

The Water Aflame

Selected Poems of Rumi

Translated from the Persian by
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These Words are Water from the Endless Sea of Love

The Western fascination with Mowlavi Rumi's poetry has persisted for centuries and ever on the rise, especially among Americans. The reason may be a void it fills in the Western literature, the general trend of which through Renaissance and the Enlightenment has led to Decadence and the Absurd, notwithstanding visionaries such as Dante, Blake and Rimbaud of the illuminations.

In Rumi's poetry too there is annihilation, conscious extinction into the beloved sublime, not so far apart from T. S. Eliot's "extinction of personality" required for poetic creativity. Rumi's verse is charged with intense passion and jubilant rapture for his beloved Shams, a perfect enlightened sufi, a token of divine manifestation. Far from somber and gloomy, his poetry is highly rhythmic, vibrant expressions of the beloved sublime and fervent longing for reunion with its immanent truth. Much of it was uttered spontaneously during his whirling trance of *Sama* and directly scribed by followers — spontaneous overflow of inspirations expressed instantly, unlike Wordsworth's romantic "recollected in tranquility". The poetry thus transcends conventional binaries of good/evil, love/ hate, war/ peace, heaven/ hell, etc., and envisions all beings dancing in ecstasy for the beloved true beauty — which recalls Keats' chiasmus, "beauty is truth, truth beauty".

In brief history, Mowlavi was born in the 13th century in the city of Balkh in the eastern frontiers of Persia. His father was an eminent Sufi, who moved the family westward on the brink of the Mongol invasion, when he was a boy of twelve. En route they met great mystics Attar and Ibn Arabi, both moved by the boy's evident promise. After meeting the son and father, Ibn Arabi noted: "Wondrous, an ocean follows the steps of a lake!". They finally settled in city of Konya,

in today Turkey, where Molavi lived to become a prominent religious teacher with a large following in his sermons.

Turning point came as he met the Sufi Shams of Tabriz, who became his idol and transformed him into an impassioned poet and mystical dancer. The magnetic bond between the two men made them a fascinating pair in literary history. Their mysterious private sessions, however, caused much jealous spite, that led at last to the flight of Shams from Konya and later his death at the enemies' hands.

The 170 poems here are chosen from over 2500 ghazals that make up the Divan of Shams (collected ghazals of Molavi,) and from the chosen lyrics select verses, and not all, transpired into English. This bilingual edition offers the original Persian poems as well as their translated English texts in the same page.

English renditions of Rumi's verse fall into two broad categories: academic and popular. The first is scholarly at the expense of poetic appeal, the second abounds in simplistic sentimentality. The present attempt aims at semantic precision and poetic concision, a balance of beauty and fidelity.

S. Saeedpour, 20 June 2020

List of poems by first line

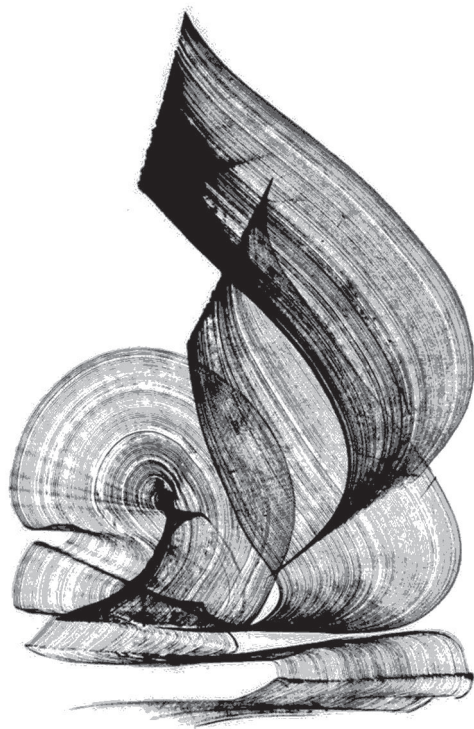
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I tried each and all, found none as fair as you.	55
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What comes from sugar, but gracious sweets?	66
Secretly said fire to the ear of smoke:	67

