

Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy in Rūmī's Poetry¹



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*Blest pair of sirens, pledges of heaven's joy,
Sphere-borne harmonious sisters. Voice, and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed power employ
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce,
And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbed song of pure concent . . .*

—Milton (“At a Solemn Music”)

Rūmī's Ecstatic Bacchanalia

To the encomia with which Rūmī's brows are belaued, another accolade might be added—that he is supreme among all Persian poets both in quantity of production and quality of composition for lyrics of ecstasy, intoxication, and bacchanalian joy. Perhaps this is why the lyrical poetry of his *Dīvān-i Shams* has been described by a famous Iranian critic as representing “the apogee of bacchanalian mysticism in the Persian language.”² Both Rūmī's *Mathnawī* and the *Dīvān-i Shams* are full of allusions to ecstasy, selfless transports, stunned silences, and drunken raptures. From the very beginnings of literary criticism in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, critics have highlighted the point that Rūmī's poetry belongs to a venerable and ancient tradition of mystical bacchanalian (*khamriyya*) poetry in Islam,³ of which love, love's intoxication,

¹ I am deeply indebted to Terry Graham for his meticulous copy-editing and to Professors Alan Williams and Franklin Lewis for their careful reading and helpful comments on a previous version of this essay.

² Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, *Insānam ārizū'st: bar-guzīda u sharh-i ghazaliyāt-i Mawlānā* [Anthology and commentary on the ghazals of Rūmī] (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Nigāh, 1386 AHsh./2007), p. 10. Rūmī's *khamriyya* are completely Sufic in nature. Of course, there have been other Persian poets who wrote both profane and mystical *khamriyya* verse, foremost of whom is Ḥakīm Nizārī Qūhistānī (d. 721/1321). See my “Sufism and Ismā'īlī Doctrine in the Persian Poetry of Nizārī Qūhistānī (645-721/1247-1321),” in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, XLI (2003), pp. 229-51.

³ See J.E. Benecheikh, “Khamriyya,” *EP*, IV, pp. 998-1008 for an erudite overview of its

and ecstasy are the leitmotifs. Among the numerous testimonies of this association of Rūmī's poetry with drunkenness and ecstasy, the following comment by the eminent Qājār *homme de lettres* and diplomat Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1288/1871) merits citation:

I have read many books, heard much poetry, have left to posterity a large quantity of works both in prose and verse. I have also published several anthologies of works of distinguished writers and eloquent poets of Persia. However, I have never seen any lyric poetry in Persian capable of stimulating so much ecstasy (*wajd-angīz*) or so full of love (*'ishq-āmīz*) like that of Mawlānā.⁴

Hidāyat's reference to ecstasy here is of particular importance because the main practical purpose that Rūmī's poems served was to stimulate *wajd*, to arouse ecstasy, which is why they are today still used as part of the traditional repertoire of *samā'* by the Sufis who hearken to his verse with the ear of the heart. His poetry is based on a meta-rational "philosophy of ecstasy," an aesthetics of spiritual savor (*dhawq*) that is apprehended by the spiritual heart as the seat of gnosis.⁵ All the poetic

background in Arabic literature. For mystical bacchanalia in Arabic poetry from Rābi'a in the eighth to Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir in the nineteenth century, see idem., "v. Mystical intoxication or substituted speech," p. 1006. As Benecheikh shows, the Sufi mystics from Rābi'a in the eighth century onwards adopted the highly anti-clerical and secular antinomian lexicon of Arabic *khamriyya* poetry for spiritual purposes. The vocabulary of libertinism which featured prominently in the poetry of Abū Nuwās (d. circa 814), the most skilled (and decadent) of the masters of the *khamriyya* genre, was revived and reinterpreted by the Sufi mystics, who "took possession of a well-established framework and activated it by substituting for hedonistic motivations the decisive quest for happiness in God. From there, a whole symbolism becomes established. Wine becomes a divine emanation which spreads its rays from one form to another, a symbol of the supreme love which manifests itself in creation. Drunkenness is forgetfulness of all that is not He" (*ibid.*, p. 2006). For a comprehensive review of *khamriyya* poetic symbolism in Persian Sufism and poetry, see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism*, Vol. 1: *The Esoteric Symbolism of the Parts of the Beloved's Body*, translated by Leonard Lewisohn and Terry Graham (London: KNP, 1984), especially part 2 on "Sufi Symbolism of Wine, Music, Mystical Audition (*Samā'*), and Convivial Gatherings" (pp. 123-214).

⁴ Rūmī, *Dīwān-i kabīr: Kulliyāt-i Shams-i Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥusayn Balkhī-yi Rūmī ma'rūf bi Mawlawī*, ed. Tawfīq Subḥānī from the Konya Manuscript (Tehran: Anjumān-i āthār u mafākhir-i farhangī, 1386 A.Hsh./2007), introduction, p. viii.

⁵ See *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā Dīwān-i kabīr az guftār-i Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad mashhūr bi Mawlawī, ba taṣṭihāt wa ḥawwashī*, ed. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran: Sipīhr, 1363 A.Hsh./1984), IV, *ghazal* 1868, which is almost entirely devoted to the metaphysics of *dhawq*. For an extended discussion of the metapsychology of *dhawq* and its importance in Persian Sufi poetry, see my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and*

metaphors which are used to describe the “savor” of this transcendental understanding are bacchanalian, that is to say, couched in antinomian Sufi tavern slang that is both “public” and “hermetic,”⁶ using a kind of drunkards’ lexicon whose key terms are wine, wine-cups, cupbearers, intoxication, rapture and ecstasy—each of these terms having technical significance in Sufism. Rūmī was well-aware that the terms of this antinomian lexicon in the classical Sufi tradition had profane as well as sacred connotations, invariably handling the ambiguity between the two with impeccable panache, as the following verses attest:

Today we’ve got songs and an amphora
full of wine and the music of *samā’*;
A Saki stone-drunk bears us the wine
among this crowd of wayward libertines.
They’re “far-out” libertines, in fact, they’ve passed
beyond existence—not decadent, demented
Dope-fiend types, high on hemp or hash:
the blacked-out addicts of the lowlife.⁷

In this *ghazal*, as Ḥusayn Ilāhī Ghomshei insightfully observes, Rūmī refers to “spiritually advanced mystics who have ‘passed beyond existence’ into a realm where the limitations of the illusory Selfhood, with its ‘me’ and ‘thee,’ are abolished.”⁸

Just like other Persian and Arabic poets who wrote bacchanalian lyrics, Rūmī makes full use of the ambivalence of imagery and meaning

Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), chap. 6.

⁶ See Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: From Zoroaster to Baha’ullah*, trans. J.M. Marchesi (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000), p. 256. See also my “Sufi Symbolism and the Persian Hermeneutic Tradition: Reconstructing the Pagoda of Attar’s Esoteric Poetics,” in L. Lewisohn & C. Shackle (eds.), *The Art of Spiritual Flight: Farid al-Din ‘Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition* (London: I.B. Tauris & the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), pp. 265-66.

⁷ Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar, vol. 6, pp. 15-16, *ghazal* 2637, vv. 27975-78. *Imrūz samā’ast u sharāb-ast u šurāḥī; yik Sāqī-yi bad-mast, yikī jam’-i mubāḥī. / Zān jins-i mubāḥī kay az ān sū-yi wujūd-ast; nay ibāḥatī-yi gīj, hashīsh muzḥājī. / [Rūḥī’t mubāḥī kay az ān rūḥ chishīda-ast. / Kū rūḥ-i qadīmī u kujā rūḥ-i riyāḥī. / Dar pīsh-i chīnīn fitna va dar dast-i chīnīn may: Yā Rabb! chih shavad jān-i musalmān-i ṣalāḥī.*

⁸ See his “The Principles of the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry,” in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 94.

found in the *khamriyya* genre.⁹ God's theophany is thus symbolized by a sparkling wine that intoxicates the contemplative's heart, which is symbolized by the wine-cup, for in the goblet of the heart, the mystic imbibes the rapture of meditation on the divine attributes (beauty, knowledge, omniscience), which leads to ecstatic transports (*wajd*). The symbolism of the mystical philosophy of ecstasy underpinning this bacchanalian lexicon was initially defined in classical Persian or Arabic dictionaries of Sufi symbols and terminology.¹⁰ However, with respect to Rūmī's poetry in particular, the real implications of this "philosophy of ecstasy" have yet to be explored. In this essay, a preliminary investigation of the topic is offered.

The Ontology of Ecstasy in Classical Persian Sufism

The Etymology of the Ecstasy of Existence

Although as a term of literary analysis, ecstasy (*wajd*) belongs to the genre of the bacchanalian lyric, in the lexicon of Sufism it is featured as one of the key technical terms pertaining to the "science of mystical states" (*ilm al-aḥwāl*). While *wajd*'s literal meaning is "ecstasy" or "rapture," the term being derived from the Arabic tri-literal root *wajada*, in different contexts denoting: "to find," "obtain," "experience," "suffer" (in the sense of passion), to be "in ecstasy," or "to be existent." From the tri-literal root are derived a series of participles, nouns, and adjectives, whence stem all the multiple levels of meaning given to *wajd* in Islamic metaphysics, musical theory, and mysticism. The more important derivatives of the root *W-J-D* are: i. *wajd*: (a) finding, (b) ardor, ecstasy; ii. *wijdān* (the verbal noun, emphasizing the active aspect of *wajd*): (a) "the find," (b) feeling, sentiment, ecstasy; iii. *wājid* (the active participle): (a) "the finder," (b) an

⁹ Khurramshāhī, *Insānam ārizū'st*, p. 9.

¹⁰ In English the most comprehensive treatment is Javad Nurbakhsh's *Sufi Symbolism* cited in footnote 3 above, published in 16 vols.: New York: KNP, 1984-2004. See also 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms*, translated by Nabil Safwat (London: Octagon Press, 1991); many such dictionaries of Sufi terms have been published in Persian. Some of the best include: Ja'far Sajjādī, *Farhang-i lughāt wa iṣṭilāḥāt wa ta'bīrāt-i 'irfānī* (Tehran: Kitāb-khāna-yi Ṭahūrī, 1362 A.Hsh./1983; 3rd ed.); Maryam Zibā'ī-nizhād, *Farhang-i iṣṭilāḥāt-i ash'ārī-yi andīsha-yi Ḥāfiẓ* (Shīrāz: Nashr-i Rāghushā, 1388 A.Hsh./2009); Sayyid Šādiq Gawharīn, *Sharḥ-i iṣṭilāḥāt-i taṣawwuf* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zawwār, 1388 A.Hsh./2009), 10 vols. in 5; Suhaylā Musavī Sīrjānī, *Farhang-nāma-yi taḥbīqī-yi ta'rīfihā va iṣṭilāḥāt-i 'irfānī-yi Kashf al-mahjūb va Miršād al-'ibād* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zawwār, 1381 A.Hsh./2002).

ecstatic; iv. *wujūd* (the abstract noun): (a) "findingness," (b) existence, (c) "realized ecstasy"; v. *mawjūd* (the passive participle): (a) the "Found One," (b) the "Existent One" (a name of God); vi. *tawājud* (a gerund), meaning "imitative ecstasy" or "affecting ecstasy." Without understanding the subtle interplay between the various connotations of these grammatically related terms, the rich meaning of *wajd* remains elusive.¹¹

Noting the difficulties of conveying all of the morphological connotations of *wajd* implicitly understood by a native Arabic speaker through translation into the target language, Michael Sells points out that "there is a difference in metaphor between the [Greco-] Latinate term ecstasy (*ek stasis*) as 'standing outside oneself' or 'rapture' (from *raptus*), a 'being taken' or 'seized up' out of oneself, and the Arabic term *wajd*. *Wajd* combines the meaning of 'intense feeling' with 'finding'. . . . In addition to intense experience and finding, the lexical field of *wajd* also includes 'existence' (*wujūd*). . . . To exist is not simply to have being or phenomenal reality. On the contrary, . . . many saw existence as achieved only insofar as one's ego-self, one's normal identity and being, is annihilated. Existence occurs in the ecstasy and in the discovery that occurs through 'passing away.' The lexical field of w/j/d—ecstasy, finding, existence—corresponds as closely as any Sufi term to what is currently called mystical experience, though in its own distinctive conceptual configuration."¹² The colloquial English expression of *finding* (an experience) *to be* true conveys a similar, though not quite so profound, semantic subtlety.

Given the sophistication of Sufi theories of ecstasy over the centuries of its doctrinal elaboration as a technical term with all its complex etymological connotations and metaphysical ramifications, it will be useful to give a survey of the concept of *wajd* in Islamic mysticism of the early

¹¹ For further study of *wajd*'s etymology, see also Farid Jabre, *Essai sur le lexique de Ghazali: Contribution à l'étude de la terminologie de Ghazali dans ses principaux ouvrages à l'exception du Tahāfut* (Beirut, 1970), p. 270, and Leonard Lewisohn "Wajid," *EP*, vol. XI, p. 23. Some recent psychological studies of the phenomenon of ecstasy have denigrated these metaphysical dimensions of *wajd* as merely a poetic fancy, and seen the experience itself as a species of pathological subjective hallucination, reducing these Sufi definitions of *wajd* (held to be related to existence, *wujūd*) as "ingenious, but . . . ultimately inaccurate, post hoc etymologies" (Kenneth Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Samā'* [London: Routledge, 2004], p. 66). A similar condescending attitude towards the experience of *samā'* appears in Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, trans. B. Biebuyck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 301.

¹² *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 111.

classical period before entering into an examination of Rūmī's ecstatic poetics.

