

## The Mevlevi dervishes and Ĝalāl al-Dīn Rūmī

The brotherhood of the Mevlevi dervishes (Mawlawis) takes its name from *Mawlana* (our Master) Ĝalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and his teachings.

Ĝalāl al-Dīn Rūmī is considered "*the greatest mystical poet of all time.*"<sup>1</sup> His nationality is shared between Afghanistan (where he was born in 1207, in Khorasan), and Turkey (where he lived and died in 1273 in Konya), and Iran (in whose language he wrote).

His teaching was addressed to all people of all faiths, of all places:

"Come, come whoever you are,  
unbeliever or fire-worshipper,  
come.  
Our convent is not of desperation.  
Even if you have broken your vows a hundred times  
come again."<sup>2</sup>

The "**Masnavi spiritual**" of Rumi (the Mathnawi), is a poem of 26,000 verses double in six volumes. But Rumi says to his disciples:

"I have not written the Masnavi  
for you hold or to repeat it  
But to put it under your feet  
so you could fly.  
The Masnavi is the ladder of ascent towards the Truth."

**The Masnavi begins with a hymn to the *ney*, the reed flute:**

"Listen to this *ney* who complains, he tells the story of separation.  
He says, 'Since they cut me from the reed bed, my lament makes man and woman groan.  
I am looking for a heart torn by separation to pour out the pain of desire.'  
Everyone who is left far from his source,  
wishes to have back the time when he was united with it ..."<sup>3</sup>

Rumi, with his thinking, is reminiscent of Greek philosophy<sup>4</sup> and, with its oriental sensibility, involves religion, art and science.

The *sama'*, the ecstatic dance of the dervishes, takes place along a circular path.

As in geometry, the circumference is developed by the geometric center, so, the circular path of the dervishes is, symbolically, the place of the multiplicity of existing things that constantly refer to the center from which are enacted.<sup>5</sup> Geometrically, the centre is not visible because it lacks of physical size; symbolically it's *Nothingness*; at the same time, it is the *Absolute*, the origin of the Universe.

"Shut up, as the center of the circle, because now the Sovereign

has erased your name from the book of the Say."<sup>6</sup>

"The Opera (*the existing multiplicity*) has woven a veil around the Worker and you cannot see Him out of the centre if not only through the Opera and for the Opera and, since the workshop is the place where the worker lives, the one who is outside is unaware of Him. Come then, into the Workshop that is the *Nothingness* so that, from that vantage point you can see together the Opera and the Worker!"<sup>7</sup>

One who participates in the *sama'* (literally "listening" referring to the *Harmony of the Cosmos*) after the first introductory laps, removes his black cloak and begins to rotate with only a white robe. Thus, symbolically,

"... he destroys his illusory appearance and evolves along the imaginary circle as *the science evolves in the knowledge*."<sup>8</sup>

"... He must migrate; he must run away from *this intellect made matter of greed and selfishness*, escape to contemplate a hundred thousand intelligences most beautiful and sublime ..."<sup>9</sup>

"O world of water and earth, since I have known you, hundreds of thousands of pains and sorrows and disasters, I have known...

As a tree, from beneath the earth I raise up hands to heaven, in the air of Who, as a friend, can liberate me from the shackles!

...

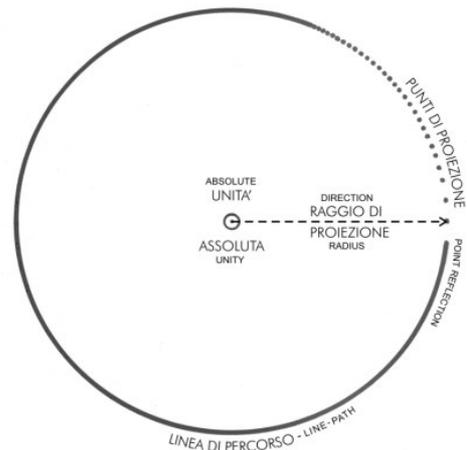
The branch turns up high because it came from on high and I tend towards the Origin, who I recognized from the Source! But why talk yet of high and low? The Oltrespazio (Beyond space) is my origin.

I do not come from one place: how could I distinguish where from where?

No, shut up rather, you enter into the *Nothingness* and are annihilated in it,

see how all things I have known from the *Nothingness*!"<sup>10</sup>

The *Nothingness* has always been the concept of philosophical interest,<sup>11</sup> insight, artistic, poetic and literary.<sup>12</sup> It is also the foundation of ecstasy (symbolically *going out of oneself* in the *sama'*), the *Nothingness*, finally, is being called into question by part of being, that is the *consciousness of being*<sup>13</sup> and, with the renunciation of the self, allows the *achievement of freedom*:



"... If they ask: What is Love? Reply, Waive will:  
***who does not escape from freedom, he is not ever free!***"<sup>14</sup>

**The field of mysticism is the inner core of all religions, where they are the closest, one to the other:**

"... I am not Jewish, nor Christian, nor Muslim nor ghebro! ...  
And not of India, not China, not Saxony or Bulgaria,  
not of Persia or Babylon, nor of Khorasan I am!  
Not of the world, not of the other, not of the heaven or hell,  
not of Adam, not of Eve, not of ethereal gardens!  
My Place is the Oltrespazio, my sign is no sign ...  
Only One I see, One I seek, One I know, One song, One contemplation!"<sup>15</sup>

**For Rumi, the world is a scale of values to be overcome:**

"Since you came into this world of beings,  
was put in front of you, to save you, a ladder.  
You were first stone, then you became plant  
and even then animal as it hid thee?  
Then you became Man with science, mind and faith: ...  
And, passing beyond man, you become angel certainly.  
And still passing beyond the angel you immerse yourself in that sea,  
***So you drop, you will be immense sea and ocean.***"<sup>16</sup>