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Since the morn Venus is in-tuned to the heart	69
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Love seized my rosary and gave me verse and song	79
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By my side I ever find the beloved scent	81
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So intoxicated I am today, so drunk	83
Rise up to raise the morning glass	84
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Flow now the ruby tears rolling down the eyes	92
Whoever has no trace of this passion	93
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This time around I twist suddenly in devotion	95
Coming back, I'm coming back from the beloved	96
Dead I was, turned alive, crying, turned to laugh	97
O waste no time, I won't leave till I drink	98
Of the thousand you's and me's I wonder who's me!	99
Fast I am running, fast, the riders to overtake	100
Hey you who served me wine at dawn	101
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Upon a passion I set foot that tops lovers all	104
Not an hour, not a breath will I quit craving you	105
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Time now for me to break the covenant	116
Once more we rise from the heart, mind and soul	117
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Though clapping hands, I am not of the woman kind	119
A servant of the sun, I speak of sunlight alone	120
What took the heart, strange, that I'm so languid,	121
From the high up we are, going up	122
Happy happy you are, but I a thousand fold!	123
Ah so devoid of color and feature I am	124
Rise to instigate a sedition	125
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Like a ghost you sneak in through my soul	127
Lovers oh lovers, it's time to depart the world	128
In our veins do flush the fluid of love,	129
What did you have, O heart, be honest, don't hide	130
Know you the tavern that's beyond the six directions?	131
What knew I this passion would drive me mad,	132
O heart, since my tongue moves not in descanting	133
This face adorns the garden, ah such face!	134
If you're in love, abandon sorrow	135
O spring anew, our own spirit, refresh our lives	136
O minstrel, softly play so the soul to body returns	137
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Go on to bed, leave me to myself	140
With a visage aflame, who is it at our door?	141
Once more is love pouring down my door and wall	142
Quit all cunning O lover, go mad, out of your mind	143
My love, are you more fair or your apple grove?	144
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Hey you're stumbling, what did you take again?	146
The rock splits in pining for your visage,	147
Frenzied I am once more, in such state	148
Happy the time you and I sit upon the porch,	149
Lunar servant I am, say nothing but the moon,	150
O lovers I'm out of my mind, where is the chain?	151
I'm drunk and you're dazed, who shall bear us home?	152
Wondrous friend of mine comes now home	153
Who is this midnight come like the moonlight?	154
Serve the cup of vintage as we are in such state	155
Someone is hiding here, grabbing my robe	156
Saw mistress mine, swinging round the house	157
Is your eye dozing off, or are you being coy?	158
Oh fluid of life, with provisions,	159
In my wine you poured some other thing,	160
In the evening when all set on lamp and dine,	161
Divine mode you have, when you enter the breast	162
What's in your heart that you laugh so sweet,	163
You are right to tremble by just a kiss	164
Carried away is my heart by the ark of love's sense	165
If you know me not, ask the darkling night	166
Surpassing the bounds of "how", say how are you?	167
Now you enter the heart, then soar off the soul!	168
You flew away at last and passed into the unseen	169
Our sea must come to end in a shore	170
Soul of the globe, where were you last night?	171
In my heart you strike a new chord	172
Came the wind to ask the willow: Hey!	173
All night I ponder, all day I wonder:	174



Healers we are, physicians from Baghdad arrived
Many a sick soul we saved from malady.
Chronic wounds and endless woes
We did nail on hooks from the limbs and veins.
Doctors of eloquence we are, pupils of Messiah
Many a dead one we marked, breathed soul into them.
Do ask those who have beheld the signs
So they say grace for what ill they fled.
We shall batter all cares, banish all pains
We are all beloveds fair like the holy moon.
All doctors divine, we claim wages from none—
We are pure of spirit, not of wicked greed.
Think not that this be hubbub and pills routine
As these healing herbs are from heaven derived.
Informed sages we are, prescribing no vial
For we run like thoughts through the bodies ill.
Open not your mouths as they are mostly owls
Cast no boasts in air for we are falcons a-fly.