Doctrines of Ecstasy in the Baghdad School of Sufism

The early development of *wajd* as a technical term in Sufism was bound up with scholastic discussions on moral theory which flourished in the Sufi School of Baghdad. Ibn 'Aṭā's (d. 309/921) celebrated dispute with Abū'l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910, known as the "Leader of the Sufi Company"), on whether *wajd* is characterized by the presence of joy or grief in the mystic is perhaps the most famous debate in this regard. Whereas Junayd declared that ecstasy means "dissociation, severance (*inqatā'*) from one's personal qualities while one's essence is graced with joy," Ibn 'Aṭā' only agreed partially with this definition, significantly replacing the word joy with grief.¹³

Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890 or 286/899), another important Sufi in the School of Baghdad, devoted his *Kitāb al-ṣifāt* to analyzing the experience of proximity to God (*qurb*), describing the various stations traversed by the mystics to attain this degree. According to Kharrāz's schema, *wajd* or ecstasy is the first station experienced by those who have realized proximity to God. Describing the "signs of the ecstasies" he states:

It is a kind of concentration of the attention with intense self-observation (*murāqaba*) accompanied by quietude of one's bodily limbs in immobility. Therein one searches for God without experiencing much fluctuation of mental imagery during contemplation (*khaṭarāt al-mushāhada*), neither allowing oneself to be moved by the initial flashes of intuitional consciousness. It is a

¹³ *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn: A Dictionary of the Technical Terms Used in the Sciences of the Musalmans*, eds. Muḥammad Wajīh, 'Abd al-Haqq, Ghulām Qādir & Nassau Lees (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), II, p. 1454; Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), I, p. 92. Trying to reconcile the two opposing views, Tahānawī reasoned that while it "seems obvious that *wajd* may be defined as the cutting off of personal qualities—insofar as it involves a definite dissociation from human characteristics—from Junayd's standpoint, however, *grief* may effect the persistence of some *human* characteristics because it is a distillation of the remnants of the mystic's *personal* being. Hence he viewed 'the essence' as still attached to *joy* when describing this dissociation. . . . Ibn 'Aṭā', on the other hand, maintained that, because joy is essentially a characteristic of the sensual soul (*nafs*), being always bound up with sensuality, when describing dissociation, he thus maintained that the essence is still bound to *grief*" (*Kashshāf*, p. 1454).

flight into solitude and isolation as one is filled with the viands of His pleasurable delights, resting in Him after undergoing the disturbance of the multiplicity of ways and means in seeking to practice emulation [of the Prophet]; and, in the end, it is finding intimacy in Him through compliance with His word when "he will relieve them of their burden" (Koran VII:157) and the loads they bear.¹⁴

Referring to this passage, Paul Nwyia notes that Kharrāz's understanding of *wajd* "is not so much an 'ecstasy,' as one normally translates the term, but actually an 'in-stasy,' because *wajd* is, first of all, a communion with oneself rather than an exit from oneself, a sort of meditation in order *to find* (*wajada*) the word of God within and so be delighted. *Wajada* is thus effectually 'to find,' and what one primarily finds on approaching God is the quietude and silence of 'all the senses' with total attention on God."¹⁵ In the following verses from a *ghazal* by Rūmī, one finds the following poetic description of this sort of "in-stasy" experienced through music, that is, in the Sufi concert (*samā'*):

Ecstatics! Hey! Ecstatics!—Go entreat the players play,
Return to pleasure—pursue the shrieking of the *nay*.
Sit in the cabaret of what's eternal where the soul's ear
Can hear the Sufi concert. Discard all words, texts, and scrolls,
Then fill your head with wine that lasts forever like a goblet;
Roll up panoply of reason's pedantry and wit;
Then go release yourselves, oh lovers, from all this stuff of self—
Immerse yourselves in contemplation of that Beauty's life.¹⁶

The notion of *wajd* as an "in-stasy" rather than ecstasy is also found in definitions of *wajd* given by other leading members of the School of Baghdad: "Ecstasy/finding is the manifestation of the Existent One or 'the Found' (*mawjūd*)"—said Abū Bakr Shiblī (d. 334/945); and "Ecstasy/finding is the losing of personal being in the Divinely Found/Existent One"—stated Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907).¹⁷

¹⁴ Cited by Paul Nwyia, *Exègèse Coranique et Langage Mystique* (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1970), p. 259.

¹⁵ Nwyia, *Exègèse Coranique*, p. 254.

¹⁶ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 2, *ghazal* 747:7842, 7848-50, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 560.

¹⁷ *Kashshāf*, p. 1454.

Commenting on Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj's (d. 304/922) teaching on Sufi mystical states, Louis Massignon observed: "Behind every ecstasy, as well as every action, he means to see only the One to Whom he is bound, Who enrapt, *man fi'l-wajdi Mawjūd*; God, Who, from ecstasy to ecstasy, continues to draw close to Him."¹⁸ And as if to sum up all such debates, Tahānawī (d. 1745), the great lexicographer of gnostic terminology, concludes: "Whoever contemplates the Existent One during his finding/ecstasy is effaced from his finding/ecstasy in the findingness/existence of the Found/Existent One so that his finding/ecstasy is transformed into that."¹⁹

The doctrine of ecstasy in the Baghdad School of Sufism developed out of speculations concerning the spiritual psychology of annihilation (*fanā'*), that is, the mystic's attempt to obliterate his temporal self in the divine Ipseity.²⁰ For this reason, the same ontological connotations of *wajd* receive frequent mention in Junayd's enigmatic meditations on annihilation. In his doctrine of annihilation of the selfhood (*fanā'*) in the divine,²¹ Junayd explains how *wajd* and *wujūd* belong to the final degree of three stages of annihilation. The first stage involves passing away from egocentric qualities and habits; the second, from all sense of personal pleasure in obedience to God; but "the third annihilation (*al-fanā' al-thālath*) is from beholding any reality in your ecstasies (*mawājīdika*) before the *mysterium tremendum* of witnessing God's consciousness of you. Here, in the midst of abiding in God you are annihilated, finding real existence (*mawjūd*) in your annihilation—through the Existence of the [divine] Other. Thus, your name is blotted out and only your barest trace remains."²²

In one of his treatises "On Annihilation" (*Kitāb al-fanā'*), Junayd pairs God-given "existence" (*wujūd*, derived from *wajd*) with divine love, praising God Who "severs the attachments of those who practice mystical detachment . . . while he grants them real existence (*awjadahum*) and favors them with his love."²³ Throughout this treatise, the Sufi's very "existence" is understood to be the fruit of a kind of rapture. Since his

¹⁸ *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, III, p. 26.

¹⁹ *Kashshāf*, p. 1454.

²⁰ See Andrew Wilcox, "The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā'* and *Baqā'* in Early Sufism," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38/1 (2011), pp. 95-118.

²¹ See F. Rahman, "Baḳā' wa-Fanā'," *EIF*, I, p. 951. For further discussion see Wilcox, "The Dual Mystical Concepts," pp. 95-118.

²² A.H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd* (London: Luzac & Co., 1976), pp. 54-55 (the translation from the Arabic text is mine).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31 (the translation from the Arabic text is mine).

cognition grants him both real existence and ecstasy, ontology becomes apprehended through ecstatic mystical contemplation. As Sells aptly points out when analyzing the subtle interplay of the three meanings of *wajd* and *wujūd* ("finding," "ecstasy," and "existence") in this treatise, "Junayd speaks of the real existence as a transitive force, of the real as 'ex-isting them,' or 'founding them,' that is, infusing them with the genuine existence of the one reality."²⁴

In a number of remarkable writings penned in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the mystics of the Khurāsān School of Sufism, particularly Abū Naṣr Sarraj of Ṭūs (d. 378/988) and 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān Sulamī of Nīshāpūr (d. 412/1021), continued to deepen and sharpen these meditations on Sufi mystical psychology. Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) in part three of his *al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya*²⁵ presented a synoptic treatment of Sufi concepts and terms, summing up the opinions of his predecessors on *wajd*, *tawājjud*, and *wujūd*. Qushayrī noted that the highest level of ecstasy is *wujūd*, that rapture of existence itself which is simultaneously the realization of ecstasy's ontological origin, for "*wujūd* occurs when one transcends *wajd*, for the mystic understands the Rapture-of-God's-Being (*wujūd al-ḥaqq*) only after his mortal being (*basharīyya*) passes away."²⁶ This doctrine of ecstasy as an *ekstasis* from self and annihilation in God's attributes later became the subject of the following famous lines in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* on the meaning of *fanā*'.

A preacher on a pulpit said: "The dervish is
Naught; he does not exist. But if indeed he is,
In fact he's not. His essence still subsists in one
Way yet his character has disappeared in Him—
In God's qualities. Just like a candle's ray
Before the solar orb of day, he's passed away.
He is and yet he's not. In sum, the flame's essence
Yet still exists, for set cotton on it, it ignites,
And yet it's naught; it gives no light to anyone:
Its light has fled: the flame has perished in the sun."²⁷

²⁴ Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 257.

²⁵ Qushayrī, *al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Zarīq/Balṭajī (Beirut Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990).

²⁶ Cited by Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 113 (translation mine).

²⁷ Rumi, *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1357 A.Hsh./1976), III:3669-73.

This same conception of ecstasy as the annihilation of self-existence in God's being continued to be especially emphasized in later centuries by Sufis of the Akbarian school.²⁸

The Ontology of Ecstasy and Psychology of Rapture in Sufi Music

As the above discussion has revealed, the highest state of ecstasy was referred to as *wujūd* or "existence" itself—the attainment of *wujūd*; "realized ecstasy" (as the abstract noun) thus became viewed as the supreme realization of existence as well. What is involved here may be likened to "finding the ecstasy (*wajd*) of being (*wujūd*)" while "listening to music" (*samā'*), that is, the application of the Sufi doctrine of ecstasy to the audition to music and song. This affiliation was succinctly expressed by Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Darrāj (d. 320/932) in his assertion that "Ecstasy (*wajd*) signifies that which is found (*yūjadu*) through *samā'*."²⁹

This understanding of *wajd* as a spiritual state of being inspired by the audition to music—*samā'* as the "food of love" so to speak—was based on a complicated mystical psychology of rapture and an ontology of ecstasy, the subtle interrelationship between auditory sensation and spiritual experience. That is to say, the experience of rapture and ecstasy is also intimately connected with the mystical psychology and contemplative disciplines of the Sufis in general and to the practice of musical

²⁸ The many connotations and etymological derivations of *wajd* discussed above were thus given a lengthy exposition in the famous Persian commentary on the *Tā'iyya* of the great Arab mystical poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 633/1235) by the Akbarian mystic Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1299-1300), who informs us that "Wajd in the technical terminology of the Sufis denotes the seeker's finding (*yāfi*) of this [sort of] 'attributed existence' (*wujūd-i mudāf*) [which the poet described] on the [human] plane of his own absoluteness (*ītlāq-i khwudish*) by means of the annihilation and obliteration of his many personal qualities and his determined, distinguishing characteristics (*fanā' va maḥw-i kithrat awṣāf wa aḥkām taqayyīdī wa imtiyāzī*). Thus, the seeker's 'finding' (*yāfi*) was of his condition of detachment (*nisbat-i mujarrad*) and his eschewal of the fetters which shackled him to the control of those many levels (*qayd-i ḥukm-i kithrat-i marātib*) [of existence] which, until that moment, had dominated his whole being. But when this 'finding' becomes his own possession, they [the Sufis] label it 'findingness'/existence/'realized ecstasy' (*wujūd*)" (Farghānī, *Mashāriq al-darārī: Sharḥ-i Tā'iyya Ibn Fāriḍ*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī [Tehran: Intishārāt-i falsafa va 'irfān-i islāmī-yi Dānishgāh-i Firdawsī, 1398 A.H./1978], pp. 364-65).

²⁹ Cited by Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Damascus: n.p. and n.d.), II:257; D.B. Macdonald, "Emotional Religion in Islam," *JRAS*, 1901-1902, part 2, p. 719 (a translation of Ghazālī's book on *samā'* from the *Iḥyā'*). For a more elaborate discussion of this theme, see my "The Sacred Music of Islam: *Samā'* in the Persian Sufi Tradition," in *The British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, VI, (1997), pp. 22-25.

audition (*samā'*) in particular. According to the celebrated Sufi theologian who was the greatest theoretician of the practice of *samā'*,³⁰ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) definition: "Singing produces a state in the heart which is called *wajd*. In its turn, *wajd* causes the bodily limbs to move, whether the movement is non-rhythmic and the emotion be disorderly, or a rhythmic movement, in which case it is called clapping and dance."³¹

The basic psychological state of *wajd* during *samā'* is that of a heightened ecstatic egoless consciousness, known as "selflessness" (*bī-kh"udī*) in the lexicon of Persian Sufism.³² The concept of selflessness is all-pervasive in Rūmī's poetry.³³ In the following verse taken from the signature line of a *ghazal*, Rūmī describes how his heart composed love-lyrics (*ghazal*) when he was intoxicated and selflessly drunk on divine wine:

Before the start of time the selfless heart
Was drunk on wine and wrote these verses out.
The more the fumes of wine choke up my breath
Each verse rhymes out more sweetly than the last.³⁴

Here, for Rūmī, "the process of poetic creation is explicitly described as inseparable from moments of ecstasy."³⁵ For Rūmī as for Nūrī, the

³⁰ As Najīb Māyil Haravī in his superb collection of Persian Sufi treatises on *samā'*: *Andar ghazal-i kh"tsh nahān kh"āham gashtan (Samā'-nāmahā-yi fārī)* (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, n.d.), p. 24, underscores.

