul: Rumi's Interpretation Of Soul's Longing For Divinity

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Abstract

Rumi a great Persian mystic poet who has influenced a majority of Muslim World with his widely accepted and recognized mystical thoughts and Sufi literature. He is mostly famous for his masterpiece “Masnavi-Ma’navi”. One of the main themes of Masnavi is “loss of the beloved” and the joy that its reunion will bring. Rumi has started his Masnavi with a commentary on the most extraordinary and beautiful connection between ones’ soul and origin of the soul(divinity). Connection of soul and self-negations are also one of the main themes of Holy Quran and teachings of Holy Prophet (SAW) are discussed in this article. In his writings, Rumi talks about how a soul feels the pain and agony of separation from its origin and how a soul longs to finally reconnect back to the divine nature. In order to best describe the nature of soul, Rumi symbolizes it with a flute who has been separated from its root and the melancholy it produces is a description of its longing and agony. Rumi emphasis on the fact that there is no point of a humans’ physical body. Everything that a person does involves its soul. And unlike human body and mind, soul never gets tired or never forgets anything. After presenting an extremely exceptional metaphor, Rumi also suggests a way out for soul in order to finally reconnect with divinity. The only way according to Rumi is developing a strong connection with Divine nature. And in order to do that, one has to build a connection with the creation of divinity; humanity. Rumi talks about how all humans are from the same origin yet there are so many barriers among them. In order to overcome these barriers, one has to have openness and humility. According to Rumi, one should get lost to find every possible way to reconnect with divinity.

Key words: Sufi, Persian, poet, soul, divinity, humanity, connection, nature, reunion, mind.

It is clear that love and its qualities have been the subject of most of the Sufi literature. It cannot be decided on the basis of any kind of critical principles that Fariduddin Attar's logic, Maulana Rumi's Masnavi or Ahmad Ghazali's biography related to love and its qualities are only the expression of the heat of their passion. The real fact is that these personalities have gained awareness of the ups and downs of the spiritual moments of love.

The theme of one's soul and its origin; “Alam e Arwah” has been presented and talked about a lot in Holy Quran and the concept of reunion with divinity has also been presented in teachings of Holy Prophet (SAW). The only way towards a path of reunion with Allah Almighty which is taught to us by Holy Prophet (SAW) is self-negation and this is the main theme of Masnavi of Maulana Rumi as well.

There have been different styles of love described by the Saints but the new angle with which Maulana Rumi has presented the moments and conditions of love in his Masnavi is not found in any civilization of the world. Rumi presents an entirely unique yet mind blowing the longing of beloved as a result of its separation from its origin. Philosophy of Rumi on soul is presented as under in light of his Masnavi Ma’navi.

Introduction of Rumi

Rūmī, in full Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, also called by the honorific Mawlānā, (born c. September 30, 1207, Balkh, died December 17, 1273, Konya, the greatest Sufi mystic and poet in the Persian language, famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic Maṣnāvī-yi Ma’navī, which widely influenced mystical thought and literature throughout the Muslim world. After his death, his disciples were organized as the Mawlawiyyah order ¹.

Much attention was paid to the education and training of Maulana Rumi from his childhood and he was adorned with all kinds of knowledge and arts because many of his books were exemplary in the external and internal sciences. Rumi's poetry mostly influenced Persian and Turkish literature but Greek history also shows traces of Rumi's art.

An American orientalist William C Chittick says about Rumi:

Rumi attributes his self-control and abstinence from worldly desires as qualities attained by him through the guidance of Muhammad. Rumi states, "I 'sewed' my two eyes shut from [desires for] this world and the next – this I learned from Muhammad." ²

At a young age, Maulana Rumi's fame reached far-off areas. During this time, the Shah of Rome, Alaaddin Kaikubad, heard of his fame and invited him to come to Rome. Thus, Maulana reached Rome and stayed there. Maulana Rumi is one of those great personalities whose heart was filled with the grief of the Ummah and he was eager to be united with the truth throughout his life. During his life, the temptation of the Tatars reached its peak and a large number of Muslims were martyred by the Tatars. Allah Ta'ala had blessed the words of Maulana Rumi. When he would start his speech, thousands of people would gather from all over the Konya just to listen to him.

Meeting of Maulana Rumi with Shah Shams Tabriz:

After meeting with Hazrat Shah Shams Tabriz, the rest of Maulana Rumi's life completely changed and he began his journey in search of divine love. There are several different sayings related to Maulana Rumi's meeting with him and each saying is a complete figure of beauty in itself. One of these sayings is described below.