حکیمیم طبیبیم ز بغداد رسیدیم
بسی علتیان را ز غم باز خریدیم
سَسَل‌های کُهْن را غم بی‌سر و بن را
زرگ‌هاش و ز پی‌هاش به چنگاله کشیدیم
طبیبان فصیحیم که شاگرد مسیحیم
بسی مرده گرفتیم در او روح دمیدیم
بپرسید از آن‌ها که دیدند نشان‌ها
که تا شکر بگویند که ما از چه رهِدیم
سر غصه بگویم غم از خانه برویم
همه شاهد و خوبیم همه چون مه عیدیم
طبیبان الهیم ز کس مزد نخواهیم
که ما پاک‌روانیم نه طماع و پلیدیم
مپندار که این نیز هلیله‌ست و بلبله‌ست
که این شُهره عَقاقیر ز فردوس کشیدیم
حکیمان خبیریم که قاروره نگیریم
که ما در تن رنجور چو اندیشه دویدیم
دهان باز مکن هیچ که اغلب همه جغدند
دگر لاف مپران که ما باز پریدیم

O sudden resurrection, O boundless bounty
Who set aflame the meadows of the mind.
Laughing you come today, key to the cage,
Come to save the poor in grace of God.
The sun's sentry you are, mandate of hope
Yours is the quest and inquest, the end and prime
O giver of souls unique, joy of knowledge and act
The rest but pretense and guile, malady and remedy.

ای رستخیز ناگهان، وی رحمت بی‌منتها
ای آتشی افروخته در بیشه اندیشه‌ها
امروز خندان آمدی، مفتاح زندان آمدی
بر مستمندان آمدی چون بخشش و فضل خدا
خورشید را حاجب تویی؛ اوامید را واجب تویی
مطلب تویی، طالب تویی، هم منتها، هم مبتدا
ای روح بخش بی‌بدل، وی لذت علم و عمل
باقی بهانه‌ست و دغل، کاین علت آمد وان دوا

Freed from the self and whims, plight of life and death
Living or dead, my home is none but grace of God.
Freed I am from the verse and meters, O primal Lord,
All sick and tired I am of the whole task of prosody —
It's all naught but mere skin, fit for the poet's brain —
O silence, you are my brain, veil of inner excellence
The least merit in silence is having no fear and hope.
A mirror I am, just a mirror, not a man of essays
My state to be seen if your ears turn into eyes.

رستم ازین نفس و هوا، زنده بلا مرده بلا
زنده و مرده وطنم نیست به جز فضل خدا
رستم ازین بیت و غزل، ای شه و سلطان ازل!
مفتعلن مفتعلن مفتعلن کُشت مرا
قافیه و مغلطه را، گو همه سیلاب ببر
پوست بود، پوست بود، در خور مغز شعرا
ای خمشی! مغز منی، پرده آن نغز منی
کمتر فضل خمشی کش نبود خوف و رجا
آینه‌ام، آینه‌ام، مرد مقالات نی‌ام
دیده شود حال من ار چشم شود گوش شما

Behold the full moon that broke our slumber
Shining from the sky upon our land of waste
Tearing sleep from our eyes as night fades into day.
No water need the thirsty, love suffices us for life.
Drops of blood all the way from the sword of his love
The whole place smells of our roasted hearts.
So how will the lovers turn in the day of union
When the world falls apart by our veiled idol!

ماه درست را ببین، کو بشکست خواب ما
تافت ز چرخ هفتمین در وطن خراب ما
خواب بپر ز چشم ما چون ز تو روز گشت شب
آب مده به تشنگان عشق بس است آب ما
جمله ره چکیده خون، از سر تیغ عشق او
جمله کو گرفته بو از جگر کباب ما
تا چه شوند عاشقان روز وصال ای خدا
چون که ز هم بشد جهان از بُت با نقاب ما

From this point of bliss go not forth alone
Drink up the spirits and chew on the sweets.
Inward like great wisdom, outward a basket of roses
You inspire holy verses in graceful gift.
Images divine, delight without remorse
From the hidden feast and feast, secrets sublime.
The charm in every face just a drop from the sea —
How can the thirsty be content with a single drop?
From these dungeons make out to open fields
With limbs so idle you think you have no legs.
Whatever thoughts you hide in your private heart
Their clue and hue come manifest on your face.