³¹ Abū Ḥamid Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Ḥalabī, 1346-52), II, p. 237. These same thoughts are elaborated in great detail by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, a contemporary of Ghazālī, in the exordium of his treatise *Bawāriq al-ilmā'*, ed./trans. James Robson [erroneously attributed by Robson to Majd al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī], *Tracts on Listening to Music* (London: RAS, Oriental Translation Fund, vol. 34 NS, 1938), Arabic text, pp. 121-2. He writes (translation mine): "The audition of this group (*al-ṭā'ifa*) [i.e. the Sufis] consists in mystical deliberation over (*mulāḥaẓat*) the hidden mysteries [concealed] within the highly refined poetry (*al-ash'ār al-raḡīqa*) which are sung by the cantor (*qawwāl*) when touched by ecstasy (*wajd*) realized by the assiduous heart of the gnostic and the perfect disciple."

³² For an extended discussion, see my "The Sacred Music of Islam," p. 22f.

³³ On Rūmī's concept of *bī-kh"udī*, see 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh, "Ān nafaṣt kih bā kh"udī . . . Ān nafaṣt kih bī- kh"udī," *Iran Nameh* (Special Issue on Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī), nos. 1 & 2 (1388 A.Hsh./2009), pp. 187-99.

³⁴ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar, vol. 2, *ghazal* 538, v. 5735. *Dil bī-kh"ud az bāda-yi azal mīguft khūsh khūsh īn ghazal / Gar may furū gīradash īn dam az īn khūsh-tar zanad* (meter: *rajaz-i musammam-i sālim*).

³⁵ Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 27.

experience of *wajd* is an *ekstasis*, an exit from self and entrance into egoless consciousness,³⁶ such that the mystic claps his hands, and when he is liberated from the imperfections of selfhood, he dances.³⁷ Dance (*raqs*)—which in Sufism implies realization of the highest level of ecstasy—means to break and smash the self.³⁸ *Wajd* is the finding (*wajada*) of an existence transcending the consciousness of the finite ego—the very existence which for Sufis is Absolute Being Itself.

Ghazālī's philosophical analysis of the nature and place of *wajd* among the mystico-psychological states experienced by the Sufis during their concerts of musical audition (*samā'*) played a central part in subsequent debates on the legality of music and the place of ecstasy in the contemplative disciplines in Islam. An entire book of Ghazālī's monumental encyclopedia, devoted to the defense of *samā'*, was in fact entitled *Kitāb ādāb al-samā'y wa'l-wajd*, "The Book of the Proper Practice of Audition and Ecstasy"—thus indicating the important role which ecstasy always has played in Islamic spirituality. Although Ghazālī cites numerous traditions with precedents during the Prophet's lifetime for the later Sufi practice of *samā'*, in regard to the actual experience of ecstasy by the Prophet himself, he gave solely one example: that of a pious Sufi, in retreat in Mecca, who, during a vision, beheld the Prophet listening to poetry in a *samā'* session, "slapping his chest like an ecstatic (*kā'l-wājid*)."³⁹

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the theological bases of Rūmī's religion of music and poetry were already anticipated by Ghazālī in this book, which enumerates seven reasons why listening to poetry is more conducive to ecstasy than hearing the cantillation of the Qur'ān. His basic argument is that the musical harmony, ecstatic transports, and ravishingly beautiful imagery of erotic poetry are capable of touching the heart more deeply than even the divine strains of the Muslim missal. This is because the heart is habituated to hearing the latter and so—more often than not—becomes disinclined to be aroused to experience any further raptures from its audition. Poetry, on the other hand, especially when graced by a beautiful singing voice, easily induces ecstasy.⁴⁰

³⁶ Thus, Shiblī (d. 334/945), describing *wajd*, said: "When I suppose that *I* have lost it, I find it and whenever I imagine that *I* have found it, I lose it." Nūrī (d. 295/907) likewise pronounced, "Finding (*wajd*) is the losing of personal being in the Divinely Found or Existent One" (cited by J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism I*, p. 182).

³⁷ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, III:97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, III:95.

³⁹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Damascus: n.d., n.p. 4 vols.), II, p. 238.

⁴⁰ For an extended discussion of Ghazālī's views on the experiences of *wajd* in listening to

Clarifying the place of ecstasy in Muslim spiritual life, Ghazālī maintains that there are altogether seven different instances where poetry is usually permitted, if not actually required, for the believer to use. Only the last two instances—listening to music and poetry by romantic lovers for longing and love to be aroused,⁴¹ and the *samāʿ* of God's lovers⁴²—need to be considered here, since they formed the theological grounds for Rūmī's adoption of verse and song as his key contemplative practice.

Listening to poetry arouses yearning (*shawq*)⁴³ in the lover of God, which in turn results in what are called "mystical states (*aḥwāl*) which in the language of the Sufis are called 'ecstasy' (*wajd*), derived from 'finding' (*wujūd*) and 'meeting' (*muṣadafa*). That is to say, the Sufi encounters in himself states which he had not encountered before he attended *samāʿ*." Like the classical Sufis before him, Ghazālī here considers *wajd* to be a chamberlain escorting the mystic into the inner sanctum of higher visionary experiences (*mushāhadāt wa mukāshafāt*) "which are the ultimate object of the lovers of God."⁴⁴ *Wajd* is the sister of mystical feeling and consciousness (*ḥāl*).⁴⁵

Samāʿ proceeds from contemplation to action in three distinct stages: understanding (*fahm*) → ecstasy (*wajd*) → dance (*raqs*), ecstasy occupying the intermediate degree, midway between rational contemplation and physical action. Concerning stage one, underlining the rational basis of ecstasy, he notes that "the first degree in *samāʿ* (listening to music) is understanding (*fahm*) what is heard and then applying this to a meaning which occurs to the listener. The fruit of such understanding is ecstasy

the Qur'ān and poetry, see my "The Sacred Music of Islam," pp. 19-29.

⁴¹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʿ*, II, pp. 228-29.

⁴² Ibid., II, pp. 229-35.

⁴³ See L. Lewisohn, "Shawq," EI², IX, pp. 376-77.

⁴⁴ Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʿ*, II, pp. 246-47.

⁴⁵ In this regard, 'Azīz-i Nasafī (d. between 1282-1300) regards *wajd* as the lowest degree of spiritual knowledge: "Know that *wajd* literally means 'to find,' but according to the Sufis it involves a special kind of 'finding' relating to heart's discovery of something from the supernal world of the invisible (*ālam-i ḡhayb*). That is to say, when the eye of the heart is first opened and the heart apprehends something from that realm, it is called *wajd*. When such 'finding' (*wajd*) is amplified, it is called 'visionary unveiling' (*kashf*). When that 'visionary unveiling' increases and becomes clearer, it is called 'gnosis' (*ma'rīfat*). When that 'gnosis' increases and becomes even clearer, it is called 'contemplative witnessing' (*mushāhada*). And finally, when the mystic transgresses beyond all the veils, it is called 'spiritual observation' (*mu'āyina*). This is the way of the people of Sufism and this their terminology" (*Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*, ed. Aḥmad Mahdāvī Dāmghānī [Tehran: BTNK, 1359 A.Hsh./1980], p. 136).

(*wajd*), which in turn engenders stirring of the limbs [to dance].”⁴⁶ Ecstatic consciousness is not *irrational* but *supra-rational* since it is based on a highly emotionalized, yet nonetheless *rational* understanding of the meaning of poetry. The ecstatic must first understand what he hears in order to attain to the certainty of the “ecstasy which transcends the understanding.”

Since ecstasy, as the second degree after “understanding” (*fahm*), constitutes, in contemplative terms, the most important aspect of *samāʿ*, Ghazālī devotes some eight pages of intricate analysis to its typology and meaning.⁴⁷ Quoting with approbation the pronouncement of Dhūʿl-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859) that “*samāʿ* is a divine infusion (*warīd al-Ḥaqq*) which rouses the heart to seek God. One who hearkens to it with sincerity realizes the divine Truth, but one who attends to it with his sensual ear becomes a heretic,” Ghazālī comments that in stating that audition “unsettles and rouses the heart to seek God,” it is actually *wajd* which Dhūʿl-Nūn had in mind, “for it is ecstasy which he found (*yajiduhu*) during that divine infusion which entered him in *samāʿ*.”⁴⁸

While arguing that audition is entirely a subjective experience, Ghazālī paradoxically defends the *objective reality* of *wajd*. Thus, any soul spiritually attuned to the harmonies Yonder may experience ecstasy in this lower world; even as a Sufī who does not know Arabic upon hearing a verse of poetry in that tongue may be sent into raptures which are even completely genuine since

The ecstasy of one consumed by the love of God Almighty is in proportion to his understanding (*fahm*); his understanding is in proportion to his imagination, and it is not necessary that what he chooses to imagine be in accordance with the poet’s meaning or language. Nonetheless, such ecstasy is true and real (*fa’hadhā’l-wajd ḥaqqan wa ṣidqan*).⁴⁹

If *samāʿ* is a stimulus to the imagination, its resultant ecstasies are the fruit of poetic meanings *understood* and spiritual realities *intuited* by *imaginal* rather than merely *cognitive* processes. As Fritz Meier comments apropos of the last-cited passage: “What matters is that something in the

⁴⁶ Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʿ*, II, p. 253.

⁴⁷ Ibid., II, pp. 257-65; Macdonald, “Emotional Religion in Islam,” part 2, pp. 719-48.

⁴⁸ Ibid., II, p. 257.

⁴⁹ Ibid., II, p. 249.

poem 'coincides with the mystic's situation so that like steel it strikes sparks from the flints in his heart' and thus causes the fire which one calls ecstasy."⁵⁰ But this ecstatic insight and understanding of poetry, whether through reason or imagination, varies from seeker to seeker, from lover to lover. The simple disciple's (*al-murīd*) ecstasy is based on rote belief and faith (*i'tiqād taqlīdī*), those who are not full adepts but do possess ecstasy (*arbāb al-wajd*) only experience an intoxication which dazes them like an intoxicant (*al-sukr al-madhish*), while the mature, discerning gnostic's rapture derives from a truly inspired certitude (*yaqīn kashfī ḥaqīqī*).⁵¹

Ultimately, poetically described spiritual realities (*ma'ānī*) and mystic raptures vary according to the listeners' states of mind or heart. Citing a paradoxical verse: "Your love is all parting; your affection all animosity; your union distance, and your peace all war," Ghazālī notes that "upon hearing this verse Shiblī would often throw himself into ecstasy (*kathīran mā yatawājad*)."⁵² He breaks the levels of ecstasy down into four authentic types as experienced by true mystics during audition of a given verse. As different as they are in degree, they all are equally true.

Of the four, the highest type of ecstasy experienced in response to such a verse corresponds to the supreme type of Love. Ghazālī gives the passionate death of Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907) who, transported by a flight of *tawājud*, ran into a reed-bed where he cut his feet and bled to death, as the supreme example and "greatest cause of love of God, the dearest and rarest of all kinds of love."⁵² Nūrī is presented by the great theologian as the supreme master of the path of ecstasy in Sufism in his book on *samā'* and *wajd*. (In this context, it may be recalled that Nūrī was the first Sufi to have spoken of passionate love and to have applied the term '*ishq*' to the love of God.) Nūrī's ecstasy during *samā'*, states Ghazālī, exemplifies the Sufi's annihilation-in-heart (*fanā' qalb*) in God. Such ecstasy "is of the highest degree, belonging to those sincere in their understanding and ecstasy (*al-ṣadīqīn fī'l-fahm wa'l-wajd*). If *samā'* is based merely on [fleeting] mystical states (*al-aḥwāl*), being tainted with the material consciousness of the flesh and its human characteristics, it falls short of the most perfect degree and degenerates into a kind of deformity. True perfection lies in the complete annihilation of human selfhood

⁵⁰ Fritz Meier, "The Dervish Dance: An Attempt at an Overview," in Meier, *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 37.

⁵¹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, II, p. 255.

⁵² Ibid., IV, p. 307.

and its states, in not paying attention to such things . . . but hearing [only] God, in God, through God, and from God.”⁵³

Ecstasy and Ineffability

The topos of the ineffability of *wajd* had been the object of much meditation among the early classical Sufis long before Ghazālī’s systematic exposition of the mystical psychology of ecstasy. As ‘Amr Ibn ‘Uthmān al-Makkī (d. 297/909) observed: “It is impossible to express the nature of ecstasy in any terms, for it is God’s mystery with the believers and those who have certitude.”⁵⁴ Citing this statement, Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1210) commented: “Its forms are infinite, for it has no limitation. What I have said is just a brief characterization of the reality of ecstasy for the discerning and wise man.”⁵⁵ The poetry of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 304/922), whose doctrines Rūmī greatly admired and emulated,⁵⁶ represented the supreme expression of the transcendental ineffability of mystical ecstasy among the mystics of the Baghdad School.⁵⁷

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdī al-Jabbār Niffārī (d. 354/965), who belonged to the generation of Sufis following Makkī, in his “Book of Spiritual Stops” (*Kitāb al-Mawāqif*) used the terms *wajd*, *tawājud*, and *mawājīd* to denote the divide between expression and the inexpressible, verbal appearance and ineffable reality. Noting in *Mawqif* 34 that speech (*qāwl*), letters (*ḥarf*), and words are all veils which cause one to go astray, he states that whereas God’s “speech induces ecstasy (*al-wajd*), the affecting of ecstasy (*al-tawājud*) by means of words only leads one [back] into the ecstasies (*mawājīd*) which were induced by words.” Real ecstasy and existence, however, are beyond such states which are linked to what is merely verbally expressed, since “by definition, ecstasies induced by verbal utterances (*al-maqūlāt*) are blasphemy.” Only that ecstasy is real which derives from the Prophet’s would-be “illiteracy” which is, in fact, true knowledge.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid., II, p. 256.

⁵⁴ Ibid., II, p. 257.

