

Sufism. Sufi individuals and groups became publicly known in Arabia in the 8th century. As mystics, esteemed for religious piety, they were able to exercise the role of mentors of devotion and conduct in the theocratic community of Islam. . . . Accepting Muhammad the Prophet as the originator of the current phase of Sufi manifestation, they also regard Jesus as a Sufi: while one of the greatest of all Sufis, Jalaluddin Rumi, openly declared that many non-Muslims understood Sufism better than ordinary Muslims. . . . Like all gnostic systems, Sufism regards conduct as secondary, and divine illumination as primary. Sufi masters are therefore those who, having experienced the 'path' to such cognition, are able to guide others along it and also to relate it to terrestrial social needs. . . .

The Sufis say that they have no history, because Sufism is experience, not recording information. Their goal is attaining knowledge of a higher reality, of which familiar religion is a lower level: that of social and psychological balance. When the goal is attained, the Sufi acquires not only knowledge of the divine (and of extra-dimensional reality) but also functions associated with it which are not to be confused with repetitious observance or emotional stimulus. Those alone who have reached this stage may properly be called 'Sufis'. Anyone else is 'on the Path', or a 'dervish', roughly equivalent to a monk or friar. . . .

Sufi 'orders' came into being much later than teachers and schools, and they clearly resemble traditional orders in, for example, Christianity. . . . Their practices are mostly of a devotional autohypnotic nature, and produce conditioned states which are much at variance with essential Sufi theory relating to the need for individual and specific teaching. Most groups which employ the name Sufi in the Middle and Far East and Africa are in fact Islamic prayer congregations of the enthusiast type. Many closely resemble formal churches of whatever religion, and hence have an attraction for people brought up in parallel systems.

The Sufis enjoy, on the whole, a high reputation in the East, and have been extensively appreciated by non-Islamic religionists and scholars, including Western mystics. . . .

[The Sayed Idries Shah "Sufism" *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*. Richard L. Gregory. Oxford University Press 1987.]

Sufism Sufis strive to constantly be aware of God's presence, stressing contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction. In contrast to the academic exercises of theology and jurisprudence, which depend on reason, Sufism depends on emotion and imagination in the divine-human relationship. . . . It is closely associated with both popular religion and orthodox expressions of Islamic teachings. It has been both opposed and supported by the state.

Sufi rituals typically consist of the recitation of prayers, poems, and selections from the *Quran*, and methodical repetitions of divine names (dhikr) or Quranic formulas, such as the shahadah. In communal gatherings, Sufis perform dhikr aloud, often with musical accompaniment. . . .

Historically, Sufi orders have facilitated interregional interaction, education, and travel, and have supported reform, spiritual revival, and missionary activities. They have also provided organization and support for movements resisting foreign rule throughout the Islamic world.

Written expressions of Sufism include hagiographies, poetry, and literature describing the stations (maqamat) of spiritual ascent on the path to God and their accompanying psychological transformations. Sufis use terms such as *sukr* (intoxication) and *sahu* (sobriety) to describe their experiences. "Intoxicated" expressions of Sufism predominate in Sufi poetry, expressing joy and ecstasy. "Sober" Sufism offers methodical, specialized discussions of ritual, behavior, morality, Quranic exegesis, and the nature of God and the world. Intoxicated Sufism is popular among Muslims of all classes and persuasions. Sober Sufism tends to appeal to intellectuals. . . .

Popular participation in Sufi gatherings and support for various types of tariqahs remain high throughout the Muslim world. Estimates of membership in Sufi orders in Egypt alone are in the millions, in contrast to the hundreds or thousands in the more militant Islamic revivalist organizations.

["Sufism" *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. John L. Esposito, ed. Oxford University Press Inc. 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*]

Rumi, Jalal al-Din al- (d. 1273) Born in Balkh (in modern Afghanistan) but lived in Qonya, Anatolia (Turkey). Initially followed existing Sufi paths, but became a visionary ecstatic in 1244 after being inspired on a new path of aesthetic and emotional mysticism, which developed into the Mawlawi (Mevlevi) order after his death. . . . Sought identification of the human self with divine Being. Famous for humanism, devotion to music, and dhikr exercises incorporating dance where dervishes imitate the order of the universe by spinning in circles around the shaykh like planets revolving around the sun; this gave rise to the European expression “whirling dervishes.” Wrote more than seventy thousand verses of Persian poetry in ordinary language, expressing the experience of God's presence in creation and inspiring joy in the listener; common themes are the trials of separation from the Beloved and the joys of union with Him. Most famous poem is *Mathnawi*, a compilation of spiritual outbursts, anecdotal ruminations, and parables expressed in poetic form. Followers believe it to reveal the inner meaning of the *Quran*.