**The endless ocean of spirituality is, however, already perceptible in every element of reality:  
as San Francisco (1182–1226) is famous for the sermon to the birds, so it is said of his contemporary  
Rumi that:**

"As he spoke of God to a group of men, all the dogs of the city there were gathered around the revelers.  
Rumi began to preach unto them, and they rhythmically shook their heads and tails and whimpered softly.  
"These dogs," said the Mawlana, "better than many men understand the *Absolute* ..." <sup>17</sup>

**There is in these verses of Rumi, a veiled distrust in the human capacity to understand the *Absolute*  
and to interact organically in the Universe.**

**The ceremony of *sama'* evokes, with *art*, the oldest origins of *religions*, referring to the intimate  
human desire for *knowledge* of nature and the universe.<sup>18</sup>**

**However, *religions, art and scientific knowledge*, in the development of "civilization," were, despite  
themselves, manipulated for power struggles and exploitation of man by man and nature,  
alienating their original identity, directed to act in the *Harmony of the Cosmos* to know, the  
spirituality of which man is a part, but also a tool:**

"The heart is like a pen in your hand,  
from you my joy, from you is worth.  
Now you grow a rose in me, now a thorn;  
now I feel like a rose, now I take thorns...  
When you hide, I believe in nothing,  
when you show yourself I am a believer."<sup>19</sup>

**The aspiration to a spiritual symbiosis with nature is incompatible with the presumption of an  
anthropomorphic centrality in the universe and the indiscriminate powers over nature. Perhaps  
today, as in the past, that presumption may be conditioned by scientific research, if this will still  
succeed in advancing in knowledge of the laws of nature without being diverted and breaking from  
utilitarian exploitation.<sup>20</sup>**

**Thus, the recovered common goal of *religion, art and science* can be expressed in human activities  
such as knowledge and conscious interaction with the universe,<sup>21</sup> of which to re-take the old feeling  
of humble religious respect; therefore not owner, but permeated by the spirituality of it.**

"I was, at the time when were not the Names, and no trace  
there was of existence of beings...  
From end to end pathways complete the Cross, and all the Nazarenes  
I have known: on the cross was not there!  
In the Pagoda I went, into the temple of the ancient monks went:  
no color, there, appeared to me of Him.  
The reins of the search then turned to the Ka'ba, but there, in that  
destination for young and old, there was nothing...  
And finally, I stared at the look in my heart, and behold, there I saw Him,  
nowhere else beyond that, He was!  
And true, so puzzled, amazed and drunk I was, so that the  
only atom of my being no longer saw.  
*I no longer was.*"<sup>22</sup>

**Of Rumi, finally, the desire for continuity of his message:**

"After my death, do not seek my tomb in the earth: in the chest of holy men is my tomb!"<sup>23</sup>

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Nicholson, *The Mathnawi*, Leiden 1925–37, p.XIII; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Rumi et la tradition soufie. In: *Nel Centenario del poeta mistico persiano Galal ad Din Rumi*, (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei), Roma 1974, p.15.
- <sup>2</sup> Verses written at the entrance of a Takiyya (convent) in Konya, Turkey
- <sup>3</sup> Jalal al Din Rumi, *Mathnawi*, edited by Gabriele Mandel Khan, Vol. 1, p. 65
- <sup>4</sup> "The One and the Multiplicity "of Plotinus (203–270 A.D.) and its origins by Plato (428–370 B.C.)
- <sup>5</sup> G. Fanfoni, An underlying geometrical design of the Mawlawi sama'khana in Cairo. In: *Ann.Islam*. I.F.A.O. Cairo (1988); pp.207–235.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Bausani, *Rumi, Poesie mistiche*, Milano 2004, p. 60
- <sup>7</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 12
- <sup>8</sup> M. Molé, "La danse extatique en Islam" in *Les danses sacrées* (Sources orientales), Paris 1963, p. 250.
- <sup>9</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 18
- <sup>10</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, pp. 115–116
- <sup>11</sup> Already in Greek culture, Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus.
- <sup>12</sup> Particularly during the romance: *L'infinito*. di G. Leopardi.
- <sup>13</sup> J. P. Sartre: *Being and nothingness (L'Être et le néant)*, 1943
- <sup>14</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 86
- <sup>15</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 63
- <sup>16</sup> A. Bausani Tradizione e novità nello stile del canzoniere di Maulana Gialalu'd.Din Rumi, in *Nel Centenario del poeta mistico persiano Galal ad Din Rumi*, (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei), Roma 1974, p.51.
- <sup>17</sup> A. Bausani, 1974, p.54.
- <sup>18</sup> Fr. D. Schleiermacher, *Reden uber die Religion*, 1799
- <sup>19</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 114
- <sup>20</sup> Naguib Mahfouz in the novel *The District Boys* after telling the moral commitment of the prophets of the three monotheistic religions and the failed application of it to the social conscience, pessimistically, also provides for the failure of science, which replaced the religions, and has become, as a technological tool, the most powerful power of exploitation and destruction, so saying, unfortunately, the human inability to escape from that intellect made matter of greed and selfishness, deprecated by Rumi.
- <sup>21</sup> In fact, if from the history of "civilization" we remove the original common goals of the already tarnished fields of religion, art and science, the human culture, although more and more advanced, it would not be very different from that of ants or other organized animals to survive, and, in this sense, we should also remember the warning of Ulysses, by Dante (*Divina Commedia, Inferno / Canto XXVI* - vv. 112–120): "... you were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge."
- <sup>22</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 57, 58
- <sup>23</sup> A. Bausani, 2004, p. 6.