⁵⁵ Baqlī, *Mashrab al-arwāḥ*, ed. N.M. Hoca (Istanbul, 1973), p. 82.

⁵⁶ See the unpublished M.A. thesis (2012) by my student at the University of Exeter: Sarah Semnani, “The Influence of Mansur Hallaj on the Poetry and Sufism of Jalal al-Din Rumi.”

⁵⁷ See Samah Selim, “Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the Poetry of Ecstasy,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXI/1 (1990), pp. 26-42.

⁵⁸ *The Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdī’l-Jabbār al-Niffārī*, ed. and trans. A.J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Co., 1978 reprint), pp. 59-60 (my translation from the Arabic text).

This notion of ecstasy never approaching true revelation or transcending the "literacy" linked to rational and verbal means of expression is the subject of *Mawqif* 55, where his divine respondent tells him that "when you come to Me, cast all expression (*al-'ibārat*) behind you, and cast the spiritual meaning (*al-ma'nā*) after that expression, and cast ecstasy (*al-wajd*) after the meaning."⁵⁹ In Niffārī's mystical theology, all words, expressions, and meanings, and even the ecstatic states which derive from both, are ultimately veils; everything expressible, whether expressions entering into words or ecstatic states passing through the heart of the mystic, must be cast aside for one to attain the ineffable Beyond. In many places Rūmī alludes to this "revealing-concealing" quality of *samā'*, which simultaneously unveils and disguises higher realms of being. In the *Dīvān*, he writes:

The music of *samā'*s like a window
That lends access to your garden.
The lovers lay their ear and heart
Upon its sill to hear one note.
That window is—alas—one grand veil,
Although this veil's all sweet delight—
Go, my noble friend and keep silent.⁶⁰

Niffārī's contemporary, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, devoted a long section to the interpretation of the ecstatic utterances of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875). Interpreting Bisṭāmī's saying: "I became a bird and did not cease to fly," Sarrāj states that "he meant by it denuding himself of his own power and ability in flight. . . . Such expressions can be found in the speech of the ecstatics and the love-lost. When the innermost conscience of the ecstatic's (*wājjid*) heart is overpowered by remembrance of the One Who has enraptured him (*wajada bihi*), he displays all his states as the qualities of his beloved. Thus, Majnūn of the Banī 'Amir would declare 'Layla' whilst gazing on a wild beast, and exclaim 'Layla' when looking at the hills, and when looking at other people utter 'Layla,' until, when asked of his name and state, he responded only: 'Layla'."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 92: v. 35, Arabic text.

⁶⁰ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, V, *ghazal* 2404:25392-25393, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 565, trans. LL.

⁶¹ Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma' fī 'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London/Leiden, 1914), pp. 380-95. See also Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 221.

Here, *wajd* = *ekstasis*, the ineffable mystical divestment of transitory selfhood through love's transports, which fuses and unites the Sufi's separate personal identity with the Divine.

* * *

The genius of Rūmī was deeply affected by these classical Sufi doctrines of ecstasy which he manages to re-express in the *Mathnawī* and *Dīvān-i Shams*, although his poetic depictions there hardly resemble the prosaic analysis of the classical treatises, such as Kalābādhi's *Ta'arruf*, Sarraj's *Kitāb al-Luma'*, and Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*,⁶² each containing separate chapters or sections devoted to *wajd*. Nevertheless, ecstasy and intoxication drive both the expression of his poetry, with Rūmī wielding the great stock of bacchanalian metaphors and images found in classical Persian poetry in a particularly dramatic way, so the reader/listener can grasp the substance of his ecstatic utterances beyond their mere semantic sense. Although the term "ecstasy" (*wajd*) itself may rarely cross the lips of the poet—despite the more than fifty references to various sorts of ecstasy in the *Mathnawī*⁶³—this massive epic poem constitutes one long ode to ecstasy and intoxication. In fact, ecstasy is the veritable tropic inhabited by his verse's muse. If Rūmī penned no systematic excursus on *wajd*, his views on ecstasy are clearly revealed in tactile forms through the poet's depictions of intoxication, drinking, and dance, especially in the context of the practice and performance of *samā'*, which are examined below.

Ecstasy in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*

What can I say—no vein of mine is sober—
to explain that Friend who is beyond a friend?⁶⁴

Rūmī's *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī* is not only the greatest work of doctrinal Sufism ever composed in verse but it is a breviary of ecstatic paradoxes (*shaṭhiyāt*), much of the monumental epic poem having been composed

⁶² See for instance, Suhaylā Mūsavī, *Farhang-nāma-yi taṭbīqī: ta'rīfihā va iṣṭilāḥāt-i 'irfānī-yi Kashf al-mahjūb va Miṣād al-'ibād* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zavvār, 1381 A.Hsh./2002), index, s.v. "*wajd*."

⁶³ See Nicholson's 'Subject Index' to the *Mathnawī*, p. 435: s.v. "Ecstasy." The actual term *wajd* is seldom used; see 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, §367, II, pp. 694ff.

⁶⁴ Alan Williams, trans., *Rumi: Spiritual Verses, The First Book of the Masnavi-ye ma'navi* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 18. *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I:130.

during nightlong sessions of *samā'*, so that each individual verse is a gift and grace of an ecstatic insight inspired in him.⁶⁵ Since Rūmī composed his poetry, whether epic or lyric,⁶⁶ on the basis of direct experience of *samā'*, it can be said that the contemplative discipline of *samā'*, with its ecstatic blend of music and song, constituted the veritable conservatory of his poetic inspiration and the praxis underlying his poetics, as 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb maintains.⁶⁷

During these nocturnal soirees, as Aflākī in numerous tales relates, Ḥusām al-Dīn Chalabī (to whom the *Mathnawī* was dedicated) wrote the verses down, before singing them back out loud to Mawlānā.⁶⁸ It is in probable reference to these gatherings that in Book III of the *Mathnawī* Rūmī reproaches a lackluster disciple for being ungrateful for the food of selflessness, intoxication, and ecstasy partaken from the table of the adepts:

You loitered around the door of the heart,
And stood upon the threshold of heart-adepts
Where you drank your fill of *aqua vita*.
Those heart-adepts by God's grace touched your soul;
There at their door they vouchsafed nutriment
Of loss of self, ecstasy, and drunken
Intoxication.⁶⁹ Yet you've left their door
And like a greedy bear you roam around
The world's shops for patrons and pastries.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Arzish-i mīrāth-i ṣafīyya* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1385 A.Hsh./ 2006), p. 96.

⁶⁶ See Sitāyishgar's extensive treatment of the relationship of his poetry to *samā'* in *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 539.

⁶⁷ "One of the particularities of Rūmī's spiritual path that distinguishes his order from other Sufi orders prevalent in Konya during his day and age, traces of which are found in some places in the *Mathnawī* and all throughout the *Dīvān-i Shams*, is his special focus on the rite of *samā'* and the overwhelming interest that he and his followers had for *samā'* and music. . . . Until the end of his life he practiced this discipline and made it the way of his followers" (Zarrīnkūb, *Bahr dar kūza: naqd u tafsīr-i qissahā va tamthīlāt-Mathnawī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī, 1376 A.Hsh./1997, [7th printing]), p. 33 [§13]). Schimmel also remarks: "For Rumi himself, the whirling movement was an expression of his enraptured interior state which he, in most cases, could not control. Yet, regular *samā'* meetings were also held in his own house or in the houses of his friends" (*The Triumphal Sun* [London: Fine Books 1978], p. 217).

⁶⁸ *Manāqib al-'ārīfīn*, II, p. 742, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 572.

⁶⁹ Rūmī's technical terms: *sukr*, *wajd*, *bī-kh"udī* in this line are entirely derived from the early Baghdad and Khurasan schools of Sufism.

⁷⁰ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, III:293-96.

Consistent with Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, all throughout the *Mathnawī* Rūmī invariably uses the term *wajd* to refer to a mystical state that befalls Sufis during *samāʿ*. This is revealed in one of the few instances where the poet actually uses the word *wajd* in reference to the Sufis' circle of remembrance of God (*ḥalqa*):

When then at last the circle of those Sufis
Who sought God's favor culminated in graces,
They found fulfillment in ecstasy and joy.⁷¹

Whether it arouses joy, as Junayd preached, or grief, as Ibn 'Aṭā' asserted, *wajd* is always considered to be a divine mercy beneficial to the mystic since it renders him selfless and indemnifies him from sin. Being drunk and bereft of his wits, whatever an ecstatic utters is not considered reprehensible;⁷² he is thus beyond reproach, at least theologically speaking, states Rūmī.⁷³ This antinomian doctrine is the chief moral underlying Rūmī's tale of Moses and the shepherd in Book II of the *Mathnawī*, where Moses symbolizes a desiccated theologian insensible to love's transports, and the shepherd depicts the ideal of the selfless, ecstatic lover whose words, notwithstanding outlandish theological deviancy, are effectively judged by God to be "above the law," in the transports of *wajd* beyond vice and virtue. In the following verses, God rebukes Moses for his rigidly legalistic attitude towards the shepherd's words of ecstasy:

I have consigned a way for every one
To every one a different idiom.
For him it's praise, for you disparagement,
for him it's honey, and for you it's poison.
We are completely free from pure and impure,
all kinds of slothfulness and speediness. . . .
For Hindus, praise is couched in Hindi terms
For Sindis, praise is couched in Sindi terms.
I am not sanctified by their laudations!
It's they who are made holy, strewing pearls.
We look at neither languages nor words,
but at the soul and at the inner state.

⁷¹ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II:203 (Nicholson's translation), cited by Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism*, I, pp. 175-76, trans. L.L.

⁷² *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, V:4102-03.

⁷³ Gawharīn, *Sharḥ-i iṣṭilāḥāt-i taṣawwuf*, vol. 9, p. 152, s.v. "Wajd."

Inspecting hearts, We see if they are humble
 although the spoken words are not so humble.
 Because the heart's the substance, speech is trivial
 as it intrudes, the substance is the thing. . . .
 The learned are a certain sort, O Moses!
 Those burnt of soul and spirit are another!
 For lovers there's a burning every moment—
 no tax or tithe befalls the ruined town!
 If he speaks wrongly do not call him "wrong,"
 or if the martyr's blood-soaked, do not wash him!
 For martyrs, blood is better far than water,
 this wrong is better than a hundred rights.
 Within the *Ka'ba* there's no *qibla* rule—
 What if the pearl diver has no snowshoes?!
 Don't ask directions from the roaring drunkard!
 Why ask a threadbare man to do your darning?
 The faith of love is separate from all others
 For lovers, faith and piety are God.⁷⁴

Ecstasy and Ecumenism

As the above story reveals, one of the key elements of ecstatic experience in Sufi Islam is the intuition of the existence of a higher "religion of love" (*madhhab-i 'ishq*) effectively beyond all formal religious denominations.⁷⁵ This "religion of love" movement in classical Persian Sufi poetry⁷⁶ normally showcased Rūmī's last-cited verse ("The faith of love . . .") as its most popular adage. A more literal translation of the verse, which ideally encapsulates the ecumenical spirit of the Sufi cult of love in Islam, is as follows:

⁷⁴ I am grateful to Prof. Alan Williams for providing me his unpublished translation of these verses; for the original verses in the *Mathnawī*, see Isti'lamī's edition: II:1756-59; 1761-65; 1768-74.

⁷⁵ Keeping in mind the dubious historicity of Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad-i Aflākī's account in the *Manāqib al-'arīfīn*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959), I, p. 561 (3:§546), precisely this idea is expounded by Rūmī in the context of defending his practice of *samā'*, where this anonymous verse is cited: "The learning which is obtained in the *madrasa*, / That is one thing. Love is something else again" (John O'Kane, trans., *The Feats of the Knowers of God* [*Manāqeb al-'ārefīn*] [Leiden: Brill, 2002], p. 388).

⁷⁶ For greater elaboration of this theme, see Husayn Ghomshei, "The Principles of the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry," esp. the section on "The Religion of Love in Rūmī," pp. 81-83.

Love's state is apart
 from religions and faith
 God is the lover's religion—
 God is the lover's state.

Since the ecstatic's utterances, even when full of explicit Qur'ānic or Ḥadīth references, often overstep the boundaries of exoteric Islam, they acquire in the process an extraordinarily universal significance easily apprehended and appreciated by laymen and non-initiates. Such verbal transgressions are technically termed *shaṭḥ* (lit. "water overflowing its banks"⁷⁷) and an entire genre of theopathic expression couched in the form of proverbs known as "ecstatic paradoxes" (*shaṭḥiyāt*), spawned by such experiences of mystical rapture and transport soon came into existence.⁷⁸

Rūmī's *Mathnawī* overflows with ecstatic *shaṭḥiyāt* that are startlingly ecumenical in content. In the following verses that ostensibly describe the drunkenness of human passion, Rūmī appeals to the all-encompassing divine mercy that has intoxicated sinners and misled them to be preoccupied with worldly riches and pleasures. According to *Sharī'a* law, a drunkard cannot be punished until he has become sober; so to remain forever drunk and bereft of one's senses, he argues, takes one beyond the Canon Law into a higher condition of being:

Since it is you who has made me so drunk,
 Don't lash me with your whip: the *Sharī'a*
 States drunks must not be thrashed if they're still drunk.
 When I wake up and get drink's fumes out of my brain
 Then beat me all you like—since hey! You won't find me
 A sober guy, not yesterday and not today!
 Whoever drinks from your goblet, oh gracious Lord
 Is free forever from sobriety; he's got
 No mind to heed the lash and whip of Canon Law.⁷⁹

In this passage, ecstatic intoxication is viewed by Rūmī as an annihilating force that leads to true existence (*wujūd*) in God. His views

⁷⁷ The standard Sufi etymology as given by Abū Naṣr Sarrāj of Tūs (d. 378/988): see Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY, 1985), p. 12.

