

sacred wisdom

# Words of Paradise

SELECTED POEMS OF  
**RUMI**

New Interpretations by  
**Rafiq Abdulla**

Illustrated with Persian and Islamic Manuscripts

Jalaluddin Rumi, the great Sufi mystic born in 1204, wrote poetry as a means to express and teach divine illumination. He believed that we have the potential, if we surrender ourselves to the power of love, to live in a condition of infinite bliss. His poems reflect the universal desire for something greater than ourselves; a psychic and spiritual energy which radiates love and draws us to our true nature. This expression of passionate yearning for the Beloved is timeless.

*Words of Paradise* features poems from the *Divan* to Shams-e Tabriz, odes to the inspirational and mysterious figure who changed Rumi's life and led him to spiritual enlightenment; from the *Ruba'iyat*, which are brief lyric pieces of a set form; and from the *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi*, the *Poem of Inner Meanings*, which, through its esoteric teachings, offers moral and spiritual knowledge.

In this collection of poems, selected for their intimacy and lyricism, Rafiq Abdulla captures the metabolic, transformative energy of the original. Through rhythm and powerful imagery, he recreates the ecstatic state, full of joy and bewilderment, which Rumi considered so crucial to reach enlightenment. Each page is illustrated with miniatures and decorations from Islamic manuscripts, including ancient *Mathnavis*. The intricate patterns which match the words reflect the true spirit of the poems, and illuminate the teachings of one of the world's greatest mystics.

To Hakam  
with best wishes  
Rafiq Abdulla  
November 2000

# Words of Paradise

SELECTED POEMS OF RUMI

New Interpretations by Rafiq Abdulla

*Words of Paradise: Selected Poems of Rumi* © Frances Lincoln Limited 2000

Text copyright © Rafiq Abdulla 2000

Notes on the poems written by Mehri Niknam © Frances Lincoln Limited 2000

Details about the manuscripts written by Tim Stanley © Frances Lincoln Limited 2000

First published in Great Britain in 2000 by Frances Lincoln Limited,  
4 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London NWS 2RZ.

For photographic acknowledgements and copyright details, see page 109

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electrical, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of  
the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the United Kingdom  
such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency,  
90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available on request

ISBN 0-7112-1509-X

Set in Baker Signet

Printed in Hong Kong

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2



Illustrated with Persian and Islamic Manuscripts

FRANCES LINCOLN

To Adam & Marianne for keeping my feet  
on the ground, which is where we all begin . . .

- R. A.

TO MAULANA RUMI

Poet – first a seeker of Truth  
Then a lover torn from the glove  
Of your passion; you learnt to  
Speak from the heart, your voice  
Like the unlettered prophet intoned  
Miracles. Your sun was more fiery  
Earth then fire and bound to die  
When his work was done. Suffering  
Was the black work of his absence.  
It seduced you into visions lighting  
The landscape of memory – a man  
Made new with each whirling second.  
Your words conscript generations,  
With you, God ceased to be a cliché.  
He had come to pluck the diamond  
Of himself from your burgled heart.

- R. A.

## Introduction

Why do we read the poems of Jalaluddin Rumi today? He is a man from a different time and a different culture, a mystic, an Islamic scholar of the 13th century CE who wrote in Persian. What is it about the poems that make us read them time and again? Why do we feel a thrill of recognition reading them 700 years after they were written?

I believe the secret lies in the quality of lived experience, the intense yearning or desire for something greater than ourselves, something which emanates power, awe, love and beauty (one of the ninety-nine names of God in the Islamic tradition is *Jamal* which means beauty). It is the feeling of homecoming in a world in which we are displaced, un-rooted, that is the essence of Rumi's verse and what draws us to it. Of course, there is more to Rumi's poetry. It is filled with great wisdom and passion, like so much mystical or spiritual verse. It moves with an erotic energy, something akin to what the writer Roland Barthes has called *jouissance* – an orgasmic, joyous quality that grabs and revitalizes us, even though it speaks of longing and loss.

Reading Rumi's poetry is like making love. We should be ready to lose ourselves in it, as only then will we find the Other, that greater energy which contains us. Rumi wrote poetry not only to be read in the silent privacy of the mind, but to be listened to with other like-minded people, as we listen to a symphony, and move with its music. It's no wonder that Rumi was the founder of the whirling dervishes, as he understood that true ecstasy – the feeling of transcending one's physical and spiritual limitations – occurs

paradoxically through movement of the body which opens new levels of awareness in the consciousness. There is no mind/body division in Rumi's world view. Everything is in flux, flowing constantly from one situation to another; everything is a manifestation of the Divine, emanations transmitted like light from the sun through our solar system. We are particles in orbit around this wonderful source of power and love – this sun – longing to return to it, to be annihilated by it and discover our true nature. Rumi's verse exemplifies this mercurial quality of loss, longing and love – we always look for completion, and the only true completion we find is in losing ourselves in the Beloved.

