

C.

The Discipline of the Way



Allusion has already been made to a basic goal of the spiritual path: the subjugation of the ego by the intellect. Man's fundamental problem is that he does not perceive things the way they truly are. Since he sees form and not meaning, he falls under the spell of the enchantress, this world. But the touchstone world is not at fault, man's vision is defective; he must begin the task of dispelling illusion within himself.

The "sword of religion" is he who enters combat for religion's sake and whose efforts are totally for God. He discerns correct from incorrect and truth from falsehood. But, he first struggles with himself and rectifies his own character traits. As the Prophet said, "Begin with your own self!" (F 171/179)

Everything man can possibly wish to possess is contained within himself. Made in God's image, he embraces all of His Attributes. Man's perfected heart is God's Throne, but his ego is the veil which prevents him from seeing his true Self. Until the veil is lifted, he will remain in ignorance and error.

The great scholars of the age split hairs in all the sciences. They have gained total knowledge and complete mastery of things that have nothing to do with them. But that which is important and closer to him than anything else, namely his own self, this your great scholar does not know. (F 17/30)

Wretched humanity! Not knowing his own self, man has come from a high estate and fallen into lowliness!

He has sold himself cheaply; he was satin, yet he has sewn himself onto a tattered cloak. (M III 1000-01)

If you could only see your own beauty—for you are greater than the sun! Why are you withered and shrivelled in this prison of dust?

Why not become fresh from the gentlenesses of the heart's spring? Why not laugh like a rose? Why not spread perfume? . . .

Why is your Jacob deprived of the lightning of your beautiful face? Hey, oh lovely Joseph! Why remain at the bottom of the well? (D 26412-13, 15)

A basket full of bread sits on your head, but you beg for crusts from door to door.

Attend to your own head, leave aside dizziness! Go, knock upon the heart's door! Why keep on knocking from door to door?

Up to your knees in the stream's water, you are heedless of yourself and seek a drink from this person and that. (M V 1073-75)

Would that you could know yourself for a time! Would that you would see a sign of your own beautiful face!

Then you would not sleep in water and clay like an animal: You would go to the house of joy of all lovely spirits.

You would travel to your every far corner to make yourself manifest, for a Hidden Treasure has remained concealed within you!

Were you only this body, you would have no news of the spirit; were you only this spirit, you would rest happily within it.

Like others you would make do with good and evil, you would manage with this and that—if, that is, you were only this and that.

Were you only one stew, you would have a single flavor; were you only one pot, you would boil in just one way.

Were you to be purified of this churning agitation, you would reside on top of the heavens like those who are pure.

To every image of your own imagination you say, "Oh, my spirit, my world!" Were these images to disappear, you yourself would be the spirit and the world.

Enough, for your words have become intellect's shackle! If not for words, you would be nothing but tongue, like the Universal Intellect.

Enough, for knowledge is a veil upon knowledge—if you knew that you are the King, why would you remain the interpreter? (D 3003)

1. SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Rūmī does not discuss explicitly the everyday discipline and rule followed by the Sufis on the spiritual path. He describes the fruits of the inward transformation that man undergoes in great detail, but he does not give precise instructions—as might be given, for example, in a manual on Yoga—concerning the spiritual practices which help to bring about this transformation. Such instructions were only transmitted orally from master to disciple, and even systematic works on Sufi practice have little to say about actual “techniques.”

However this may be, a great deal may be gleaned from Rūmī's works about the general outline of the discipline followed by himself and his devotees. In general, Sufi practice begins with the performance of the ritual injunctions of the Sharī'ah or Divine Law, which is followed by all Moslems. In other words, the Sufis take for granted man's obligation to perform the “pillars” of Islamic practice, such as the five daily prayers, the fast during Ramadan, etc. These things, after all, are the Sunnah or Wont of the Prophet, and as he said, “The Way is my acts.” But the Sufis do not limit themselves to those elements of the Prophet's Sunnah codified in the Sharī'ah. They emphasize a deeper understanding of the meaning of the ritual, as opposed to its form; and they add other practices recommended by the Koran and the Prophet but not made encumbent upon all believers. In this connection the fundamental Sufi practice, for Rūmī as for all Sufi masters, is the “remembrance” (*dhikr*, *yād*) of God, which is urged in numerous Koranic verses and prophetic sayings.

One of the root meanings of the word *dhikr* is “to mention,” and the “remembrance of God” referred to in the Koran signifies equally the “mention”—or the “invocation”—of God's Name. As taught by the Prophet and as handed down through the chains (*silsilah*) of Sufi masters, “remembrance” is the systematic repetition of one of God's Names with the aim of achieving constant awareness of Him. At the highest stages of the spiritual path, the remembrance, “he who remembers” (*dhākir*) and “He who is remembered” (*madhkūr*) are one and the same, for no multiplicity remains. In short, remembrance or invocation is the central spiritual technique of Sufism, but always under the guidance of a shaykh, who alone can grant the disciple the right and the spiritual receptivity to invoke the Name of God in a

systematic fashion. Regular invocation of a Name of God without a shaykh's permission involves an affirmation of the desires of the ego and the sin of pride, and no positive result can be achieved on such a basis.