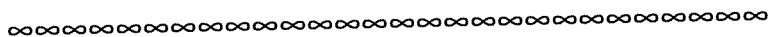
[*Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. John L. Esposito, ed. Oxford University Press Inc. 2003.]

A great mystic poet of Islam and founder of the Mevlevi order. Rumi's meeting with the Shams al-Dn Tabrzi, led him to abandon his teaching career and devote himself entirely to the mystic path. From then on, Rumi, over a period of time, received divine illumination; and the love of God became the whole basis of his life. Contrary to general Muslim practice, Rumi gave music and dance an important place in religious expression. The best known of his works are *Diwani-shams-Tabrizi* (The Poems of Shams-i-Tabriz) and *Mathnaw* (The Poem in Rhyming Couplets, tr. R. A. Nicholson, 1925–40), a great mystical poem considered to be the essence of the Qur'n rendered in Persian. His influence over the Sufi orders of Turkey, Persia, Central Asia, and India reinvigorated Islam from within and helped it recover from the Mongol invasions (1258).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. Ed. John Bowker. Oxford University Press, 2000.

RUMI

Translated by Coleman Barks



Birdsong brings relief
To my longing.

I am just as ecstatic as they are,
But with nothing to say!

Please, universal soul, practice
Some song, or something, through me!

Song of the Reed

Listen to the story told by the reed,
of being separated.

"Since I was cut from the reedbed,
I have made this crying sound.

Anyone apart from someone he loves
understands what I say.

Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.

At any gathering I am there,
mingling in the laughing and grieving,

a friend to each, but few
will hear the secrets hidden

within the notes. No ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit,

spirit up from body: no concealing
that mixing. But it's not given us

to see the soul. The reed flute
is fire, not wind. Be that empty."

Hear the love fire tangled
in the reed notes, as bewilderment

melts into wine. The reed is a friend
to all who want the fabric torn

and drawn away. The reed is hurt
and salve combining. Intimacy

and longing for intimacy, one
song. A disastrous surrender

and a fine love, together. The one
who secretly hears this is senseless.

A tongue has one customer, the ear.
A sugarcane flute has such effect

because it was able to make sugar
in the reedbed. The sound it makes

is for everyone. Days full of wanting,
let them go by without worrying

that they do. Stay where you are
inside such a pure, hollow note.

Every thirst gets satisfied except
that of these fish, the mystics,

who swim a vast ocean of grace
still somehow longing for it!

No one lives in that without
being nourished every day.

But if someone doesn't want to hear
the song of the reed flute,

it's best to cut conversation
short, say good-bye, and leave.

THE GUEST HOUSE

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

CLEAR BEING

I honor those who try
to rid themselves of lying,
who empty the self
and have only clear being there.

Q U I E T N E S S

Inside this new love, die.
Your way begins on the other side.
Become the sky.
Take an ax to the prison wall.
Escape.
Walk out like someone suddenly born into color.
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side. Die, and be quiet. Quietness is the surest sign that you've died.
Your old life was a frantic running from silence.

The speechless full moon comes out now.

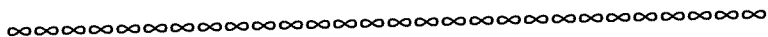
UNFOLD YOUR OWN MYTH

Who gets up early to discover the moment light begins?
Who funds us here circling, bewildered, like atoms?
Who comes to a spring thirsty
And sees the moon reflected in it?
Who, like Jacob blind with grief and age,
Smells the shirt of his lost son
And can see again?
Who lets a bucket down and brings up
A flowing prophet? Or like Moses goes for fire
And finds what burns inside the sunrise?

Jesus slips into a house to escape enemies,
And opens a door to the other world.
Solomon cuts open a fish, and there's a gold ring.
Omar storms in to kill the prophet
And leaves with blessings.
Chase a deer and end up everywhere!
An oyster opens his mouth to swallow one drop.
Now there's a pearl.
A vagrant wanders empty ruins.
Suddenly he's wealthy.