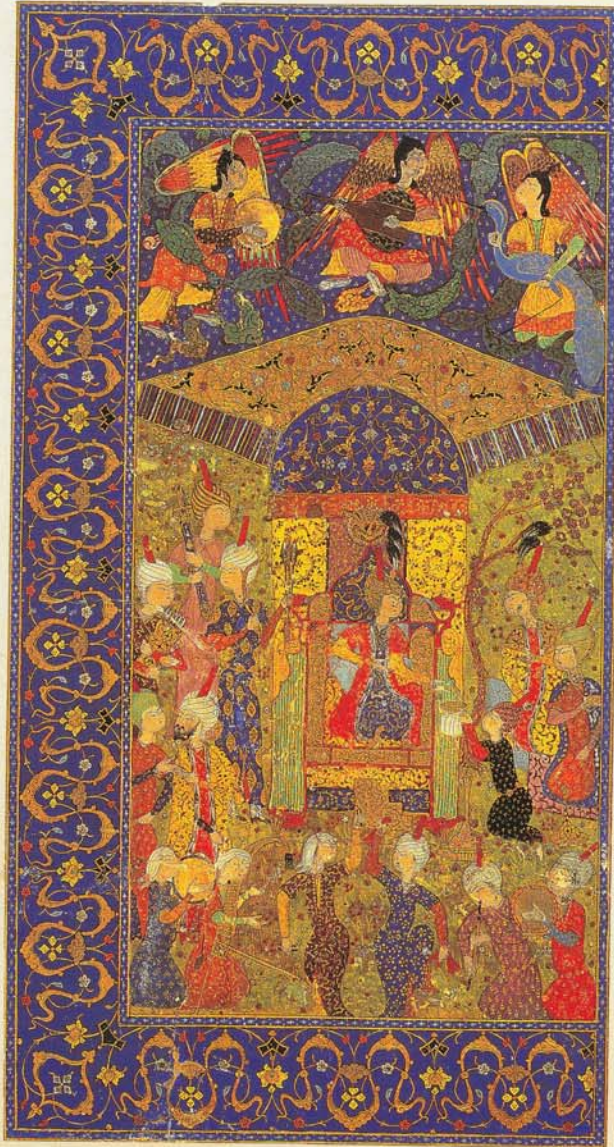
Most of the poems selected in this book come from two major sources: the *Divan* to Shams-e Tabriz and the *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi*. The *Divan* is the collection of lyrical odes to the inspirational and controversial figure of Shams-e Tabriz. He came into Rumi's life unbidden, and turned it upside down by his presence and secret teachings. When he disappeared as mysteriously as he had come, his absence almost drove Rumi out of his mind. However, through a process of personal transformation, Rumi's love for Shams was transfigured into the Beloved, the leitmotif for the *Divan*.

The *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi* or *Poem of Inner Meanings* runs for thousands of verses and is made up of countless interweaving stories, interspersed with more generalized observations. In this great didactic work, Rumi attempts to describe every aspect of mystical perception and aspiration. The *Mathnavi* is so highly regarded in the Muslim world that it has been audaciously called the Qur'an in Persian.

Unfortunately, as most of us are unable to enjoy the musicality and outflowing energy of Rumi's poetry in the original Persian, we try to capture it in translations, or transpositions and interpretations, in languages we can understand. There is no such thing as an exact translation unless it is the translation of the reader or listener who reads the source text fluently. This may be possible with contemporary texts but, I believe, it is not possible

with poetry from other historical periods which inevitably was written for, and understood by, readers with different expectations and values. In such cases, we are not only reading a text from a remote period which catered to people who are long dead, but the significance of the poem in its context has also passed away irrevocably. We may only guess at it. More importantly, we can re-create the poetry in our own idiom. This is a tricky business – and in bridging the cultural, linguistic, and chronological gulf between the original and its modern re-creation, I have not shied away from radical departures from a 'literal' understanding of translation, in order to convey that part of the original's spirit that most clearly speaks to the modern reader. I have tried to interpret these poems of Rumi, threading the maze of their meaning and language into a contemporary idiom whilst keeping the original energy, tension, eclectic imagery and lucidity of Rumi's verse. I have endeavoured to retain the significance of the spiritual concepts he used, making them more accessible to the modern Western reader. Inevitably we are confronted with deviations of form and language, but my aim was to come closer to the feel and lyrical intention of the original. I want to convey something of the beauty and intensity of Rumi's language and imagery whilst keeping us close to some of his spiritual insights which, after all, are the kernel of what attracts us to his poetry in the first place.