All spiritual discipline assumes faith on the part of him who practices it. In Arabic, the word "faith" (*īmān*) derives from a root signifying "to become secure." In the Moslem consciousness, faith is connected primarily with knowledge and only secondarily with the will and the emotions. As we have already seen, Rūmī describes the "believer"—*mu'min*, "he who has faith"—as dominated by the intellect and irradiated by the Light of God. So "faith" and "belief" have none of the overtones of irrationality connected with the word "belief" in English. What Moslems understand by it, as can be seen in the passages quoted below, is "becoming secure in the knowledge of God." It is the beginning of certainty.

A man of faith must practice his convictions. For Rūmī, this practice is the "Greater Holy War," a term derived from the famous saying of the Prophet when he returned to Medina from one of the early battles: "I have returned from the lesser holy war to the Greater Holy War." One should note here the close relationship between the following terms, all of which are derived from the same root: *jihād* ("holy war"), *mujāhadah* ("spiritual combat"), *jahd* ("effort") and *ijtihād* ("striving"). Linguistically the second term bears practically the same meaning as the first, since they are two different forms of the same verbal noun. But as a technical term in Sufism "spiritual combat" is employed synonymously with "ascetic practice" (*riyāḍat*) to denote all the practices the disciple undertakes on the way of self-purification and spiritual realization, whereas "holy war" refers to both the outward and inward war against the unbelievers, or spiritual practice in a more general sense. The third and fourth terms denote in a still more general sense the striving and personal initiative necessary on the Way.

Among the specific acts of spiritual warfare and ascetic practice which Rūmī refers to are companionship with the Sufis, reduced intake of food, fasting, invocation/remembrance, and nightly vigil. Like so many other Sufis, Rūmī is well known for his own practice of the last of these, and he wrote many poems of his *Dīwān* praising it and encouraging others to practice it. At nighttime, while others sleep, one can be alone with God and devote one's full attention to Him.

Without doubt man is compounded of a body that is base, base, base; and a spirit that is noble, noble, noble. God the Exalted brought these two together through His perfect Power. A hundred thousand wisdoms are manifested from that noble spirit, and a hundred thousand darknesses from this gross body. That is why God said to the angels, See,

I am creating a mortal of clay. When I have shaped him and breathed My Spirit into him, fall you down, prostrating yourselves to him (XXXVIII 72-3). He connected the body to dark clay and the spirit to the breath of His own Spirit, so that the light and divine Breath would make this dark clay its instrument for righteousness, justice, and guarding God's Trust; so that it might be a means of salvation, elevation, and high degrees. The purpose was not that the dark clay, through its greed for the light of *I breathed My spirit into him*, should make the lamp its instrument for treachery and theft.

When a thief comes with a lamp,
he takes the better goods.

On the contrary, that lamp and candle of the Breath-Spirit should illuminate the clay of the body with the light of religion and hold it back from its greed for clay, ignorance, and heaviness. "So he whose intellect dominates his sensuality is higher than the angels, and he whose sensuality dominates his intellect is lower than the beasts." (MK 95: 99/189-190)

Someone asked what is more excellent than the ritual prayer.

The master replied that one answer is the spirit of the ritual prayer, as already explained in detail (v. F 11-12/24). A second answer is that faith is better than the ritual prayer. For the prayer must be performed five times a day, while faith is continual. The prayer may be omitted for a valid excuse, and in certain circumstances it may be postponed. This is another superiority of faith: It cannot be omitted for any excuse, and under no circumstances may it be postponed. Faith without the prayer is beneficial, but there is no benefit in the prayer without faith, as for example in the case of hypocrites. Moreover, in every religion the ritual prayer is different, but faith does not change in any of them—its inward states, its kiblah, and so forth are all the same. (F 32/43)

One of the chief disciples said: In former times, the unbelievers worshiped idols and prostrated themselves to them. Today we do the same thing. We go before the Mongols and prostrate ourselves and show all kinds of respect to them. Then we consider ourselves Moslems! And we have many other idols within ourselves, such as greed, self-will, spite, and envy, and we obey them all. Therefore, outwardly and inwardly we act the same as the idolworshippers, but we consider ourselves Moslems!