ازین اقبالگاه خوش مشو یک دم دلا تنها
دمی می نوش باده‌ی جان و یک لحظه شکر می خا
به باطن همچو عقل گل، به ظاهر همچو تنگ گل
دمی الهام امر «قُل»، دمی تشریف «أَعْطِينَا»
تصویرهای روحانی، خوشی بی پشیمانی
ز رزم و بزم پنهانی، ز سیر «سِرِّ» او اخفی؟
ملاحظات‌های هر چهره از آن دریاست یک قطره
به قطره سیر کی گردد کسی کش هست استسقا؟
دلا زین تنگ‌زندان‌ها رهی داری به میدان‌ها
مگر خفته‌ست پای تو، تو پنداری نداری پا
هر اندیشه که می‌پوشی درون خلوت سینه
نشان و رنگ اندیشه ز دل پیداست بر سیما

Ever seen a lover fulfilled of this passion?
Ever seen a fish who got tired sick of the sea!
Ever seen a picture that fled its painter?
Ever seen a lover to claim the beloved he seeks!
The lover apart is like a name without sense
But sense like the beloved has no need of name.
You are the sea and I the fish, hold me as you wish
Bless me, rule me, as without you I am forlorn.
If fire sees you, it will be so rooted to the ground
That it will bear roses for each and all to pick.

تو دیدی هیچ عاشق را که سیری بود ازین سودا؟
تو دیدی هیچ ماهی را که او شد سیر ازین دریا؟
تو دیدی هیچ نقشی را که از نقاش بگریزد؟
تو دیدی هیچ وامق را که عذرا خواهد از عذرا؟
بُود عاشق، فراق اندر، چو اسمی خالی از معنی
ولی معنی، چو معشوقی، فراغت دارد از اسما
تویی دریا، منم ماهی، چنان دارم که می خواهی
بکن رحمت بکن شاهی که از تو مانده ام تنها
اگر آتش تو را ببند چنان در گوشه بنشیند
کز آتش هر که گل چیند، دهد آتش گل رعنا

Such love, O so much love that's ours, O God!
So fair and fine, so beautiful, my God.
By that liquor of life are we whirling so
Not by the drums, the reed-flute or the clapping.
To any mind and brain his fancy falls
Makes that mind so refined, of sight intense.
By the beloved's reflection in this rose garden
Everywhere shines a moon, stars and sun.
Like tides of a torrent, towards you we flow
As every flood is destined unto the sea.
For *Shamse Tabrizi*, the heart and soul and eyes
Are in anxious frenzy with passion, O God!

زهی عشق، زهی عشق که ما راست خدایا
چه نغز است و چه خوب است، چه زیباست! خدایا
از آن آب حیات است که ما چرخ زنایم
نه از کفّ و نه از نای نه دفاهاست، خدایا
به هر مغز و دماغی که در افتاد خیالش
چه مغز است و چه نغز است، چه بیناست، خدایا
ز عکس رخ آن یار درین گلشن و گلزار
به هر سوّمه و خورشید و ثریاست، خدایا
چو سیلیم و چو جوییم، همه سوی تو پوییم
که منزلگه هر سیل به دریاست، خدایا
ز شمس الحق تبریز دل و جان و دو دیده
سراسیمه و آشفته سوداست، خدایا

I chanced on a journey without my self
Where I found my heart's delight.
The moon that was hiding from us
Lay cheek on our cheeks without us.
As we lay lives on the beloved quest
His care delivered us from our airs.
Ever drunk we are without wine
Ever in cheers without our selves.
You need never to remember us —
We are remembrance with no selves.