One day Hazrat Shah Tabriz fell asleep while reciting the Holy Quran after Isha prayer, then in his dream he saw an old man with a long white beard. That elder was standing by his head and saying, "Son! You are now exalted in external and internal knowledge. Allah Almighty wants to take a big job from you for which you have to go to Rome and there is a dervish who needs your guidance. When Hazrat Shah Shams Tabriz woke up from his sleep, he attended the service of his holy mentor Baba Kamaluddin Chandi and narrated his dream to him. After hearing the dream, Hazrat Baba Kamaluddin Chandi said that you should stay for a while. Shah Shams Tabriz kept having the same dream for the next two days. On the third consecutive night, He was visited by the same saint in his dream and he ordered him to go to Rome. After getting permission from Hazrat Baba Kamaluddin Chandi, he immediately started preparations for the journey and left for Rome. After reaching Konya, he started searching for Maulana Muhammad Jalaluddin Rumi. Maulana had great fame in Rome at that time and he was a creative authority. In search of Maulana Rumi, Shah Shams Tabriz reached the bank of a pond where Maulana Rumi was teaching the students of Madrasah. There were some books around. When Shah Shams Tabriz came, he looked at the books and said, "O Jalaluddin, what is this?" He replied that it is "Qeel" (temporary World). Hearing this, Shah Shams picked up all those books and threw them into the pond. All the manuscripts got dissolved in the water. Maulana was very surprised and worried but asked while restraining himself. "What is this?" He said, what you showed was Qeel and what I showed is "Alam e Haal" (Real World) ³.

From here Maulana Rumi entered the present world and this meeting changed his life completely. After that, Maulana Rumi stopped teaching. The teaching circle ended. He stopped fatwa-writing and entered the world in such a way that he became Sultan-ul-Aashiqin and Sultan-ul-Arifin, and then he wrote a Masnavi, which is called the Masnavi of Maulana Rumi, to bring the world to the present.

Maulana Rumi in the influence of Shah Shams Tabriz:

After the meeting with Shah Shams Tabriz, the second part of Maulana Rumi's life begins, which can be compared with the period after the meeting with Laila of Majnu. After this meeting, Maulana Rumi continued to set the goals of true love until his death, and when this journey was completed, he was at the end of his quest to meet his Lord and his voice from the world, and in this state of ultimate love from the world. Leave and meet your real creator.

For months the two mystics lived closely together, and Rumi neglected his disciples and family so that his scandalized entourage forced Shams to leave the town in February 1246. Jalal al-Din was heartbroken, and his eldest son, Sultan Walid, eventually brought Shams back from Syria. The family, however, could not tolerate the close relation of Jalal al-Din with his beloved, and one night in 1247 Shams disappeared forever. In the 20th century it was established that Shams was indeed murdered, not without the knowledge of Rumi's sons, who hurriedly buried him close to a well that is still extant in Konya ⁴. About the end of Shah Shams Tabriz, there are no authentic sayings in history. But what happened to Maulana Rumi after his meeting with Shah Shams and in the end Maulana created Masnavi Ma'nawi is the witness of history itself. Maulana Rumi kept his thoughts through this creation in such a way that the influence of Shah Shams' companionship on Maulana began to be reflected in every poem of the Masnavi and today, with the mention of Maulana Rumi, Shah Shams must be mentioned on everyone's tongue. It comes as a component of Maulana Rumi.

Creation of Masnavi Ma'nawi:

Masnavi is a great poetic achievement of Maulana Rumi which he composed in the last years of his life. It is the essence of Sufi stories, moral teachings and mystical revelations. This book of Maulana has given life to Maulana. The popularity of this book increased to such an extent that all Iranian works were left behind. The total number of verses of Masnavi is 2666 and it is known that Maulana left the sixth book unfinished and said:

باقی این گفته آید بے زبان
درد دل بر کس کو دارو نور جہاں⁵

"The person whose soul will have light.

The rest of the Masnavi will automatically come to his heart."

It means that the last 5 books of Masnavi were so thorough that a person who craves for the right path will definitely understand the right path by reading those five volumes. This above written verse also enlightens the methodology of Maulana's writings. One style of academic and creative writings is to describe each problem separately in one chapter and to collect one type of articles in one place. The second method is to write a story and explain the scientific problems in it from time to time.

The advantage of this second method is that the subjects become mindful and does not become restless. Maulana Rumi has adopted the second method in Masnavi. In this way, a person does not have to complete the Masnavi in order to understand it.

Separation of Soul from its Origin in light of Holy Quran

All the Sufis and Saints who have passed through the history, the purpose of their life has been to reach the end of divine love and the principle of attaining the closeness and love of Allah has always been that one should be extreme in love for Allah.