The master answered: But there is one more thing. Since all these things come into your mind, they are

bad and cannot be approved of. But without doubt, the eye of your heart has seen some tremendous, ineffable, and inscrutable thing that lets you see these things as ugly and shameful. Salty water appears salty to someone who has drunk fresh water. "Things become clear through their opposites." So God has placed the light of faith in your spirit, which then sees these things as ugly. After all, they appear ugly in relation to something beautiful. If this is not the case, why do not others have this pain? Why are they happy in what they are doing and say, "What we have is the important thing"? (F 77/89)

Do you not see that, at the time of Pharaoh, when Moses' staff became a serpent and the staffs and cords of the sorcerers became serpents, he who had no discernment saw them all in the same light and made no distinction? But he who had discernment understood the difference between truth and sorcery. So he became a believer through discernment. Hence we understand that faith is discernment. (F 146-147/155)

The believer is he who knows that behind this wall there is Someone who is aware of every single one of our states. He sees us, even if we do not see Him. For the believer this has become a certainty. In contrast another person says, "No, this is only a tale," and has no faith. The day is coming when God will box his ears and he will be sorry. He will say, "Alas! I said an evil thing! I was wrong! It was indeed all He, but I denied Him!"

For instance, you are playing the rebeck and know that I am behind the wall. For certain you will keep on playing. You will not stop, for you are a rebeck-player. After all, the purpose of this ritual prayer is not that you should stand and bow and prostrate yourself all day long. Its purpose is that you should possess continuously that spiritual state which appears to you in prayer: Whether asleep or awake, writing or reading, in all your states you should never be empty of the remembrance of God; rather, you should be one of those who are constantly at their prayers (LXX 23). (F 174/182-183)

You say, "Night and day I perform the ritual prayer." How is it, oh brother, that your words themselves are not a ritual prayer? (D 31532)

Although the ritual prayer is an excellent act, its spirit and meaning are more excellent than its form, just as man's spirit is more excellent and more subsistent than his form; for man's form does not remain, but his spirit does. In

the same way, the form of the ritual prayer does not remain, but its meaning and spirit do, just as God has said: *Those who are constantly at their prayers* (LXX 23). . . .

Thus the jurispudent explains the form of the ritual prayer: "You begin it with 'God is greatest' and you end it with 'Peace be upon you.'" But the Sufi explains the spirit of the prayer: "Ritual prayer is union with God such that none knows him who performs it but God Himself." The precondition for the form of the prayer is purification with water; but the precondition for prayer's spirit is that you turn your eyes and heart into blood for forty years through the spiritual combat of the Greater Holy War, and that you pass beyond seventy veils of darkness and come alive through the Life and Existence of God. (MK 19: 23/66-67)

The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual combat. The first spiritual combat they undertake in their quest is the killing of the ego and the abandonment of personal wishes and sensual desires. This is the Greater Holy War. (F 130/140-141)

The suffering of that world is beyond the limits of description; compared to that, all suffering in this world is easy.

Happy is he who wages the Holy War, who chastises his body and gives it its due.

Wishing to be delivered from the suffering of that world, he assumes the painful burden of worship in this world. (M II 2472-74)

This one is the Greater Holy War, that other the lesser; both are the work of heroes like Rustam and 'Alī.¹⁶

They are not the work of him whose intellect and sobermindedness jump from his body at the twitch of a mouse's tail.

A person like that should be far from the lines of battle and the spears, like women. (M V 3802-04)

Your ego is causing your sins to increase; it used to be a worm—now it has become a dragon.

By night a corpse, it eats unlawful food; by day its belly full, it thieves and talks nonsense.

Go, seek justice from a prince, a standard bearer, a man of vision.

The land is never empty of God's caliph: How could there be creatures without a Lord?

The world is ill in its confusion, without justice, punishment, or a banner of authority.

The final medicine for the world's illness and malady is the sword.

The time for the Greater Holy War has come!
Arise, oh Sufi! Enter the battle!

Cut the throat of sensuality with hunger! Fret not over stew!

The dervish gives away his body and spirit:
This is the principle of every generous act.

Place them in the fire, for fire is an alchemy that transforms the unripe. (D 36113-22)

Bounty for the body makes you unripe, but the body's affliction matures you. Until you undergo the affliction of religion, you will not win the good fortune of faith. (D 25928)

Only godfearingness, religion, and piety are of any use: Through them you gain prosperity in the two worlds. (M VI 264)

Vileness, evil, and bad moral qualities veil the human substance. Removing these veils is impossible without a great deal of spiritual combat. Acts of spiritual combat are of many kinds, the greatest of which is mixing with companions who have turned their faces toward God and their backs toward this world. No act of spiritual combat is more difficult than to sit with sound companions, for the very sight of them wastes away the ego and annihilates it. That is why it is said, "When a snake sees no human being for forty years, it becomes a dragon"—in other words, when man sees no one who can cause his evil qualities to waste away. (F 234/241)

Man must cleanse all ulterior motives from his faculty of discernment and seek companions in religion. "Religion" is to recognize companions. (F 8/20)

Go, oh heart, go with the caravan! Go not alone over the stages of the way, for pregnant Time gives birth to temptations. (D 24227)

In short, be a companion of the congregation—like a sculptor, carve a companion even out of stone,

For the caravan's multitude and throng will break the backs and spears of the highwaymen. (M II 2150-51)

Whoever wants to sit with God, let him sit in the presence of the saints.