But don't be satisfied with stories, how things
Have gone with others. Unfold
Your own myth, without complicated explanation,
So everyone will understand the passage,
We have opened you.

Start walking toward Shams. Your legs will get heavy
And tired. Then comes a moment
Of feeling the wings you've grown,
Lifting.



THE WORM'S WAKING

This is how a human being can change:

There's a worm addicted to eating
Grape leaves.

Suddenly, he wakes up,
Call it grace, whatever, something
Wakes him, and he's no longer
A worm.

He's the entire vineyard,
And the orchard too, the fruit, the trunks,
A growing wisdom and joy
That doesn't need
To devour.

The mystery does not get clearer by repeating the
question,
Nor is it bought with going to amazing places.

Until you've kept your eyes
And your wanting still for fifty years,
You don't begin to cross over from confusion.

Who sees inside from outside?
Who finds hundreds of mysteries
Even where minds are deranged?

See through his eyes what he sees.
Who then is looking out from his eyes?

THIS WE HAVE NOW

This we have now is not imagination.

This is not grief, or joy, not a judging state, or
an elation, or a sadness.

Those come and go. This is the presence
that doesn't.

It's dawn, Husam, here in the splendor of coral, inside the
Friend, in the simple truth of what Hallaj said.

What else could human beings want?

When grapes turn to wine, they're wanting this.

When the night sky pours by, it's really a crowd of
beggars, and they all want some of this.

This we are now created the body, cell by cell, like
bees building a honeycomb.

The human body and the universe grew from this, not this
from the universe and the human body.

I have lived on the lip
Of insanity, wanting to know reasons,
Knocking on a door. It opens.
I've been knocking from the inside!

THE LAME GOAT

You've seen a herd of goats
Going down to the water.

The lame and dreamy goat
Brings up the rear.

There are worried faces about that one,
But now they're laughing,

Because look, as they return,
That goat is leading!

There are many different kinds of knowing.
The lame goat's kind is a branch
That traces back to the roots of presence.

Learn from the lame goat,
And lead the herd home.

THE SEED MARKET

Can you find another market like this?

Where, with your one rose
You can buy hundreds of rose gardens?

Where, for one seed
You get a whole wilderness?

For one weak breath
The divine wind?

You've been fearful
Of being absorbed in the ground,
Or drawn up by the air.

Now, your waterbed lets go
And drops into the ocean,
Where it came from.

It no longer has the form it had,
But's still water.
The essence is the same.

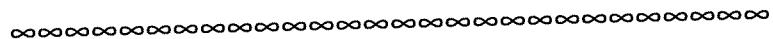
This giving up is not a repenting.
It's a deep honoring of yourself.

When the ocean comes to you as a lover,
Marry, at once, quickly,
For God's sake!

Don't postpone it!
Existence has no better gift.

No amount of searching
Will find this.

A perfect falcon, for no reason,
Has landed on your shoulder,
And become yours.



SPRING IS CHRIST

Everyone has eaten and fallen asleep. The house is empty.
We walk out to the garden to let the apple meet the peach,
To carry messages between rose and jasmine.

Spring is Christ,
Raising martyred plants from their shrouds.
Their mouths open in gratitude, wanting to be kissed.
The glow of the rose and the tulip means a lamp
Is inside. A leaf rembles. I remble
In the wind-beauty like silk from Turkestan.
The censer fans into flame.

The wind is the Holy Spirit.
The trees are Mary.
Watch how husband and wife play subtle games with their
hands.
Cloudy pearls from Aden are thrown across the lovers,
As is the marriage custom.

The scent of Joseph's shirt comes to Jacob.
A red carnelian of Yemeni laughter is heard
By Muhammad in Mecca.

We talk about this and that. There's no rest
Except on these branching moments.

THE DIVER'S CLOTHES LYING EMPTY

You're sitting here with us, but you're also out walking
In a field at dawn. You are yourself
The animal we hunt when you come with us on the hunt.
You're in your body like a plant is solid in the ground,
Yet you're wind. You're the diver's clothes
Lying empty on the beach. You're the fish.

In the ocean are many bright strands
And many dark strands like veins that are seen
When a wing is lifted up.
Your hidden self is blood in those, those veins
That are lute strings that make ocean music,
Not the sad edge of turf, but the sound of no shore.