Rumi wrote poetry to transform his listeners and readers, to take them out of themselves, to make them drunk with the Divine. In this disenchanted age where we float aimlessly in a sort of postmodern irreality, where images cheat us of a sense of ourselves, Rumi has something important to say to all of us. His poetry lights a fire in us, something incandescent with longing to attain greater levels of awareness in ourselves, to break out of the mould of our solitude to a greater, life-enhancing whole.



Music opens our hearts and surely ensnares  
With echoes that spill from celestial spheres;  
And faith far beyond the impaled cast of thought  
Turns ugly dissonance to honey by angels brought.

Adam's children tuned and so coarsely tied  
Hear with him the angels' songs and smiling sigh.  
We remember them, even faintly, as yearning  
Heartbeats of the sweet soul's original learning.

Oh, music feeds the calling souls of lovers,  
Music raises the spirit from its earthly covers.  
The ashes grow bolder and shed their fur  
Listen with stillness that only souls can share.

*Mathnavi IV, 733*

Dawn – conceived light: the pregnant moon  
Rises concave into the blood-streamed sky  
Casting off the face of fading night.  
Hovering over my uplifted eyes,  
It showers me with legendary silver,  
Then like a falcon hunting its prey  
It swoops down to take me in its talons and rise,  
Rise again in a great signature curve naming God,  
High into the breaking sky.  
My soul in flight straining gravity sees naught  
Save the mythic eye of the moon which fills  
My paltry body with the cool grace of silver light  
Refining the unlettered soul from dross; it grows  
Tenderly transparent with the teeming height,  
Transparent as the mercy of flowing water;  
Polished by the fire of Being – felt not spoken –  
Until the lens of my unskinned soul  
Opening to the Void, is carelessly dissolved.

*Divan 649*

Now that your soul has entered my all-too-present flesh  
And made with it a soul in kind,  
Your each embarking thought,  
The breathing swing and sway of your every movement  
Makes an impression on the wax of my surrendering will.  
My mind is but a pillow  
Indented by the flow of your passing thoughts.  
My newly-moulded soul is alight with  
Your pulsing grace, your secret deceptions  
Have transformed dead stone to fire.  
Each new day is a slow beginning,  
New lamentations rise  
From the reed of my longing for your lip;  
Your loving candour strokes the mouth of the reed  
With a sweet languishing refrain.  
My soul imitates and installs  
Your moon's soft milk-light in its chambers.  
I mould myself to fit your form  
Like a belt for the waist, even when  
Your eye has tethered me with angry scowls  
Turning me this way and that until  
My distracted heart jumps out of itself.