If you cut yourself off from their presence, you will be lost, a part without your whole.

If the devil separates you from the noble saints, he will find you without friends and devour your head.

To travel one instant without the congregation, even for a single span, results from Satan's deception—know this well! (M II 2163–66)

Whether we speak of joy or heartache, let us sit as a congregation and speak together.

Should our companion travel far, we will do the same; should he move less, so will we.

Let us and our companions have the same heart and breath and attack Rustam's battlelines like fire!

Though we be men, traveling alone we will achieve only lamentation and mourning, like women.

If we go on the hajj without companions, we will surely not reach the Kaaba.

We are the strings of a harp—as parts of it, let us sing high and low!

We were all in Adam's congregation, let us return together to Adam!

Our point is hidden—Adam is but an expedient: Let us pitch our tents on the shore of the Greatest Ocean!

When the Solomon of Subsistence comes to His Throne, we will kiss His signet ring a hundred thousand times. (D 1671)

The Prophet said, "The night is long, so shorten it not with your sleep; the day is bright, so darken it not with your sins." The night is long for you to voice your secrets and ask your needs without the disturbance of people. When friends and enemies are not around to annoy you, you can achieve privacy and contentment. God pulls down this veil so that your acts may be protected and guarded from hypocrisy—so that they may be accomplished sincerely for Him alone. In the dark of night, the hypocrite is distinguished from the sincere believer and is disgraced. Things are hidden by night and become disgraced only by daylight. But the hypocrite is disgraced by the night. (F 60/71–72)

By your spirit, leave not the work at hand! Sleep not! Subtract one night from your life and maintain the vigil: Sleep not!

You have slept a thousand nights for the sake of your own self-will: What of a single night? For the sake of the Friend, sleep not!

For the sake of that Gentle Friend who sleeps not by night, do the same! Entrust your heart to Him and sleep not!

Fear that night of illness when, until daytime, you lament and groan piteously, "Oh Lord! Oh Lord!"—sleep not!

That night when Death comes and says, "Welcome!"—by the bitterness of that night, oh traveler, sleep not!

Stones melt before those chains of awesomeness: If you are not a stone, then remember those chains and sleep not!

Although night is a lovely black-skinned saki, take not her cup and fear the morning after: Sleep not!

God said, "At night My friends do not sleep." If you are embarrassed and ashamed at His words, sleep not!

Fear that tremendously terrible night with no refuge: Make night your provision on the way and beware—sleep not!

You have heard that the saints find their desire at night; for the love of that King who satisfies desires, sleep not!

When your kernel dries out, He will give you a fresh kernel—you will become all kernel, oh hopeful man, so sleep not!

I have told you a thousand times: Be silent! But you do not benefit. Bring one and take a hundred thousand in return—sleep not! (D 312)

What hidden sweetness is found in this empty stomach! Man is like a lute, neither more nor less:

When the lute's stomach is full, it cannot lament, whether high or low.

If your brain and stomach burn from fasting, their fire will draw constant lamentation from your breast.

Through that fire you will burn a thousand veils at every instant—you will ascend a thousand degrees on the Way and in your aspiration.

Keep your stomach empty! Lament like a flute and tell your need to God! Keep your stomach empty and speak of the mysteries like a reed!

If you keep your stomach full, it will bring Satan to you at the Resurrection instead of your intellect, an idol instead of the Kaaba.

When you fast, good character traits gather round you like servants, slaves, and retinue.

Continue your fasting, for it is Solomon's seal: Give not the seal to the devil, disrupt not your kingdom.

And if your kingdom and army should flee from you, your army will return, so raise the banner!

The Spread Table has come from heaven to those who fast, for Jesus son of Mary has called it down with his prayers.¹⁷

Await the Table of Generosity in your fast—the Table of Generosity is better than cabbage stew! (D 1739)

2. REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Never be without the remembrance of God, for His remembrance provides the bird of the spirit with strength, feathers, and wings. If your goal becomes actualized completely, that is *Light upon light* (XXIV 35). But in any case, through the remembrance of God your inward will be illuminated and you will achieve a degree of detachment from the world. For instance, look at the bird that wants to fly in heaven: Though it cannot reach heaven, moment by moment it soars farther from earth and higher than the other birds. Or consider a small box of musk whose opening is narrow: You put your hand into it, but you cannot bring out the musk; yet your hand becomes perfumed and your senses refreshed. So too is the remembrance of God: Even if you do not reach His Essence, yet His remembrance has numerous effects upon you. You actualize tremendous benefits by invoking Him. (F 175/183)

The cry of the ghoul is the cry of an acquaintance—an acquaintance that pulls you toward destruction.

It cries out, "Oh caravan! Come this way, here are the waymarks and the road!"

The ghoul mentions each by name—"Oh so-and-so!"—in order to make the traveler join those who have passed away.

Having gone forward, he sees wolves and lions, his life wasted, the road far away, the day late.

Tell us, then, what is that cry of the ghoul? "I want wealth, I want position, I want respect."