ما را سفری فتاد بی ما
آنجا دل ما گشاد بی ما
آن مه که ز ما نهان همی شد
رخ بر رخ ما نهاد بی ما
چون در غم دوست جان بدادیم
ما را غم او بزداد بی ما
ماییم همیشه مست بی می
ماییم همیشه شاد بی ما
ما را مکنید یاد هرگز
ما خود هستیم یاد بی ما

Strike no notes but to dote on our sweetest heart
That grace of a thousand Josephs*, charming sweet.
Since my heart wore the belt in pledge to Messiah
My faith is hence defiant of this brand of belt.
A sun divine shone out, not from the east or west
For him our walls and doors set to dance like atoms.
As particles we are in pursuit of that sunlight
Hence our task to whirl like atoms all day and night.

* Biblical prophet in Egypt, famed for beauty and virtue

پرده دیگر مزن جز پرده دلدار ما
آن هزاران یوسف شیرین شیرین کار ما
دل چو زُناری ز عشق آن مسیح عهد بست
لاجرم غیرت بَرکد ایمان بر این زُنار ما
آفتابی نی ز شرق و نی ز غرب از جان بتافت
ذره وار آمد به رقص از وی در و دیوار ما
چون مثال ذره ایم اندر پی آن آفتاب
رقص باشد، همچو ذره، روز و شب، کردار ما

Dispatched a star with a message to you last eve
Saying: Betake my regards to that shining moon.
In prostration said I: Betake my praise to that sun
Whose rays convert granite into sheer gold.
Opened up my heart, to expose the hurts and scars.
Said I: Betake these news unto that cruel idol.
Your realm of union was the heart from the start,
How long will you hold this vagrant soul apart!
I cease now, but so as to repel the stupor
Do make your languid eyes the Saki of lovers.

دوش من پیغام کردم سوي تو استاره را
گفتمش: «خدمت رسان از من تو آن مه پاره را»
سجده کردم، گفتم: «این سجده بدان خورشید بر
کاو به تابش زر کند، مر سنگ‌های خاره را»
سینه خود باز کردم، زخم‌ها بنمودمش
گفتمش: «از من خبر ده دلبر خونخواره را»
شهر وصلت بوده است آخر ز اول جای دل
چند داری در غریبی این دل آواره را
من خمش کردم ولیکن از پی دفع خمار
ساقی عشاق گردان نرگسِ خماره را

Once dragged down to the carnal cage from high up
I went lone and separate from cherubims of the court.
In the cage of a sudden found a lunar mate
Whose desire cast many a passion in my mind.
All seek release from ill captivity, not me —
Why get out, to whom, when Beloved is right here?
Nowhere can I gain his sanctity but within this cage
As the honey's heart goes pure in fire alone.
When you gain that gem you merit the marvel
To cross like Moses through the seven seas.

چو مرا به سوي زندان بکشید تن ز بالا
ز مقرّبان حضرت بشدم غریب و تنها
به میان حبس ناگه قمری مرا قرین شد
که فکند در دماغم هوسش هزار سودا
همه کس خلاص جوید ز بلا و حبس، من نی
چه روم چه روی آرم به برون و، یار اینجا!
که به غیر کنج زندان نرسم به خلوت او
که نشد به غیر آتش دل انگبین مصفا
چو بدین گهر رسیدی رسد که از کرامت
بنهی قدم چو موسی گذری ز هفت دریا

The grass whose flowers shall forever flourish,
The beauty whose grace the both worlds ravish
From his eyes such messages reach my sight
That make my eyes swoon in languor.
Like the moon our body is aglow from love
Our heart like lyre of Venus with torn strings.
Like raven is the dark flesh, the carnal world is winter
But despite the two foulds, it shall forever be spring.

چمنی که تا قیامت گل او به بار بادا
صنمی که بر جمالش دو جهان نثار بادا
ز پگاهِ میرِ خوبان به شکار می خرامد
که به تیرِ غمزه او دلِ ما شکار بادا
به دو چشم من ز چشمش چه پیام‌هاست هر دم!
که دو چشمم از پیامش خوش و پُرخمار بادا
تن ما به ماه مانند که ز عشق می‌گدازد
دلِ ما چو چنگِ زهره، که گسسته تار بادا
تن تیره همچو زاغی و، جهانِ تن زمستان
که به رگم این دو ناخوش، اَبدا بهار بادا