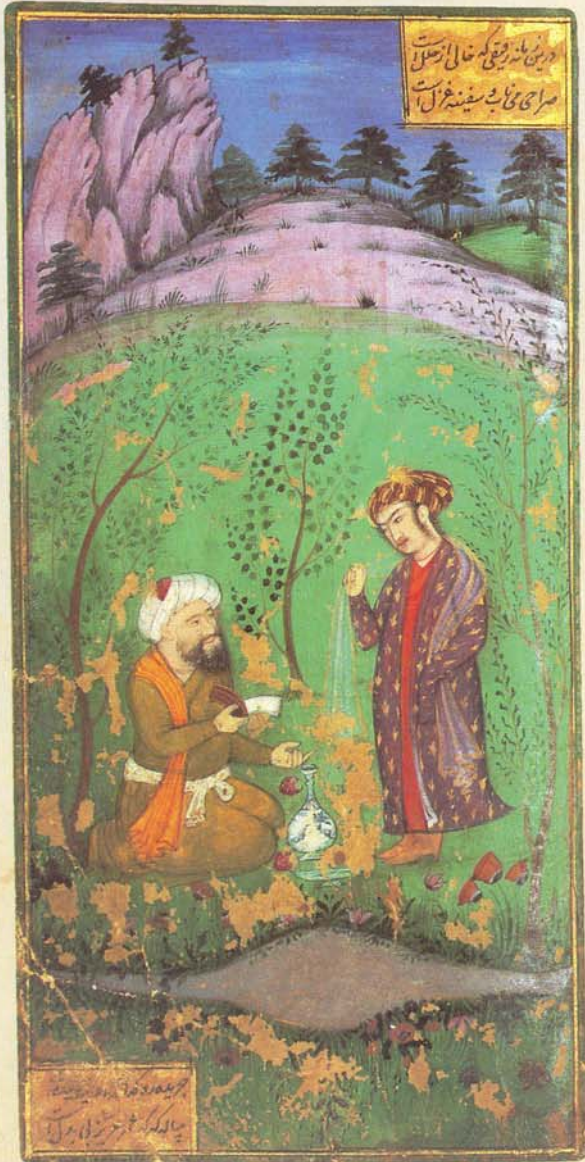
*Divan 2313*

I gaze at the porcelain of your face and my heart lights up.  
Your gentle nature teaches me to float into your embrace;  
And then your laughter, it draws from me  
A sequence of joy; my musk and distilled rose  
Make vintage of your cunning scent.  
Your secret moon is my emblem,  
Your hair my shaded bower.  
I place my forehead on the dust of your entrance.  
I leap with eagerness into that place of yours  
Where lights play only on your chosen guest.  
There is no pole for my heart other  
Than the pull from your direction.  
Even if this heart is disarrayed by others,  
It is returned to its keeper,  
That connecting wholeness that is yourself.  
I am tossed and bewildered

By the secret river of your being which  
Induces me in its sweet current.  
I plunge like a salmon with desperate, bucking energy  
To test your flow. Your breasts,  
As soft as the moon's dreaming light,  
Turn me to gold as your sacred fold entrances me,  
Incubates my desire and makes us one.  
Why should my head which presses you with  
Tender burning, not rest itself against your precious  
Central place and wait to be struck by your mallet?  
No, it's time I learnt to be silent; yes, silent,  
Since my savage moans of love  
Are bisected and broken into meagre whimpering  
By your own despatching cry.

*Divan 2253*





Seated here attached to the present of this royal place  
 We are a singing joy, you and I.  
 Two in form two in figure, two to the outward eye  
 We're one in one, you and I.  
 The grove's verdant green picked in birdsong  
 Treats us kindly with a trace of eternity  
 As we enter the garden, you and I.  
 The unnumbered eyes of the stars gaze on us,  
 We turn on them the moon's face, you and I.  
 You and I, refined with joy, more than you and I  
 Set apart from the dross of empty words, you and I.  
 We are, you in I and I in you, the envy of gorgeous  
 Birds of paradise when we melt in secret laughter,  
 You and I, the mystery is you and I as we sit  
 Together in this royal place, yet in this cusp  
 Of being in the shade of common bliss we are one  
 You and I,  
 You and I,  
 We are at once in Iraq and Khorasan  
 You and I.

*Divan 322*

And this is Love – the vertigo of heaven  
Beyond the cage of words,  
Suddenly to be naked in the searchlight  
Of truth, no shade no leaf for the senses.  
You are a victim, Love's felony pillages your breath  
Knocks away your feet, makes you blind with insight,  
So that you may clearly see for yourself.  
Congratulate your heart whilst you can, for it has  
Clambered into the inner chamber of circling lovers;  
Now it sees with uncluttered eye and rashly  
Enters the rough neighbourhood of loving breasts.  
What is the origin of your energy, O heart?  
Where is the drastic home of your pulse?  
Birds may sing their busy language  
I shall hear them with a lover's newfound ear!  
The heart complains: "I was in travail  
As the body was burnt. I fled the workshop  
Even as it was being made. When I was exhausted  
Beaten down, I was dragged through madness beyond  
Description, torn apart beyond the good sense of sounds."