If you prevent these cries from rising up within yourself, then you can be initiated into the mysteries.

Invoke God and burn away the cry of the ghouls! Close your narcissuslike eye toward these vultures! (M II 748-754)

Drink the potion of His remembrance and be delivered from thoughts! If you were not to enter into all this strife, oh man pleasing to God, how would you lose? (D 8844)

A naked man jumped into the water to escape the stings of hornets.

The hornets circle around him; when he shows his head, they do not let him go.

The water is God's remembrance, and right now the hornets are the remembrance of this woman and that man.

Hold your breath in the water of remembrance and be patient, so that you may be freed from old thoughts and inward whisperings!

After that, you will gain totally the nature of that pure water from head to foot. (M IV 435-439)

In the outside world, wind sets a tree in motion. In the inside, remembrance rustles the leaves of the heart's tree. (D 9778)

Remembrance makes people desire the journey; it makes them into travelers. (D 33569)

What is sweeter than the remembrance of the Friend? Hey, do not sit idle like this! Invoke! (D 23208)

If you mention His Name in the depths of a well, He will make the well's depths the summit of paradise. (D 8565)

Separation from Him is a well, remembrance of Him a rope: At the bottom of the well a Joseph clings to the rope. (D 19325)

His Name is the Spirit of spirits, His invocation the ruby of the mines. His love is in the soul, He is both our refuge and our hope.

When I mention His Name, good fortune arrives; then the Name becomes the Named—without duality, without hesitation. (D 30700-01)

Where is the knowing, nimble Minstrel of Love—He who plays only for Love, accepting no one's request?

I have died hoping for Him but have not seen Him; I have entered the grave in my desire.

Oh dear friend, if you have seen Him, how good for you! Oh friend, indeed, how good for you!

But if He is hidden like Khidr,¹⁸ alone upon the shores of the sea,

Then oh wind, take our salaam to Him! For my heart is in tumult over Him.

I know that burning salaams take lovers to their Beloved.

Love makes the millwheel of the heavens spin,
not water; Love makes the moon go forward, not feet.

In remembrance, the millwheel of spirits begins
to turn through the water of the eyes.

Remembrance is the noose of union with the
Beloved—be silent, for madness has begun to boil! (D 127)

One of the lesser known dimensions of Sufi practice is the "meditation" (*fikr*) which precedes or accompanies remembrance/invocation. Certain Sufi texts give relatively explicit instruction concerning the practice of meditation, although other terms are more commonly employed, such as *muḥāsabah* ("accounting" one's inward states) or *murāqabah* ("attentive regard"). Rūmī makes passing reference to meditation as a spiritual discipline only under the more general term *fikr* and in relation to its concomitant *dhikr*. He also discusses, in relatively great detail, the transformation of meditation into its Object and of invocation into the Invoked. But this belongs more to the domain of "spiritual psychology" and will be discussed below, beginning with section III, D. In that context, for reasons which will be apparent, the word *fikr* can be translated better as "thought."

As to meditation as a spiritual discipline, the following two allusions to it are worth quoting. The first, a single line from the *Mathnawī*, summarizes all of Sufi discipline; the second, a short ghazal from the *Dīwān*, criticizes those disciples who lack the necessary fervor in their practice.

The Sufis polish their breasts with invocation
and meditation so that the heart's mirror may receive virgin
images (from the Unseen world). (M I 3154)

Brother! To be a lover you must have pain!
Where is your pain? Sincerity and patience require a man.
Where is the man?

How much longer will your invocation be
congealed and your meditation paralyzed? Where are
passionate cries and a yellow face?

I am not looking for the elixir or gold. Where is
a receptive piece of copper? How can even a lukewarm
disciple attain passionate love? What then if he's cold? (D
2206)

3. MAN'S EFFORT AND GOD'S GRACE

To undertake the discipline of the path, man must exert himself to the utmost of his ability. But this must not lead him to overestimate the importance of his own self, since in the last analysis, it is precisely

his self from which he must escape. Hence, while Rūmī constantly urges the spiritual traveler to expend effort on the path, he often reminds him that all of his effort and everything he possesses derives from God's bounty and grace ('ināyat). Man's spiritual aspiration (himmat) must aim high, but he must never forget that God has given him his aspiration. Ultimately God's grace and attraction are all that matter. For, in the words of the Prophet, "A single one of God's attractions equals all the works of jinn and men."

A single mote of grace's shadow is better than a thousand efforts of the obedient servant,

For Satan will remove the bricks of obedience.
Even if there are two hundred bricks, he will make a way for himself. (M VI 3869-70)

Nonexistence is an Ocean and the world foam;
it is Solomon, and the creatures are ants.¹⁹

The Sea's boiling brings the foam into existence,
Iran and Turan are but two of its flecks.²⁰

In this boiling, tell me, what is effort? Why do these patient men boast of their patience?