⁷⁸ The best study of which is Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*. The most famous work in this genre in Persian is Rūzbihān Baqlī's *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyāt: Commentaire sur les paradoxes des soufies*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran: Institut Français d'Iranologie de Téhéran, 1981).

⁷⁹ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, V:4202-04.

in this regard exactly parallel those of Junayd, Shiblī, Nūrī and other members of the School of Baghdad surveyed above. Rūmī adds that just as one realizes true Existence through mystical intoxication and ecstasy, one regresses truly into non-existence if one falls into sobriety. If words of ecstasy like those of Bāyazīd—"How great is My Majesty!"⁸⁰—are emitted by one, then one is to be excused, for being in a state of selflessness, one is beyond reproach:

The selfless man is dead and gone, annulled
In God he dwells, cocooned in the divine.
His personality has passed away;
He's but a looking-glass: the form therein
You see is you, not him, and if you scoff
And spit at him, it blows back in your face.⁸¹

In a word, here we can see how the transcendental experience of ecstasy leads the self-bereft mystic to pass beyond the boundaries of nomocentric *Sharī'a*-oriented Islam and enter a region where inter-religious ecumenism becomes the norm, triumphing over sectarian exclusivism.⁸²

Ecstasy and Music

As discussed above, the connection between ecstasy (*wajd*) and music (*samā'*) in Sufism was theologically authorized by Ghazālī, who devoted an entire book of his colossal opus, the *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, to explaining the orthodox religious bases and correct theological applications of music and ecstasy. The pre-eminent place and significance of *samā'* for the stimulation of ecstasy (*wajd*) is apparent in numerous passages in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* and *Dīvān-i Shams*.⁸³ In his *Mathnawī* in particular, the sacred

⁸⁰ *Subhānī mā a'āzam sha'nī*. For an excellent discussion of this saying of Bāyazīd and its various occurrences and interpretations in previous classical Sufi texts, see Nicholson's commentary on the *Mathnawī*, IV:2101-02 (Heading).

⁸¹ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, IV:2139-41.

⁸² Another similar example of this may be cited here from the *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, where he states that the "Turks, Greeks, and the Arabs," if "they be lovers" during *samā'* will "become of one tongue through this meritorious music" (vol. I, *ghazal* 304:3329).

⁸³ The place of *samā'* in Rūmī's poetry, which has already been treated extensively by a number of other scholars, is not my concern here. For an exhaustive study of the place of *samā'* in Rūmī, see Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, pp. 534-81. Annemarie Schimmel's extensive treatment of Rūmī's immersion in *samā'* and its effect on his lyric poetry in her *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rūmī*, pp. 210-22, is also particularly

concert (*samāʿ*) figures as the key stimulant to ecstasy. The “Epistle to the Reed-flute”—*Nay-nāma*—which opens the poem makes this quite clear. That Rūmī was familiar with a diversity of musical instruments (*chang*, *kūs*, *ṭabl*, *surnā*, *ney*, *duhul*, *ṭablah*, *tanbūr*, etc. used by the Sufis in their concerts) is evident from many passages in the *Mathnawī* and the *Dīwān* in which these are celebrated.⁸⁴ Rūmī himself played the *rubāb*.⁸⁵ In the following passage, for instance, Rūmī refers to the audition of music by the Sufi saint Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Adham of Balkh (d. c. 165/782), who ruled as a king before he renounced the throne and converted to the life of a wandering dervish.

From heaven's whirring spinning jenny we've received
 These tuneful strains and airs, philosophers thus believed.
 The circling gyres and the spheres' polyphony
 They maintained, gave men's voice and lutes this psalmody.
 Believers say those sounds came down from Paradise,
 Through Heaven's grace these shrill strains seem idyllic tunes.
 It was in Heaven we heard that dulcet measure.
 For all of us were bits and parts of Adam there.
 . . . That's why, for lovers, song and verse and music is

notable. Other key sources include: Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, pp. 309-13; 461-63; A. F. Ambrosio, “La danse des mevlevīs: histoire et symbolique,” in A. F. Ambrosio, E. Pierunek, and Th. Zarcone (eds.), *Les derviches tourneurs. Doctrine, histoire et pratiques* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2006), pp. 123-68; Abū'l-Qāsim Tafaḍḍulī, *Samāʿ-ī darvīshān dar turbat-i Mawlānā* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tanvīr, 1377 A.Hsh./1998 [3rd printing]), *passim*; Husayn Ḥaydarkhānī, *Samāʿ-ī ʿarīfān: baḥṭh kāmīl u farāgr pirāmūn-i samāʿ* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sanāʿī, 1374 A.Hsh./1995), index, s.v. “Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Mawlawī”; Jean During, *Musique et extase: L'audition mystique dan la tradition soufie* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1988), index, s.v. “*samāʿ*.”

⁸⁴ See Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, II, §367, p. 695; Muḥammad Riḍā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī (ed.), *Ghazaliyāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sukhan, 1388 A.Hsh./2009), introduction, pp. 116f.; Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 211-16; Abū'l-Qāsim Tafaḍḍulī, *Samāʿ-ī darvīshān dar turbat-i Mawlānā* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tanvīr, 1377 A.Hsh./1998 [3rd printing]), pp. 178-96; Murtaḍā Fallāh, “Mūsīqī dar shīʿr-i Mawlānā,” *Mawlānā-pazhūh* (1389 A.Hsh./2010), vol. 2, pp. 142-52, where specific verses from Rūmī's poetry related to these instruments are cited and discussed. Schimmel stresses that “the number of verses with musical allusions is almost unlimited in Rūmī's poetry. The poet cleverly connects the different instruments all of which serve, more or less, as symbols for his own spiritual experience: only the Eternal Musician can inspire him to sing and to speak poetry” (*The Triumphal Sun*, p. 215).

⁸⁵ ʿAbd al-Bāqī Gūlpīnārī [=Abdūlbāki Gölpınarlı], *Mawlawiyya baʿd az Mawlānā*, trans. Tawfiq Subḥānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kayhān, 1366 A.Hsh./1987), p. 547.

Their food and drink, for there, their fancy finds focus,
 There's concentration of the imagination,
 One's inmost thoughts attain there invigoration;
 In fact, by flute and horn find configuration.⁸⁶

A *locus classicus* concerning the effect of music on the soul and the experience of ecstasy (*wajd*) during *samā'*, these verses from the *Mathnawī* give a good example of the poem's avowal of the sanctity of the powers of voice and verse to arouse ecstasy in the mystic.

Ecstasy in the Mathnawī's Qur'ānic Language

Rūmī's consciousness was highly Qur'ānized, being steeped in the prophetological and hagiographical history of Islamic Sufism.⁸⁷ His poetry is so peppered with citations from the Muslim scripture that the Qur'ānocentric nature of his writings cannot be overemphasized; indeed, his *Mathnawī* has been called "the Qur'ān in Persian."⁸⁸ The following verses on divine drunkenness that contain references to various persons and doctrines mentioned in the Qur'ān exemplify his specifically Qur'ānocentric poetic vision:

The real wine is what flows from the wineskin of
 Eternity, not one that makes you drunken for one night.
 The Seven Sleepers⁸⁹ drank that real wine and lost
 Their wits three centuries and nine years; such wine
 That made Egyptian ladies slash their wrists,⁹⁰ go mad

⁸⁶ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, IV:732-36; 742-43, my translation. For an alternate translation of these lines see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p. 312.

⁸⁷ See John Renard, *All the King's Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

⁸⁸ On which, see: Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, Siyāmak Mukhtārī, *Qur'ān va Mathnawī: Farhangvāra-yi ta'thīr-i āyāt-i Qur'ān dar adabiyāt-i Mathnawī* (Tehran: Nashr-i Qaṭra, 1384² A.Hsh./2005); Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, pp. 395-96; 418-19; and also Dr. Ghomshei's essay in this volume, pp. 7-9.

⁸⁹ A reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (Qur'ān, XVIII:8-25). This identification of the Seven Sleepers with the intoxicated mystic, who is enraptured in God and rendered selfless, reappears throughout the *Mathnawī* (e.g. see Nicholson's commentary on *Mathnawī*, I:392).

⁹⁰ Qur'ān, XII:31. The story of Zulaykhā's self-righteous female critics who slit their wrists at the sight of Joseph and at once repented of the prudery of their common moral code, having been stunned by his beauty, is one of the typical examples used by Rūmī to illustrate the sway and power of selfless ecstasy over the soul. See *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, V:3236-37.

As maenads, delirious in their love of Joseph.⁹¹

In the space of only three couplets cited here, references to three different passages from the Qur'ān appear. The above verses represent but a handful out of a myriad that are cited here merely to give a flavor of the Qur'ānic substratum of his ecstatic vision and expression.

Ecstasy and Supraconsciousness

Another key theme of the type of ecstatic intoxication praised by the Sage of Konya is that it produces a supraconscious awareness (*hūsh*) and intelligence (*'aql*), before which the analytical power of man's discursive mind seems feeble. In this context one may recall Ghazālī's observation that the rapture of the discerning gnostic derives from a truly inspired certitude (*yaqīn kashfī ḥaqīqī*). The higher forms of consciousness that exist are best realized by the mystic besotted in the passion of love.⁹² When one loses one's reason in divine love, transcending ordinary rationality, one is given an intelligence that is ten—if not a myriad—times as powerful as the ordinary man's mind.⁹³

Therefore, despite the appearance of "rationality" in Rūmī's doctrines of "higher reason" or divine intelligence in the *Mathnawī*, far from expressing a "mysticism of sobriety"⁹⁴ as one scholar has argued, as a poet he considered himself to be the mouthpiece of the divine *logos*,⁹⁵ one who is perpetually *entheos* ("full of the god") with Platonic *furor*, his poetry being the creation of what Plato calls "inspired madness."⁹⁶ It is in this spirit that he celebrates the lunacy of the lover and the "fine frenzy" of the poet's eye:

⁹¹ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, IV:2097-99.

⁹² *Ibid.*, V:3233.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, IV:1424-1427. See also Parī Rīahī, *'Aql az dīdgāh-i Mawlānā* (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Pazhūhishī-yi Hikmat va Falsafa, 1384 A.Hsh./2005), pp. 165-216.

⁹⁴ I allude here to Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī's observation that "the *Mathnawī* represents the highest culmination of the mysticism of sobriety (*saḥw-āmtz*) which is more or less of a 'rationalistic' bent (*'aql-girāyāna*), although of course his reason is a divine and mystical intellectuality, not that of the philosophical or logical type, as contrasted to the *Dirvān-i Shams*, which represents the zenith of the mysticism of intoxication (*'irfān-i sukr āmtz*) in the Persian language" (Khurramshāhī, *Insānam ārizū'st*, p. 10).

⁹⁵ Anton-Hermann Chroust, "Inspiration in Ancient Greece," in Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C. (ed.), *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK, 1978), pp. 37-54.

⁹⁶ *Phaedrus* 245A.

Although your intellect fly up to heaven's gate
 Your fowl that follows others' precedent
 Pecks up from lowly soil all its beliefs.
 For the soul all blind conformist knowledge breeds ill
 And what is learned by imitation's all a bane,
 Yet here we sit and say it's our very own.
 We should discard this shabby baneful reason,
 Embrace wise lunacy instead; reject and spurn
 All that seems like profit to oneself.⁹⁷

In fact, the sober consciousness (*hushyārī*) of the self-involved worldly man is understood by Rūmī to be an affliction that leads to separation, distinction, and division. Sobriety sets people apart from each other "like oil and water," whereas in the experience of the ecstasy of drunkenness and selflessness, class distinctions vanish, the king's throne and the judge's bench appear as one, so "they're soul within the body incarnate."

Those ardent spirits were so strong they could
 inflame the heads of kings and make them place
 their crown upon their wine-boy's head. Such passion,
 such sedition it incited, that vassals
 with suzerains, and slaves with princes then
 were kneaded into one *mélange*; their flesh
 and bones dissolved away; the soul alone
 remained: the prince's throne, the judge's bench
 were hybridized that moment into one.
 When sober, serf and king are separate,
 like oil cast on to water; when they're stoned
 they're soul within the body incarnate.⁹⁸

* * *

The above overview, unfortunately cursory, of Rūmī's doctrines of ecstasy, drunkenness (*sukr, mastī*), and selflessness (*bīkh"udī*) in the *Mathnawī* demonstrates how integral the realization of rapture during *samā'* was to the whole poem's genesis. It also shows how central the terminology relating to the sphere of *wajd* is to his message. The keynote themes discussed above: the meta-ethical character and the ecumenical

⁹⁷ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II:2326-28.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, V:3456-60.

nature of the utterances of the mystic overcome by ecstasy, the stimulation of ecstasy through audition to music (*samāʿ*), the Qurʾānic diction that usually accompanies the poet's ecstatic expressions, and the transcendental intoxicated consciousness—"higher rationality"—of the experience of ecstasy, will all reappear with greater elaboration later on in the bacchanalian lyrics of the *Dīwān-i Shams*, as we shall see in the ensuing discussion.

Ecstasy and *Samāʿ* in Rūmī's *Dīwān-i Shams*

There are altogether 151 references to the word *samāʿ* in Rūmī's works, the vast majority of which (134 in total) occur in his *Dīwān-i kabīr*, also known as the *Kulliyāt-i Shams* or *Dīwān-i Shams* ("Shams' Book of Verse").⁹⁹ This voluminous collection of poetry that totals over 35,000 couplets is not only the largest book of mystical lyrics containing the widest, most diverse pattern of meters composed by any Persian poet to date, but also the most celebrated assemblage of ecstatic lyrical love poetry in all Islamic—if not in all world—literature.¹⁰⁰ The dominant register that characterizes this collection of lyrics is impassioned intoxication and Dionysian ecstasy.