As Allah Almighty says in Holy Quran:

﴿فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَ يُحِبُّونَ﴾⁶

"Soon Allah will bring a nation whom Allah loves and they love Allah."

The connection of Soul with Allah Almighty has been discussed in the Holy Quran so many times. In fact, it is one of the key themes of Holy Quran. Allah Almighty says about soul:

﴿وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ﴾⁷

And they ask you about the soul. Say: The soul is one of the commands of my lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little.

Allah Almighty also talks about reunion of soul with its origin in Holy Quran which depicts how soul is in the guardianship of Allah Almighty Which He can take back He wants. Allah Almighty says:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾⁸

Every soul must taste of death, then to Us you shall be brought back.

In another verse, Allah Almighty says:

﴿إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾⁹

To Allah is your return, of all (of you), so He will inform you of what you did.

Such verses show that all human beings will return to the Allah Almighty. It is known that the returning can be imagined only when the same person who lived in world, remains and then returns to Allah Almighty. If man had been only a physical body which decays after death, there would not have been a concept of reunion with Allah Almighty. But the question is, whether a person with living body can have a reunion with Allah Almighty or not? Answer to this question is reflected in Masnavi of Maulana Rumi.

Maulana Rumi started his Masnavi with a very beautiful simile in which he has beautifully described the story of the soul's "origin" i.e. the grief of separation from its Creator. The eagerness and restlessness of the soul reflects how much it grieves after being separated from its beloved Lord Almighty. It is likened to a flute and the air passing through the flute is associated with fiery love and this fiery love is constantly burning the soul.

Rumi says:

بشنو از نه چون حکایت می کند
از جدایی ها شکایت می کند
کز نیستان تا مرا ببریده اند
از نفیرم مرد و زن نالیده اند
سینه خواهم شرحه شرحه از فراق
تا بگویم شرح درد اشتیاق
هر کسی کو دور ماند از اصل خویش
باز جوید روزگار وصل خویش
آتش است این بانگ نائے و نیست باد
هر که این آتش ندارد نیست باد
آتش عشقست کاندلر نه فتاد
جوشش عشق است کاندلر می فتاد¹⁰

Listen to the reed how it tells a tale,

complaining of separations

Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed,

my lament, has caused man and woman to moan.

I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold the pain of love-desire.

Everyone who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it.

In every company I uttered my grieving cry;

I consorted with the unhappy and with them that rejoice.

Every one became my friend from his own opinion;

none sought out my secrets from within me.

Maulana has started the "Masnavi" with the description of the flute and the medium of the flute which explains the subjects of mysteries and knowledge. It could not have been created from any other instrument. Maulana has described the nature of the soul and its emotions in a touching manner with the simile of the flute and has told that just as the flute's soulful songs are due to the fact that it is separated from its origin. In this same way, the human soul has separated from the soul of souls, the Absolute Being (i.e. God) and has come to this material world. Therefore, his anxiety and restlessness are also on the same basis and until the soul returns to its origin (God), it will not get peace.

As Allah Almighty says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً﴾¹¹

'Allah will say to the righteous, ' "O tranquil soul! (28) Return to your Lord, well pleased 'with Him' and well pleasing 'to Him'.

The soul is waiting for him until he receives this message, he will not be blessed with peace and contentment and he will continue to express his pain and separation like a flute. This sense of description, which was started by Maulana, is spread throughout Maulana's Masnavi.

From the parable of the flute, one can imagine the life of Maulana, how much he was dedicated in the love of God and how much love he had inside him and how eager he was for his beloved. There is no doubt that the Rumi had found his beloved. But this story of love is strange that whether there is a separation or a unity, the condition of lover remains anxious and this condition is apparently anxiety for the lover, but inwardly a lover feels comfort and peace in it. Maulana Rumi further explains in the flute language that I want to tell my grief every day, why do I cry, what do I miss and why do I miss? I am torn apart and when I find such a chest, then I will tell this story of my pain and desire in front of him. This pain requires the same chest that has itself suffered from a separation in life and whose chest has burst and tasted the pain.

In this speech, the meaning of the chest can also mean one's own chest, that is, no one should think from my moans and cries that I am disgusted with pain or sad, not at all. On the contrary, I wish that my heart would burst even more from the pain, because it is a rule that the lover himself has a special pleasure in the pain of love that he does not want it to fall ¹².

Going forward, the soul explains the reason for its complaint and says that it is the rule of every person that when he is separated from his origin, he looks forward to the reunion with its origin. I too, since I have separated from the world of spirits and those qualities of mine have been lost, I seek the same garden and the season of spring again.