The Sea has made the ugly beautiful, the waves have made the bitter sweet. (D 20010-13)

Grace is one thing and effort another. The prophets did not achieve the station of prophethood through effort; they found that good fortune through grace. However, God's Wont requires that whoever achieves prophethood live out his life in striving and virtue. This is for the sake of the common people, in order that they might have confidence in the prophets and their words. For the common people are not able to see the inward—they only see the outward. But when they follow the outward, they find access to the inward through the outward's intermediary and blessing. (F 176/183-184)

Indeed, the root is God's attraction; but, oh friend, exert yourself! Do not wait for that attraction!

To abandon exertion is to show disdain: How should disdain be worthy of a spiritual warrior?

Think neither of acceptance nor rejection, oh youth! But keep His commands and prohibitions constantly in view.

Then suddenly the bird of attraction will fly down from its nest—when you see the morning, then you can put out the candle. (M VI 1477-80)

Man imagines that he will be able to drive away his own reprehensible attributes by exertion and holy

war. After striving earnestly and expending his strength and means, he falls into despair. Then God says to him, "You imagined that you would accomplish this task through your own strength, activity, and effort. This is the Wont that I have established: expend everything you have in Our way. Then Our bounty will come to you. In this endless road, We command you to travel with your own feeble hands and feet. We know you cannot traverse this way with feet so feeble. Indeed, in a hundred thousand years you will not arrive at the first waystation. However, when you travel this road until your legs are exhausted and you fall down flat, until you have no more strength to move forward, then God's grace will take you in its arms." (F 78-79/91)

I was asleep and Thou awakened me so that I might sing of Thy eyebrow's curve.

Otherwise, if not for the attraction exerted by Thy Spirit, what has a creature of dust to do with Thy Love? (D 23586-87)

Our desire derives from Thy request—wherever a man travels the Way, he displays God's attraction.

Does dust leap up without wind? Does a ship set sail without the sea? (M V 4216-17)

Everyone sees the Unseen in proportion to the clarity of his heart, and that depends upon how much he has polished it.

Whoever has polished it more sees more—more Unseen forms become manifest to him.

If you say, "Purity is God's bounty," well, this success in polishing the heart also derives from His bestowal.

A man strives and prays to the extent of his spiritual aspiration: *A man shall have to his account only as he has labored* (LIII 39).

God alone bestows aspiration—no wretched beggar aspires to be king. (M IV 2909-13)

The tailor of Time has never sewn a shirt for any man without tearing it to pieces.

See a thousand simple fools in this world, paying Iblis skirts full of gold for pain.

These multicolored flowers that are sweetmeat to your eye—you eat of them and they give you yellow cheeks.

Oh you who have embraced a corpse saying, "My darling!" In the end embracing corpses will freeze body and soul.

Become accustomed to God, for when your appointed time arrives, you will be parted unwillingly from these paintings of the devil.

Stretch not your legs on this sweet carpet of earth, for it is a borrowed bed: Fear the time when they come to roll it up!

Throw not the dice recklessly into this cup of Time! Beware of your opponent, for he is a master at backgammon.

Behold not the dust of the body, gaze upon the mounted horseman of the spirit! Use your vision to search for the horseman in the midst of the dust!

Faces like roses must come from a rosegarden: If there is no rosery, from whence the flowers?

When you see the apple—the chin—know that there must be a tree. This apple serves as an exemplar—it is not to be eaten.

Keep your aspiration high, for if you keep it low, the King's chamberlain will drive you away—"Begone!"

Silence! No more words! Speak without words, like the rational faculty of the angels upon the lapis lazuli roof. (D 869)

4. MEN AND WOMEN

Like other traditional metaphysical and cosmological teachings, Sufism divides the realities of existence into active and passive, male and female, yang and yin.²¹ Thus the Creator is masculine and active in relation to creation, which is female and receptive. Within the created order, the Universal Intellect or "Supreme Pen" (*al-qalam al-'alā*) is active, writing the objects of its knowledge in the Universal Soul or "Guarded Tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*), thereby bringing the individual creatures into existence. Likewise heaven or the spiritual world is active in relation to earth, the material world.

In the view of the intellect, heaven is the man and earth the woman: Whatever the one throws down the other nurtures. (M III 4404)

In the human microcosm, the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are reflected in the intellect and the ego. However, because of man's unique position among creatures, the natural order of things is sometimes distorted or even reversed. In other words, the intellect should be active in relation to the passive ego. The intellect should discern truth from falsehood like a sword and then make decisions

upon the basis of this discernment; and the ego should animate and control the body in keeping with the intellect's directives. In the prophets and saints, who have returned to the human norm or "primordial nature" (*fiṭrat*), this is indeed the situation. But in most people, the ego has assumed an active role as the result of Adam's fall; hence it governs or at least colors the discernment of the intellect. Sensuality predominates and veils man from the intellect's light. If man were to rejoin his primordial perfection, his intellect would once again play a masculine role, and his ego would live in harmony with it as its feminine mate.