As we have seen in the foregoing section on the *Mathnawī*, Rūmī's poetic genius owed much to the contemplative discipline of *samāʿ*. Overcome by ecstasies and raptures (*wajd*) vouchsafed to him during the *samāʿ* ceremony, in many instances his ecstatic poetry was an epiphenomenon of that mystical song and dance. In one *ghazal* he describes himself as "just

⁹⁹ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar; Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 537. There are only 17 references to *samāʿ* in the *Mathnawī*. For a full treatment of *samāʿ* in Rūmī's poetry, see *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, I, pp. 534-80.

¹⁰⁰ It contains 3,229 *ghazals* that vary in length between 6 to over 60 couplets, 44 strope poems (*tarjīʿāt*) totalling 1,700 verses, and about 2,000 quatrains (*rubāʿiyāt*). For the full table of the meters in the *Dīwān*, see Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Poetry* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1982), Appendix 3. "Out of the forty-eight meters used by Rūmī in his *ghazals*, eighteen meters can be found that are extremely rare in Persian poetry or else had never been used before him. There are also at least sixteen different poetic meters which were his own innovation and invention!" (Taqī Purnāmdāriyān, *Dar sāyih-i āftāb: shiʿr-i fārsī va sākt-shikānī dar shiʿr-i Mawlawī* [Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sukhan, 1380 A.Hsh./2001], p. 166). "Rūmī's concentrated efforts to use a wide diversity of poetic meters and a variety of end-rhymes is unrivalled—in the *Dīwāns* of other Arabic or Persian poets nothing of its like can be found" (Muḥammad Riḍā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī [ed.], *Ghazaliyāt-i Shams-i Tabrizī* [Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sukhan, 1388 A.Hsh./2009], introduction, p. 116).

a drunk, an addict of *samā'*."¹⁰¹ Most Iranian critics concur that Rūmī's lyrical poetry was overwhelmingly composed under the influence of the song, music, and dance of *samā'*.¹⁰² Bahā al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, in his introduction to one of the best anthologies of Rūmī's *ghazals*, writes:

Most of Rūmī's lyrics (*ghazaliyāt*) were nurtured by the Sufi music concert (*samā'-parvar*), that is to say, they were either inspired by his participation in *samā'* or meant to inspire others to participate in *samā'*. The echo of the *daf* and *rubāb*, foot-stamping and the rising and stooping of dancing dervishes, overwhelmingly bear witness to his immersion in the experience and illumination [of *samā'*], celebrated in vibrant tones throughout all his *ghazals*.¹⁰³

Apart from the overt textual evidence demonstrating the musicality of Rūmī's poetry (countless *ghazals* composed to drum-beat rhythms written in staccato meters, allegro in tempo, with lilting end-rhymes featuring choral refrains for use as versicles for Sufi *dhikr*¹⁰⁴) and the fact that his lyrics possess greater diversity of musical rhythms and melodies than found in any other Persian poet,¹⁰⁵ codicological evidence also demonstrates that the practical use of his *Dīvān* by Mevlevi dervishes from its inception was a hymnbook for *samā'*, which is why his lyric poetry may be considered to be inseparable from its use in the Sufi concert, as A.J. Arberry has pointed out.¹⁰⁶ This facilitation and systemization of Rūmī's

¹⁰¹ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, V, *ghazal* 2495, v. 26384. The couplet reads: *Man kih dar ān nazāra-am, mast u samā'-bāra-am/ layk samā'-yi har kast pāk nabāshad az manī*.

¹⁰² "The Persian language in the lyrical poetry of Rūmī attained a degree so rich in respect to musicality that no other language can compete with it. . . . We must him consider him more than any other poet in the world as one who was aware of the importance of the need to preserve musicality in poetic meter and end-rhyme" (Shaft'i-Kadkanī (ed.), *Ghazaliyāt-i Shams-i Tabrizī*, introduction, pp. 113, 116). See similar remarks by J. C. Bürgel, "Ecstasy and Order: Two Structural Principles in the *Ghazal* Poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī," in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. II: *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150-1500)*, pp. 61-74; 'Alī Dāshī, *Sayrī dar Dīvān-i Shams* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Javidān, 2535 Shāhanshāhī/1976 [5th printing]), pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ Khurramshāhī, *Insānam ārizū'st*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ On which, see Fallāh, "Mūsīqī dar shī'r-i Mawlānā," pp. 137-63.

¹⁰⁵ Purnāmdāriyān, *Dar sāyih-i āftāb*, p. 165. On this subject, see also Jalāl al-Dīn Huma'ī, *Mawlawī-nāma: Mawlawī chī migūyad?* (Tehran: Nashr-i Humā, 1385 A.Hsh./ 2006), II, pp. 595-98.

¹⁰⁶ Commenting on the Chester Beatty codex, one of the oldest manuscripts used by Prof. Furūzānfar in preparing his critical edition of the *Dīvān-i Shams*, A.J. Arberry points out

poems for use in *samāʿ*, represents the well-documented practice of the “use of sung poetry as a support for *dhikr* . . . in the context of *samāʿ*” in the Persian Sufi tradition.¹⁰⁷ Wherever *samāʿ* was observed, if Aflākī is to be believed, Rūmī was often inspired to compose *ghazals*, so that much of the *Dīvān* clearly comprises his versification of these sublime musical moments of inspiration (*awqāt*) expressive of higher states of consciousness (*ḥālāt*) experienced during *samāʿ*.¹⁰⁸

Just as we have seen with the *Mathnawī*, the lyrical oeuvre of Rūmī’s *Shams’ Book of Verse* may thus largely be considered as inspired by the Muse of Islamic melopoeia—the Sufi *samāʿ* gathering. Given

that “the poems have been arranged group by group according to metre; then, within each group, alphabetically by rhyme. Moreover, the opening couplet of each separate poem has been inscribed in red ink, to facilitate speedy identification. The resulting impression is of a gigantic hymnbook; and this indeed may well have been the intention. When it is remembered that these poems were originally composed, and were thereafter chanted, as accompaniment to the sacred dance of the Mevlevi dervishes, it does not seem too fantastic to conclude that the Chester Beatty codex, which once belonged to a Mevlevi monastery in Cairo, was compiled in this fashion as a service-book, to help the cantor to choose speedily the poem appropriate in rhythm to the particular phase of the dance” (A.J. Arberry (trans.), *Mystical Poems of Rumi*, annotated by Hasan Javadi; foreword by Franklin Lewis [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009], pp. 29-30). That Arberry’s judgement is by no means “fantastic” but absolutely correct, is corroborated by the fact that the Konya Manuscript (calligraphed during Rūmī’s lifetime between 768-770/1366-1368, published in 2 vols. by Tawfīq Subḥānī (ed.), *Dīwān-i kabīr: Kulliyāt-i Shams-i Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Husayn Balkhī Rūmī maʾrūf bi Mawlawī* (Tehran: Anjumān-i āthār u mafākhir-i farhangī, 1386 A.Hsh./2007) is also arranged exactly like the Chester Beatty codex as a service-book according to meter and rhyme; in some cases, Rūmī’s own poetic additions can be found on the margins of this manuscript (as Subḥānī notes, introduction, pp. lvii-lviii), demonstrating that the traditional use of the *Dīvān* was as a hymnal for singing during *samāʿ* concerts even during the poet’s lifetime.

¹⁰⁷ See M.I. Waley, “Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism,” in Leonard Lewisoohn (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. I: *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, p. 518.

¹⁰⁸ In this respect I concur with the judgment of Mihdī Sitāyishgar who, in his substantial two-volume work devoted to the subject of music in Rūmī’s poetry, comments that: “While dancing in *samāʿ*, certain poetic sentiments sprang to mind. These he expressed in metrical verses that in turn aroused ecstasy (*wajd*) in him. To the sound of music he would come into the middle of the assembly of *samāʿ* crying ‘Hey’! Time and again, Rūmī repeated this action and little by little the disciples of Rūmī also entered into *samāʿ* collectively. These disciples, who became soon known as the *samāʿ-īyūn*—Sacred Music Dancers—would then be invited as guests to private garden gatherings and Sufi *khānaqāhs* where the Mevlevi Dancers would be asked to perform. In this fashion, what was originally an ecstatic practice begun by Rūmī himself in the course of composing his own *ghazals*, turned into a group activity of the *samāʿ-īyūn*” (*Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 539). See also the various tales to this effect narrated in *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn*, I, pp. 489ff, trans. J. O’Kane, *The Feats*, pp. 336ff. A similar judgement is delivered by ‘Alī Dāshī, *Sayr dar Dīwān- Shams*, pp. 26-27.

that his devotion to *samā'* in the *Dīvān-i Shams* is more evident than in his other works, in what follows, I will sketch five essential dimensions—personal-mystical persuasion, poetic-aesthetic, mystical-ecstatic, contemplative-doxological, and cosmic-metaphysical—of this Dionysian vision animating its lyrics.

Samā' as Mystical Persuasion

Perhaps the most telling—and from a chronological standpoint certainly the earliest—account of the role that the practice of *samā'* played in Rūmī's life following his encounter with Shams-i Tabrīzī (November 2, 1244) is that given by his son Sulṭān Valad¹⁰⁹ in his *Ibtidā-nāma*. The following verses, translated below into prose, merit citation in this regard:

Day and night he [Rūmī] danced listening to music, being on earth like the whirling firmament. His cries and laments reached to highest heaven, and his wailing was heard by the young and old alike. He gave silver and gold to musicians, bestowing whatever he had in the way of wealth and property upon them. He was never a moment without music (*samā'*) and dance (*raqs*), never resting either by night or day, so that there was not a single singer left whose voice had not turned as silent as a deaf-mute. Their throats were all hoarse from constant singing, and all of them gave up hope of gold and coins. All the singers were exhausted and fatigued, suffering from hangovers although they had not drunk any wine. They were tired of speaking, wailing, lamenting, and not sleeping. They were so exhausted that their souls were ready to leave their bodies and their hearts burnt out without being touched by fire. A huge commotion was stirred up throughout the city [of Konya]. Not just the city, but a riot occurred throughout all Time and Space. [People murmured]:

“What's happened to the great leader and authority of our age—who we thought was such a great Islamic judge and genius? Why, like some wild hysterical person, does he stir up such wanton passions, sometimes in private and sometimes in public? Due to his dire influence the common folk have abandoned the canon law of Islam.

¹⁰⁹ On whom see M.I. Waley, “Bahā'-al-Dīn Sulṭān Walad,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, II, pp. 435-36.

All have made themselves pawns to love. Cantors who specialized in Qur'ān cantillation have abandoned their profession. Instead they only recite poetry and frequent the company of musicians. Young and old alike care only to spend their time in song and dance (*samā'-bāra*), gallivanting about on the steed of love. In lieu of prayers and pious invocations they devote themselves to writing songs and composing rhymes; their entire devotional acts and works have become all but a song and dance. They consider everything delusion but love. They vaunt that their whole religion and faith as simply becoming a lover. This path they follow is neither Islam nor infidelity. The almighty king who all obey is Shams-i Tabrizi. All their works comprise drunkenness and selflessness. This erotic faith of theirs is utter heresy.”

[Rūmī's] opponents spoke like this out of extreme denial. They declared his works all contrary to religion and the holy law. They were philistines. They considered the very pith and life of Faith heresy, and labeled as lunacy Universal Intelligence.¹¹⁰

Keeping in mind that Sulṭān Valad's poetic biography of Rūmī was slanted towards magnifying his father's stature and solidifying his own place as founder of the Mevlevi Order in the eyes of posterity, his account, despite its hagiographical nature, nonetheless probably accurately documents Rūmī's overwhelming personal passion for audition to music and verse (*samā'*). Furthermore, there are numerous passages where Rūmī and his companions' wild intoxicated fervor (*shūr*) and entreaties and attempts to obtain ecstasy (*tawājjud*) during *samā'* are described in even more vivid detail by Aflākī.¹¹¹ Just as with Sulṭān Valad's account, simply because so many of Aflākī's stories sometimes sound so completely fantastic, having been “written down with no regard to weeding out the factual or the likely from the implausible,”¹¹² which often mean his accounts “must be digested with a healthy dose of salt,”¹¹³ these stories cannot be just dis-

¹¹⁰ Cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, pp. 533-34.

¹¹¹ *Manāqib al-'arīfīn*, I, pp. 232-33, trans. J. O'Kane, *The Feats*, pp. 161-62.

¹¹² Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p. 250.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

missed out of hand.¹¹⁴ After Rūmī's death, the *samā'* ceremony continued to play a central role in the Mevlevi Order under Sulṭān Walad, his son and successor, and a century and a half later under Pīr Ādil Chalabī (d. 865/1460) "it took on its definitive form,"¹¹⁵ which we know today as the dance of the Whirling Dervishes.

Ecstasy, Higher Consciousness, and Poetic Inspiration

If, as has been argued, Rūmī's lyric and epic poetry and the philosophy of ecstasy that sustained them were inconceivable without *samā'*, it is clear that any study of his poetic inspiration cannot be disassociated from the principles of this ceremony. Indeed, the literary genre to which much of Rūmī's lyric poetry in the *Dīvān* belongs can be classified as "dance verse" or "musical lyrics" (*shi'r-i samā'ī*).¹¹⁶ *Samā'* and the composition of poetry formed for Rūmī an indivisible unity,¹¹⁷ since as a contemplative discipline *samā'* attuned his heart to other, ampler magnitudes, generating a higher consciousness that enabled him to gain access to an imaginative

¹¹⁴ As the editor of the *Manāqib* points out, Aflākī's biography of Rūmī and other Mevlevi figures still remain of immense interest "from the standpoint of history, sociology, psychology, art, mysticism, and literature" (T. Yazıcı, "Aflākī 'Arefī, Shams al-Dīn," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, I, p. 567).