Fire of Love in Soul

Going forward, the flute (spirit) further describes his condition and says that there is such a fire in me, that it burns others and then he describes the great wealth of this love in such a way that the person who is not blessed with this love, they give bad prayers to him that it is good for him to have a bad and evil fate. This is a statement of the glory of love.

"Ishq" is the negation of self and the means of connection with God

The language of all saints and pilgrims who reached the court of this truth and who found connection with it was the language of love. Even if they continue to set goals through behavior, they continue to set goals through asceticism and obedience. They continued to set goals through discipline and mujahidah, but no one was blessed without "Ishq".

The Saints of Allah say that obedience and worship bring the servant to heaven, but love brings the servant to the nearness of this true truth and brings him to the court of God's closeness and blesses him with the wine of his departure ¹³.

Just as two swords cannot exist in one cover, in the same way divine love and "selfishness" cannot exist in one heart. Love of Allah remains or selfishness remains, and the person in whose heart Allah resides not only enjoys the charms of rapture immensely, but also remains a leader in every test of life. Because man listens to his heart and the heart listens to Allah. Then what happens is what Allah wills, but the basic condition for this is the negation of self. As long as the self is not negated, then the closeness of God will not be achieved.

Self-negation in light of sayings of Holy Prophet (SAW)

Holy Prophet saw says about self-negation:

¹⁴ ((يارسول الله وما الجهاد الاكبر، قال: جهاد النفس))

Biggest struggle in with one's own Nafs.

This highlights the importance of self-negation and self-control. As Holy Prophet saw has said that this type of Jihad is superior to other categories which includes fighting the enemies and sacrificing one's life.

Another saying of Holy Prophet saw is:

¹⁵ ((الجهاد جهاد الهوى من منع نفسه هواها فقد استراح من الدنيا وبلاها وكان محفوظا معافى من أذاها))

Biggest struggle is against one own self. A person who controls himself becomes successful in passing the test of his Nafs and save himself from the problems created by Nafs.

Both of these sayings reflect the importance of self-negation because it can lead you towards Allah Almighty as well as it can destroy you if not controlled. This is the essence of Rumi's commentary as well.

Praise of "Ishq" in words of Rumi

Maulana Rumi addresses Ishq at one point and describes his admiration, writes in his stories:

شاد باش ای عشق خوش سودای ما

ای طبیب جمله علتهای ما

ای دواى نخوت و ناموس ما

ای تو افلاطون و جالینوس ما

جسم خاک از عشق بر افلاک شد

کوه در رقص آمد و چالاک شد ¹⁶

Be happy O Ishq, what a good passion you are

You are the doctor of all our diseases

You are also the doctor of our honor and dignity

You are our Plato and Galen

"It was love that took the earthy body to heaven. It was love that made the mountain dance".

Rumi says that if love cures all my diseases, then our greed, greed, self and selfishness are also cured. Further, he describes the greatness of love in an allegorical manner with great beauty.

Allah says in Holy Quran about "Miraj":

﴿سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَرَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ﴾¹⁷

Here, referring to the blessed body of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) by "Body of Dust", it is said that it was love that took a human body to the heavens and beyond the Throne to the place of Qaba -e-Qosain. It is said that it was love that lifted the physical body from this earth to the heights of the heavens. Then in the next verse, it is said that it was love that made the mountain crumble. And in the dance of love, the mountain also came to know.

Here, both the events "Miraj" and "Koh-Tur" in which love is prominently reflected. Love is prominent in both places. The difference is that in one place the beloved is being called. For connection and to another place, the lover himself is going. In Ascension to be separated from the Beloved, the Beloved desired that my Beloved leave all creation behind and come alone to My presence.

In the event of Tur, Love travel towards beloved. He fell in love and the intensity of separation from the beloved was so great that he started dancing with this passion and danced so much that he was crushed. The extremity of the reunion with beloved was so intense that the mountain itself began to dance with this enthusiasm and danced so much that he was left in a state of collapse.

One meaning of this can also be that when the Truth manifested itself in the form of a mountain, it was love that became life and moved the mountain, and love was the reason why Musa (peace be upon him) was willing for this manifestation. He fell down and could not even speak.

Conclusion

From Rumi's words, the true feelings of passion, intense love, innocent and waiting sighs and sighs, longing to see the beloved and meeting the Lord and God are revealed. The kind of commentary Rumi presented gives us direct guidance in light of Holy Quran and practices of Holy Prophet saw. The clarity with which Rumi has described the philosophy of divine love and reunion of soul with Divine nature using various metaphors is unparalleled. This sort of depiction of one's true nature has never been described by anyone before nor it can be presented like that ever again. Rumi had complete faith in his passion for love and expressed love and joy all his life, every page of Masnavi is full of this philosophy of love.

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