If duality were to leave our heart and spirit for
a moment, our intellect would be Adam, our ego Eve. (D
25842)

Since the two sexes reflect these two universal principles of activity and passivity, men have a certain innate affinity with the intellect, while women are more directly colored by the ego. Nevertheless, this does not mean that any given man is more dominated by the intellect than any given woman, since here it is primarily a question of form and not of meaning.

Rūmī's verses often follow the symbolism of this cosmological scheme, so that "men" are symbols of the saints and "women" are symbols of the unbelievers. In other words, he (or she) who is dominated by the intellect is a "man", while he (or she) who is dominated by the ego is a "woman." Hence "men" look at meanings, while "women" are caught up in forms.

The most common application of this symbolism is in the domain of practice and spiritual warfare. Thus "men" are spiritual warriors, while "women" are lacklustre worldlings. High aspiration on the spiritual path is the domain of men, while women sit at home and occupy themselves with mundane affairs. Spiritual combat is the realm of heroes like Rustam and 'Alī, while women prefer the apparent safety of the village and talk of this and that.

Although from this point of view femininity is negative because of its affinity with the ego and worldliness, from another point of view it is positive, since it reflects and displays God's Beauty, Gentleness, and Mercy. I shall allude to this second symbolism at the end of the present section and then refer to it in more detail below (part III, G).

When a woman charges into battle, she will
break no enemy ranks, but her plight will be lamentable.

Though she carries a sword like a lion, her
hand will be trembling.

Alas for him whose intellect is feminine and whose ugly ego is masculine and prepared!

Without question his intellect will be vanquished; he will be taken only toward loss.

Happy is he whose intellect is masculine and whose ugly ego is feminine and helpless!

His partial intellect is masculine and dominant; intelligence has negated the feminine ego. . . .

The animal attributes prevail in woman, because she tends toward colors and scents.

When the ass perceived the color and scent of the pasture, all arguments fled from its head. (M V 2459-64, 66-67)

This "man" and "woman," who are the intellect and the ego, are very necessary for the manifestation of good and evil.

Day and night in this abode of dust these two necessary beings are in war and altercation.

The woman always desires the necessities of the household—reputation, bread, food, and position.

Like a woman, the ego sometimes displays humility and sometimes seeks leadership to remedy its plight.

The Intellect, indeed, knows nothing of these thoughts; its mind contains naught but longing for God. (M I 2618-22)

Know that your ego is indeed a woman—it is worse than a woman, for the woman is a part of evil, your ego the whole. (M II 2272)

By the spirit of all Men! Whoever is not a lover of God is a woman in meaning—behold then what sort of women are women! (D 9584)

Woman is she whose way and goal are color and scent: She is the reality of the ego that commands to evil embodied in the physical constitution of humankind. (D 19431)

The superiority of men over women—oh worshiper of the present!—is that men see better the ends of things. (M IV 1620)

An effeminate man is not suited to fight against the ego; incense and musk are not suited for an ass's arse.

Since women never go out to fight the holy war, how should they engage in the Greater Holy War?

Except rarely, when a Rustam is hidden within a woman's body, as in the case of Mary.

In the same way, women are hidden in the bodies of those men who are feminine from faintness of heart.

In the next world, that womanliness will take on form for everyone who did not become mature in manliness. (M VI 1882-86)

. . . The king gave the girl in marriage to the general; he crushed his own anger and greed to dust.

Though he was feeble in the manliness of asses, he possessed the manliness of the prophets.

To abandon anger, sensuality, and greed is all manliness and a trait of the prophets.

Suppose he has none of the masculinity of asses in his veins. God will still call him "mighty king."

It is better for me to be dead and favored by God than living, but distant from Him and rejected.

Know that this is the kernel of manliness, that other the skin. The first takes to paradise, the second to hell. (M V 4024-29)

Manliness is this manliness, not beard and penis: Otherwise, the ass's implement would be the king of men. (M V 3711)

If you are not a highwayman on the road of religion, then worship not colors and scents like women. (M V 4082)

In the road are many highwaymen, but these companions are women—she who has prettily painted her feet is not worthy for this Way.

The battle drum has been sounded, the army of Love has arrived. Where is a courageous Rustam so that he may set to the task? (D 8826-27)

If you are a man, direct your heart steadfastly toward His awesome Face, for His Face is the kiblāh of Men. (D 4311)

Look upon Love's face in order to gain the attribute of Men—sit not with the cold, for their breath will make you cold as well. (D 30415)

Join us like a man, for you are a lion—why do you let your heart flutter like a woman? (D 29052)

Who is Rustam in this world compared to the battle lines of God's lovers? Every day they ride their stallions joyfully into a sea of blood.