¹¹⁵ Hülya Küçük, "Sulṭān Walad's Role in the Formation of the Mevlevi Sufi Order," *Mawlana Rumi Review*, III (2012), p. 35. For an interesting study of controversies regarding *samā'* in the later Mevlevi Order, see Alberto Fabio Ambrosio, "İsmā'īl Rusūshī Ankaravī: An early Mevlevi intervention in the emerging Kadizadeli-Sufi conflict," in John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander (eds.), *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200-1800* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 183-97.

¹¹⁶ As Najīb Māyil Haravī clarifies in his *Andar ghazal-i kh"tsh*, pp. 32-33. Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī adds: "His *ghazals* are mostly written in the form of poems to be sung (*tarāna*), that is to say, lyrics (*shi'r-i mulhūn*) composed according to fast rhythmic tunes (*ḍarbt-ahangī*). This is further clear evidence of his spiritual connection with the principles of the art of music and knowledge of musical cadences. Most of these poems were composed in a state of spiritual attraction (*jadhba*), divestment of material being (*inqiṭā'*), passion (*shūr*), love (*ishq*), dance (*raqs*), and *samā'*, while waving his hands, stamping his feet, and whirling to the musical beats and melodies of the instruments being played, the *nay* and *rubāb* in particular" (*Mawlawī-nāma*, p. 596). Prof. Franklin Lewis has disputed the significance and impact of *samā'* upon Rūmī's poetic inspiration in a private correspondence with the author (Aug. 23, 2012), but does concede that "the rhythmic turning of *samā'* no doubt induced many an impromptu poem, and part of the reason Rumi composed so many poems may have been to provide his followers with a suitable repertoire of librettos for the *samā'*" (*Rumi: Past and Present*, pp. 314-15).

¹¹⁷ See my "The Sacred Music of Islam," p. 28.

and invisible reality¹¹⁸ from which so many of his poems and songs (*bayt u tarāna*) sprang,¹¹⁹ as he affirms in one *ghazal*:

Samāʿ is God's tether,
Not song and verse, sport and play.
Don't gaze with pride and despise
As if awry our balladry.¹²⁰

Jean During has argued that there are several factors that account for the close connection between ecstasy, *samāʿ*, and poetic inspiration in Rūmī's lyrical poetry:

- "Since both of them [that is, *samāʿ* and poetry] proceed from the same mystical state of ecstasy, Rūmī's poetry was as much an aid to the music of the spiritual concert as the result of the mystical state engendered within him by *samāʿ*."
- The same state of ecstasy is often a source of revelation and, in turn, of poetic inspiration.
- According to all evidence, Rūmī's poems, and particularly those in the *Dīvān* dedicated to Shams-i Tabrīzī . . . sometimes appear to have been written simply for the sake of their musicality. Nevertheless, there is never any sense of stylistic artifice aroused because that musicality is intended to prolong and amplify the mystical state of consciousness (*ḥāl*) in which discursive reason dissolves away."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ As 'Alā al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1326) put it: "Ordinary ascetics and devotees will never be able to take even one step in that realm where the adepts spread their wings in *samāʿ*" (*Muṣannaḥāt-i fārsī*, p. 128, cited by Haravī, *Andar ghazal*, p. 8).

¹¹⁹ Firaydūn Sipahsālār notes that "Our sublime Master [Rūmī]—God bless him—used to write grand statements in exposition of the spiritual realities of *samāʿ*. Whoever persists in studying these remarks shall obtain sufficient interior illumination capable of fathoming their mysteries" (cited by Haravī, "Samāʿ-ī Khudāvanagār," in *Andar ghazal*, p. 289). For the original see Firidūn Sipahsālār, *Risāla-yi Sipahsālār dar manāqib-i Ḥaḍrat-Khudāvandagār*, ed. Muḥammad Afshīn-Vafāʾī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sukhan, 1387 [2nd printing]), pp. 58-59).

¹²⁰ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 5, *ghazal* 2374:25102.

¹²¹ Jean During, *Musique et extase: L'audition mystique dan la tradition soufie* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1988), pp. 193-94, translation mine.

Just as Sulṭān Valad's account cited earlier bears witness and as Aflākī in numerous anecdotes confirms, Rūmī soon became notorious for his obsession with the song and dance of *samā'*. He paid scant regard to the reproach and abuse leveled at him that he was an idler lacking all sense of proper etiquette and pious dignity appropriate to the traditional Sufi shaykh, and flaunted instead his otherworldly bohemianism:

“Music,” someone said, “demeans status,
and lessens your prestige and makes
you lose your place in men's eyes.”
“I need no place,” I said. “Your love's enough
for me, this world or the next,
of name, fame, state and circumstance.”¹²²

Underlying his *malāmatī* attitude of disregard for the scorn which his public displays of *samā'* in Konya were greeted by its highly conservative populace,¹²³ lay centuries of previous Sufis' engagement with music and erotic verse that deliberately flouted conventional codes of Muslim ethics, with a paramount place in society given to a contemplative elite of ecstatic virtuosi who aimed to elevate their Sufi votaries into a higher state of consciousness.¹²⁴ In the *Dīvān-i Shams* Rūmī describes those who profess the sanctity of the practice of *samā'* as God's intimate confidantes and supreme adepts. Elsewhere, he states that only those who profess (*iqrār*) to be drunk on this wine are the real savants and true intellectuals (*'āqil*), while those who cynically scoff and look with incredulity at the Sufi concert he dubs “dissenters” or “recreants” (*munkir*):

Whoever's not intoxicated by the Sufi concert
Is still a recreant although he may profess belief.
But one who knows the taste and lore of wine,
Call him intelligent—don't say he's just a barman.¹²⁵

¹²² *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar, vol. 4, *ghazal* 2062:21784, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 564.

¹²³ See Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad-i Aflākī, *Manāqib al-'arīfīn*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959), I, pp. 88-89, 104, trans. J. O'Kane, *The Feats*, pp. 66, 75. For an overview of opposition to *samā'* in thirteenth century Anatolia, see also Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, pp. 312-14.

¹²⁴ See Haravī, *Andar ghazal*, pp. 30-33, for a good overview of how Sufi poetry has been used in musical concerts (*shī'r-i samā'ī*) and the symbolism of *samā'*.

¹²⁵ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 3, *ghazal* 1157:12277-78, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 549. *Har kay ū rā samā' mast nakard / munkirash dān, agar chih kard iqrār // Har kay iqrār*

The Doxology of Samā': Ecstasy and the Interior Dimension of Ritual Prayer

One of the key principles of the "religion of love" in Sufism is that any act of devotion—ritual prayers, for example—must be animated by the spirit of ecstatic love to be genuine orations that are vouchsafed divine acceptance.¹²⁶ Unlike the Muslim's daily prayers that may be recited by rote and not necessarily thereby be rendered invalid according to *Sharī'a* law, the prayers of God's lovers, devoid of the corresponding ecstatic mystical state (*hāl*), constitute mere affectation. For this reason, Rūmī habitually referred to *samā'* as being "the ritual prayers of lovers" (*namāz-i 'ushshāq*), effectively elevating the ecstatic dance of the Sufi concert to the status of a sacred practice rivaling in importance the performance of Islamic ritual prayers.¹²⁷ Two anecdotes in Aflākī's *Manāqib al-'arīfīn* give a good taste of the debates conducted on the comparative merit of *ṣalāt* (Muslim ritual prayer) vs. *samā'* in Konya during this period:

There were often times when the singers would become exhausted from the extreme duration of *samā'*. So Mondays and Thursdays [holy days when *dhikr* performances are held in many Muslim countries] they invariably showed up a little late to the *madrasa*. Rūmī would say, "Since we don't have access to the lovers' ritual prayers (*namāz-i 'ushshāq*), at least let us perform our dawn prayers." He would then perform a few prostrations and genuflections of the Muslim ritual prayer until the singers arrived when the dancers would begin their Sufi concert (*pāy-kūbandagān samā' mīkardand*).

Similarly, one day when the musicians were playing the *rubāb* out of devotion to Rūmī, he became transported in ecstasy. An esteemed friend suddenly entered the hall announcing, "Afternoon prayers are now being held." Mawlānā paused a moment, and then he exclaimed: "No, no! *That* afternoon prayer is of one sort, and *this* afternoon prayer [listening to the *rubāb*] of another sort. Both incite us towards God, the former calling outwardly to

kard u bāda shinākht / 'āqilash nām nih, magū khammār.

¹²⁶ See Ghomshei, "The Principles of the Religion of Love," pp. 77-84.

¹²⁷ Aflākī, *Manāqib*, I, p. 394, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 542. See also the comparisons made between the prostrations and genuflections of ritual prayer (*namāz*) and movements in *samā'* by Rūmī's biographer, Firīdūn Sipahsālār, "Samā'-i Khudāvanagār," cited by Haravī, *Andar ghazal*, p. 289.

the divine service, and the latter inwardly summoning us to divine love and gnosis ('*ishq va ma'rifat-i haqq*')."¹²⁸

Even if such tales be apocryphal—and so many of the stories of Aflākī (who began writing his hagiography of Rūmī's life in 718/1318 and completed it circa 754/1353, some 70 years after Rūmī had died¹²⁹) were clearly written in the candlelight of devotional verisimilitude rather than in the daylight of what's historically verifiable—these tales correctly underscore the centrality and significance of *samā'* and music in Rūmī's own spiritual life.

A well-known trope in Persian Sufi texts is that the performance of *samā'* when informed by ecstatic consciousness is preferable in certain instances to the ritually correct recitation of Muslim daily prayers,¹³⁰ since the presence of ecstasy in one's devotions was the touchstone of piety.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn*, I, pp. 394-95 (§326, 327). My translation follows that of O'Kane, *The Feats*, p. 272, but with substantial modifications.

¹²⁹ Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p. 250.

¹³⁰ The most famous anecdote regarding this classic Sufi trope is found in Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar's *Asrār at-tawḥīd fī maqāmāt Shaykh Abū Sa'īd*, ed. M.R. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī (Tehran: Āgāh, 1366 A.Hsh./1987), I, p. 226, where the following story is related about Shaykh Abū Sa'īd ibn Abī'l-Khayr (357/967-440/1048), credited as being the first master who formally institutionalized the practice of *samā'* in the Sufi *khānaqāh* in Iranian Islam. The Shaykh was visiting the town of Qāyīn where he kept the company of a certain religious leader called Imām Khwāja Muḥammad Qāyīn:

Muḥammad Qāyīn used to frequent all the *samā'* gatherings which the Shaykh [Abū Sa'īd] attended. One day during a banquet, the Sufis were all in the midst of *samā'* and the Shaykh experienced a mystical state and the entire company [of Sufis] was immersed in that mystical delight. It was a very joyous moment. The muezzin sounded the call for noonday prayers. The Shaykh continued to be preoccupied with his mystical state and the whole group was in ecstasy (*wajd*), dancing and letting out shouts. Despite these mystical circumstances, Imām Muḥammad Qāyīn cried out: "Prayers! Prayers! (*Namāz! Namāz!*)."¹³¹ Our Shaykh replied, "We're all praying!" and went back to dancing as before. Imām Muḥammad left the assembly and occupied himself in saying his prayers. When the mystical state that had engaged them was over, the Shaykh then pronounced: "From the eastern horizon of the globe where the sun rises to the western rim where it sets there is nobody more distinguished and learned than this man—that is, Imām Muḥammad Qāyīn—but he doesn't have even a hair's-breadth of understanding of this topic (Sufism)" (trans. John O'Kane, *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness [Asrār al-Tawḥīd]* [Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda 1982], p. 342, with modifications).

¹³¹ The *Hādīth* sustaining this doctrine ("Ritual prayer is imperfect without the presence of heart") is cited in the *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I: 381; see Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i*

In this context, it may be underscored that *samāʿ* and music were “not simply articles of faith for Rūmī; they were religion and faith itself,” as Husayn Ghomshei in his essay in this volume eloquently argues. In fact, the keynote tenet and perhaps the most unique aspect of Rūmī’s mystical theology is music:

This science of music is the faith that I profess;
On this I pin my faith, as God is my witness.¹³²

Despite this emphasis on the importance of the cultivation of *samāʿ* as a contemplative discipline, many of the deepest meditations in the *Mathnawī* concern the attainment of ecstasy and selflessness by means of ritual prayer. “Prayer is one of the most important features in Maulana’s work,” observed Annemarie Schimmel. “In a number of lyrical poems the borderline between love poem and prayer is blurred . . . the poet easily switches from what seems to be an ecstatic love verse to a deep-felt prayer.”¹³³ However, in his lyrics in the *Dīvān-i Shams*, it is the degree of *ecstasy* in the performance of ritual prayer that is always of the essence. In the following *ghazal*, Rūmī’s description of “the drunkards’ prayers (*namāz-i mastān*)” effectively subverts the entire tradition of sobriety and temperance characteristic of the conventional juridical outlook on ritual prayer in Islam. Whereas the Qur’ān warns the believer not to “approach prayer when you are drunk” (IV:46), Rūmī lets us know that his intoxication is inspired by a fresh “faith of fire and wine”; his religion of love is full of ecstasy stimulated directly by God:

As dusk descends all men
for vespers light a lamp
But me, I sit with the Friend
behold her image in mind,
Wailing with sobs of grief,
groaning with sighs of lamentation. . . .
When with tears I make ablutions
my prayers stir up a fire

Mathnawī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihārān, 1335 A.Hsh./1956; reprinted Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1361 A.Hsh./1982), p. 5, no. 10.

¹³² *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 1, *ghazal* 457:4842.

¹³³ *I am Wind You are Fire* (London and Boston: Shambala, 1992), p. 163.

whose flames at the muezzin's cry
 burn to ashes the mosque's door!
 Whither should I face to pray?
 what *qibla* I knew has fled;
 Which prayer did I omit;
 alas, what test is this
 which Fate has brought on us?

Wondrous are such prayers,
 these drunken vespers and hymns,
 orisons of lovers too drunk to pray—
 Tell me if they're well-recited
 orthodox by punctuation, precise in pitch,
 for lovers in such drunkenness
 know no time nor place.

Two prostrations, strange! was it
 I made? Alas, was that the eighth?
 Which Qur'ānic verse was it I read?
 I forget, I swear I had no tongue!

How can I knock on God's door
 —I have no hand or heart anymore.
 Since hand and heart you've borne

O God, away from me
 grant me, I beg, refuge!
 So dazed am I when I pray I swear—
 so incognizant—or who's before me,
 that when I bend my knee, I've no conception
 of prostration or genuflection.

From now on, I'll be like shadow, stirring
 before each Imam, a motion dancing,
 as light and shade that waxes and wanes
 cast by a parasol's swaying.¹³⁴

Just as the realization of ecstasy (*wajd*) lies at the heart of ritual prayer, rapture is also the touchstone of the authenticity of *samā'*. To perform *samā'* in a state of ecstasy is to reach Paradise. To engage in *samā'* without ecstasy is to be cast into the Inferno. When Rūmī was questioned about the mystery underlying *samā'*, Aflākī tells us he replied as follows:

¹³⁴ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar, vol. 6, *ghazal* 2831:30053-60.

Theophanic revelation (*tajallī*) and the vision of God occur for the men of God more often during *samāʿ* than any other time. Through *samāʿ* they sally forth from the world of their self-existence (*hastī-yi khʿud*) and it transports them into other realms and ultimately brings them unto the *Visio Dei*. In sum, there is a kind of *samāʿ* that is forbidden (*harām*) . . . —which is utter infidelity (*kufṛ*). If a hand flails up in the dance of *samāʿ* without the right sort of mystical state of consciousness (*ḥāl*), that hand and foot will certainly experience the chastisement of hellfire. But any hand waved in the air inspired by that mystical state will certainly attain to Paradise. So there is a permissible *samāʿ* which pertains to those who practice asceticism and renunciation (*ahl-i riyāḍat va zuhd*) since their practice is performed with watery eyes and heartfelt warmth. *Samāʿ* such as this is a religious requirement (*farīḍa*). Such is the sacred music of those who experience ecstatic states of consciousness (*samāʿ-yi ahl-i ḥāl*) which is a religious duty (*farīḍa-yi ʿayn*) for them just like the duty of performing the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. Thus, for adepts in ecstatic states of consciousness (*ahl-i ḥāl*), performing *samāʿ* is exactly like consuming bread and water when one needs them, which is religiously obligatory upon them for it sustains their life.¹³⁵

Although Aflākī's "highly stylized and hagiographical"¹³⁶ narration renders it unlikely that these are Rūmī's literal words (the *Manāqib* having been compiled from largely oral sources decades after Rūmī died), his theosophical *apologia* for Rūmī's views on music—the criterion of *samāʿ* being the realization of genuine ecstasy (*wajḍ*) rather than merely the attempt to stimulate rapture (*tawājud*)—do echo authentic Sufi doctrines found in both classical and contemporary sources.¹³⁷ There are also numerous *ghazals* in his *Dīvān* that express precisely these sentiments.¹³⁸ In this vein in the *Mathnawī*, he asserts:

¹³⁵ Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn*, II, p. 658, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 545 (my translation; for an alternative translation, see O'Kane, *The Feats*, p. 454).

¹³⁶ Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p. 251.

¹³⁷ For a good account of which see Javād Nūrbakhsh, *Samāʿ* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Niʿmatullāhī 2535 Shāhanshāhī/1976), translated in his *In the Tavern of Ruin* (New York: KNP, 1976), chap. 4, pp. 32-62.

¹³⁸ See Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 218-22.

Not every man attains the *samā'* true and pure,
Not every bird may feed on figs.¹³⁹

That *samā'* was most likely the key essential contemplative discipline animating the incredible flowering of Rūmī's lyric poetry¹⁴⁰ seems to be further confirmed by its place as the keynote of the Mevlevi Order's sacred liturgy and doxology under the direction of his son and successor Sulṭān Valad. Of course, as reiterated above, since the presence of rapture and ecstasy during *samā'* are the key criteria of genuine spirituality and the absence thereof proof of skepticism and unbelief,¹⁴¹ it is clear that in Rūmī's view, religion is essentially an ecstatic experience of communion with God animated by music. One finds much in Rūmī's lyrics in accordance with Shakespeare's view that

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.¹⁴²

Indeed, Rūmī would seem to have anticipated the Bard's view of the moral nature of music's emotional impact in these verses:

Once all your fasting and your prayers are
proper and aright in God's sight, you're then
a proper hero and a champion.

¹³⁹ *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I:2763.

¹⁴⁰ Louis Martz's observation about the role of meditation in Donne and the poets of his school echoes my thesis on the central place of *samā'* in Rūmī's poetry and the poets of his school: "It may be easier for us to see Donne's originality, not as a meteoric burst, but as part of a normal, central tendency of religious life in his time. The 'metaphysical poets' may be seen, not as Donne and his school, but as a group of writers, widely different in temper and outlook, drawn together by resemblances that result, basically, from the common practice of certain methods of religious meditation. The direct influence of one of these poets upon another, though considerable, would thus become secondary: individual mastery of the art of meditation would lie behind the poetry and be the essence of their kinship" (*The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954], p. 2).

¹⁴¹ E.g. *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 3, *ghazal* 1157:12277-78 cited above.

¹⁴² *The Merchant of Venice*, V, 1:83-88, Lorenzo to Jessica.

Be pure, abased like dust on the threshold
of this seraglio; don't vaunt yourself
so much before the lovers' concert.
If you reject *samā'* and loathe the music
of lovers, come the Day of Judgment,
they'll raise you up amongst a pack of dogs.¹⁴³

Cosmic Samā'

The terrestrial dance of the whirling dervishes is but a mirror of the whirling celestial spheres, for the *samā'* heard "whilst in this muddy vesture of decay" is a by-product of the heavenly "harmony in immortal souls."¹⁴⁴ The harkening of the physical ear here-below represents the soul's meager attempt to audit the choiring of the transcendental concert hymned by the divine mind and spirit:

The ear accustomed to the concord of sweet sound and verse
Hears it here on earth and above in the concert of the firmament.
The concert played on earth derives from the song of the spheres
Since what the body's ear hears here of song and verse
Comes from the concert there played by *Spiritus* and *Intellectus*.¹⁴⁵

* * *

The sky is whirling like the mantle of a Sufi,
The Sufi therein unseen. Muslims, who's seen
A dervish robe to dance without a body?
The body moves, the robe cavorts; the body dances
Because the soul is touched and haltered down
By Love—the love of the one the soul adores.¹⁴⁶

Emphasizing the other-worldly, celestial origin of music, he writes in one verse that the ladder of *samā'* is "higher than the roof of heaven,"

¹⁴³ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 4, *ghazal* 2021:21325-21327, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 549.

¹⁴⁴ *The Merchant of Venice*, V, 1:63-64, Lorenzo to Jessica.

¹⁴⁵ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 4, *ghazal* 1832:19254-19255, cited by Sitāyishgar, *Rubāb-i Rūmī*, p. 554.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, *ghazal* 1936:20379-80.

for "there is music beyond this world and the next."¹⁴⁷ Every degree and level of being is drunk in ecstasy, the entire cosmos intoxicated, lost and bewildered by the musical concert that animates it. "The body is but a shadow cast on the earth from the pure soul of the lovers who cavort in the heaven of love. When the theophany of Divine beauty (*tajallī az jamāl-i Haqq*) increases, one may behold all the atoms in heaven and earth drunk like Moses from God's epiphany."¹⁴⁸

You skies and spheres of heaven—how long
Will you revolve? Go look at the whirligig of the elements:
How water, air and earth and fire all are drunk.
If this is what in form appears, don't ask
About Reality, for *intellectus* and *spiritus* are stoned,
The *vis aestimativa* intoxicated,
The heart's *arcanum* drunk.¹⁴⁹

* * *

Every other second's breath there comes a prophet from
The king welcoming union with the Friend and bearing
The royal cup in hand. A salvo of applause
From Universal Mind is heard. The parts and wholes
Cavort and dance, and in the garden
Rose and cypress humbly genuflect.¹⁵⁰

The ecstatic intoxication of being is universal and ubiquitous. Drunkenness permeates the entire creation, transcending all opposites, uniting all the contraries of existence:

The dance of Gabriel is out of love
For God's seductive beauty;
The ogress capers and cavorts
Enamored of a pixie.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, *ghazal* 1290:13686-13687.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, *ghazal* 398:4207-08.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, *ghazal* 390:4141-42.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, *ghazal* 1130:11919-20.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., vol. 5, *ghazal* 2327:24646.

However, although the sun's intoxication moves giddy atoms to dance, like motes bobbing up and down in its rays, the real *samā'* lies within the human heart, where the God of Love perpetually dances:

Love, who is kind to lovers, has returned
 To her own home. (Though one conceives of love
 As form, her form annuls all form).
 . . . These motes all dance like Sufis in *samā'*
 Before the sun, yet no one knows to what
 Discourse, drum beat or song tune they cavort.
 In every heart another beat and chord is struck.
 We all can see the dancers moving there:
 The players are a mystery that none can see.¹⁵²

Conclusion

In this essay, an attempt has been made to link Rūmī's poetic inspiration to the spiritual psychology of *samā'* in general and to *wajd* in particular and thus demonstrate how deeply his poetry was affected by the sanctity of music and song. The inspiration of Rūmī's poetry, it has been argued, largely derives from the contemplative discipline of the *samā'*, the Sufi concert, which itself belongs to the poetic discourse of the "science of mystical states" (*ilm al-aḥwāl*) in Sufism. These higher states of consciousness were expressed in his verse through poetic symbolism drawn from a bacchanalian lexicon couched in an antinomian Sufi tavern slang that paradoxically was both public, being a matter of common literary knowledge, and hermetic, using an esoteric symbolic code, a kind of mystical drunkards' lexicon whose key terms were wine, wine-cups, cup-bearers, intoxication, rapture, and ecstasy.

As we have seen, Rūmī's poetry gave poetic expression to many of the key doctrines of ecstasy found in the tenth-century Baghdad School of Sufism, doctrines which had developed out of speculations concerning the mystical psychology of annihilation (*fanā'*). The theoretical foundations for Rūmī's religion of music and poetry were already been laid down in the late eleventh and early twelfth century by Ghazālī's *Kitāb ādāb al-samā'y wa'l-wajd* that had consecrated and provided theological justification for the practice of *samā'* for Muslim mystics for centuries to come.

¹⁵² Ibid., vol. 3, *ghazal* 1195:12709, 12713, 12714, 12715.

Rūmī's poetry was a poetic species of this Sufi form of ecstasy born of the marriage between Sufi musicology and its doctrines of ecstasy. In this respect, it is useful to remember that the practice of *samā'* in the Mawlawī Order had *ecstasy* as its leitmotif, as Fritz Meier emphasizes:

In the environment of the Mawlawī order, which was founded in Anatolia in the 13th century by Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn-i Rūmī, the dance developed into an obligatory means of inducing ecstasy, i.e. in the series of preparations before an experience it occupied the position of *tawājud*, which naturally entailed a change of character. Among the Mawlawīs it turned into a well-rehearsed circle dance. . . . When the dance begins and ends is defined by music. *Here ecstasy is no longer the cause but the goal of the dance.* Actually, the Mawlawīs themselves often conceive of their circle dance as the ritual enactment of cosmic events. . . . *But the practical purpose of the dance is to induce ecstasy.*¹⁵³

Although this marriage between the science of music and the theosophy of ecstasy does not in any way "explain away" the miraculous phenomenon of Rūmī's poetic genius or make his *Mathnawī* or *Dīvān-i Shams* any less momentarily ineffable or monumentally inimitable as works of poetry, it gives us a practical dimension to the remarkable inspiration animating his verse. The Muse of the *Mathnawī* may still remain masked, but at least we know her name now: Music.

This science of music is the faith that I profess;
On this I pin my faith, as God is my witness.¹⁵⁴

One final consideration concerns the spiritual purpose underlying Rūmī's poetry. Generated from the contemplative discipline of *samā'*, his verse, as this essay has demonstrated, was largely inspired by ecstasies enjoyed therein. His lyrics were used in turn as a hymnal by Sufi devotees during *samā'* concerts to evoke further ecstasy. No critical approach to his poetry which would detach the literary vehicle of his verse from its teleological tenor and metaphysical message can therefore be productive. Insofar as existence (*wujūd*) born of mystical consciousness (*ḥāl*) is only found (*wajd*) through passing away in ecstasy, the process of coming to grasp the full nature of his poetry necessarily requires a kind of aesthetic

¹⁵³ Meier, "The Dervish Dance," p. 40, italics mine.

¹⁵⁴ *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, I, *ghazal* 457:4842.

and mental *tawājud* on the part of the reader, involving appreciation of the necessity of rapture as a prerequisite, leading to ecstasy as the consequence of any real existential understanding of his poetry.

The Philosophy of Ecstasy

RUMI AND THE SUFI TRADITION

Edited by
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