On every side two hundred headless corpses churn in an ocean of carnage, but the lovers dance and laugh like sugar in their splendor and glory, for *Verily unto Him we are returning* (II 156). (D 18700-01)

Marvellous battlefield, marvellous men, each one joyful in his own death! Make your own head the polo ball, then ride out on the field! (D 19402)

Who is this feminine ego that we should strike her with our swords? We will strike Rustam and receive blows from him! (D 16711)

We have learned the profession of manliness from God! We are champions of Love and companions of Muḥammad! (D 17499)

We are that shark for whom the ocean is but a single gulp! We are not men of sopped bread and lentils and the table. (D 17089)

Jump up, let us all dance, clapping our hands! For we have been delivered from women through our manliness! (D 35533)

A child cries for walnuts and raisins, a man of intellect sees such things as trifles.

In the view of the heart, the body is walnuts and raisins—but when will a child gain the knowledge of men?

Whoever is veiled is indeed a child—a man has escaped from doubt.

If you were a man because of beard and testicles—well, any goat has plenty of hair and a beard. (M V 3342-45)

Men rejoice at the passing of this world, but children exult in its endurance.

Since the blind bird has never tasted sweet water, it sees this briny pond as a spring of paradise. (M IV 2593-94)

In this world of dust how long will we fill our skirts with dirt and stones and potsherds, like children?

Let us leave the dust and fly to heaven, let us flee from childhood to the banquet of men! (D 14306-07)

One day an effeminate man called out, "Oh nasty shepherd! Will that goat bite me, I wonder? He looked at me from the midst of the flock."

The shepherd answered, "He will bite an effeminate man, he will even trample him under his hooves. But why should a man worry about him?" He said, "Well spoken!"

Where is your intellect, so that you may become rational? Where are your legs, so that you may travel—so that you may leave dry land for the ocean and become secure from earthquakes?

You will become the king of kings and enter the eternal realm; you will go higher than the spheres, far outside this garbage pit. (D 24218-21)

Oh you who call yourself a man! What kind of manliness is this, letting Iblis hump you like a pederast? (D 7528)

Just as the forms of men are relatively direct reflections of Severity and the activity of the Universal Intellect, so the forms of women manifest Gentleness and the serene receptivity and beauty of the soul at peace with God; in them, God's own Beauty reveals itself clearly. Both the *Mathnawī* and particularly the *Dīwān* are full of verses celebrating woman as the image of the divine Beloved. In the present context, a single passage can suffice as an allusion to this teaching.

She whose beautiful face makes man her slave—how will it be, indeed how, when she begins acting like his slave!

She whose haughtiness causes your heart to tremble—what will happen to you, indeed what, when she comes before you weeping!

She whose disdain fills your heart and soul with blood—what will it be like when she comes to you in need!

She who ensnares us through her tyranny and cruelty—what will be our plea when she comes before us pleading?

Made attractive to men is the love of desires—women. . . (III 14). God has made her attractive, so how can men escape from her?

Since He created Eve so that Adam might find repose in her (VII 189), how can Adam cut himself off from her?

Even if a man is Rustam and greater than Hamzah, still he is captive to his old woman's command.

The Prophet, to whose speech the whole world was enslaved, used to say, "Speak to me, oh 'Ā'ishah!"²²

Water prevails over fire because fire dreads it; but when the fire is veiled, it brings the water to a boil.

When a pot comes between them, oh king, the fire naughts that water and changes it to air.

If, like water, you outwardly dominate over woman, inwardly you are dominated by her and seek her.

Mankind possesses such a characteristic, but the animals lack love because of their inferior status.

The Prophet said that women totally dominate men of intellect and Possessors of Hearts,

But ignorant men dominate women, for they are shackled by the ferocity of animals.

They have no kindness, gentleness, or love, since animality dominates their nature.

Love and kindness are human attributes, anger and sensuality belong to the animals.

She is the radiance of God, she is not your beloved. She is the Creator—you could say that she is not created. (M I 2421-37)

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used to indicate the sources of quotations from Rūmī's works. For complete bibliographical details, see the Index of Sources.

- D *Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*. Italicized numerals indicate the number of a ghazal that has been translated in its entirety; Roman numerals indicate the lines of a partially translated poem.
- F *Fīhi mā fīhi (Discourses of Rūmī)*. The first number indicates the page of the Persian text, the second of the Arberry translation.
- M *Mathnawī*. Both book and verse are indicated.
- MK *Maktūbāt*. First the number of the letter is given, then the pages on which it occurs in both the Istanbul and Tehran editions.
- MS *Majālis-i sab'ah*. Page numbers are supplied.
- R *Rubā'īyyāt*. The number of the poem is given.

THE SUFI PATH OF LOVE

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Teachings of Rumi**

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State University of New York Press
Albany

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, address State University of New York
Press, State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, ‡Maulana, 1207-1273.

The Sufi path of love.

(SUNY series in Islamic spirituality)

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

1. Sufism—Early works to 1800. I. Chittick,

William C. II. Title. III. Series.

BP188.9.J332513 1983 297'.4 82-19511

ISBN 0-87395-723-7

ISBN 0-87395-724-5 (pbk.)