*Divan 1919*

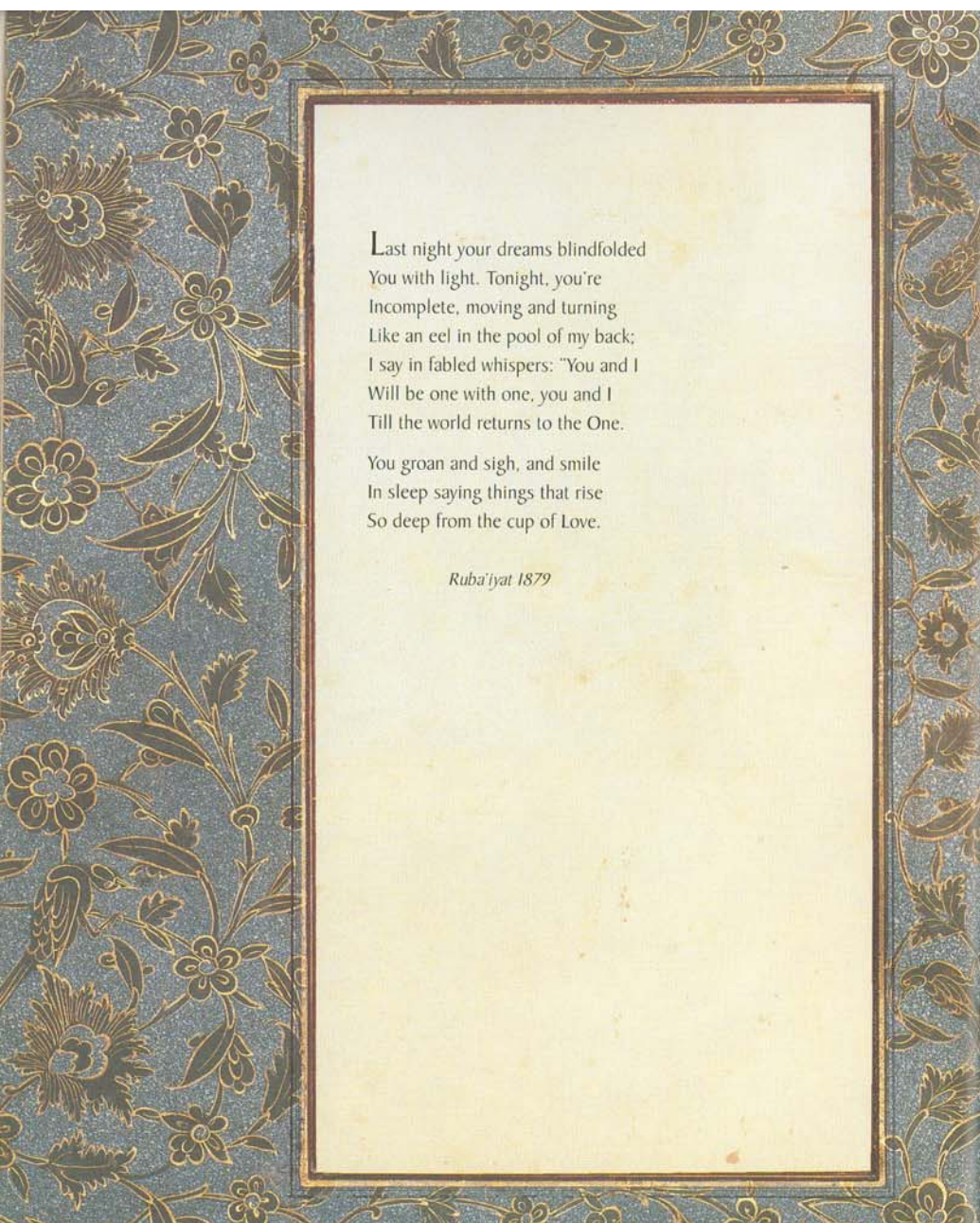
I am you and you are me, you in me, me in you,  
Oh Beloved, do not wander from your longing breast,  
Oh Beloved, do not think you're estranged from me,  
Do not Beloved, do not exile yourself from home.  
Do not Oh Beloved, do not taunt my head, don't tempt  
My foot so I become a fool who stamps his cruel heel  
Upon his broken head. I'm fired with you Oh Beloved,  
I flow from you as your leaning shadow; you cannot,  
My Beloved, plunge your dagger into this shadow of yours.  
Cherish this dancing darkness like a tree nurses its own,  
Letting it sway from the founding path of its trunk.  
Bring all the shadows into the sun of your eye so they  
Will merge in the light of your cheek. My heart's domain  
Is disordered by your distance, torn with civil strife;  
Mount your throne Oh Beloved, remain in charge.  
"Reason is the crown" the Caliph Ali said  
With the emancipation of a poet; now take from your grace  
Oh Beloved, place on your throne a new diamond  
Mined from the shadow of your being.

*Divan 1254*

Where is he?  
Where is my soul's delight?  
My North, my West, my South and East?  
He's not here amongst you who conceive nothing,  
Where has he gone?  
He is not here, not here,  
Not even the compassing aroma of his presence  
Dwells amongst you who receive nothing.  
I look here, I look there,  
I look up and down,  
I cannot see even the shadow of his beard.  
Oh believers, speak to me!  
Tell me where he has gone who shone  
Like a blue flame in my conceiving eye.

Shout out his name and your echoing bones  
Shall never crumble in the receiving grave.  
You who have kissed his hand are blessed,  
Even in death your lips shall remain sweet as melons.  
Should I be grateful for the incomparable beauty of his face  
Or for the sweet severity of his demeanour?  
Even if his lucid soul is no longer sketched  
In the memory of his body, it does not matter;  
My Love revolves like the planets around the storm of his Sun.  
Call out for Shams, my soul requires him,  
Chant his familiar names of friendship,  
Lighten the gravity of our grief,  
Enliven the ear's lassitude with the energy of his name.

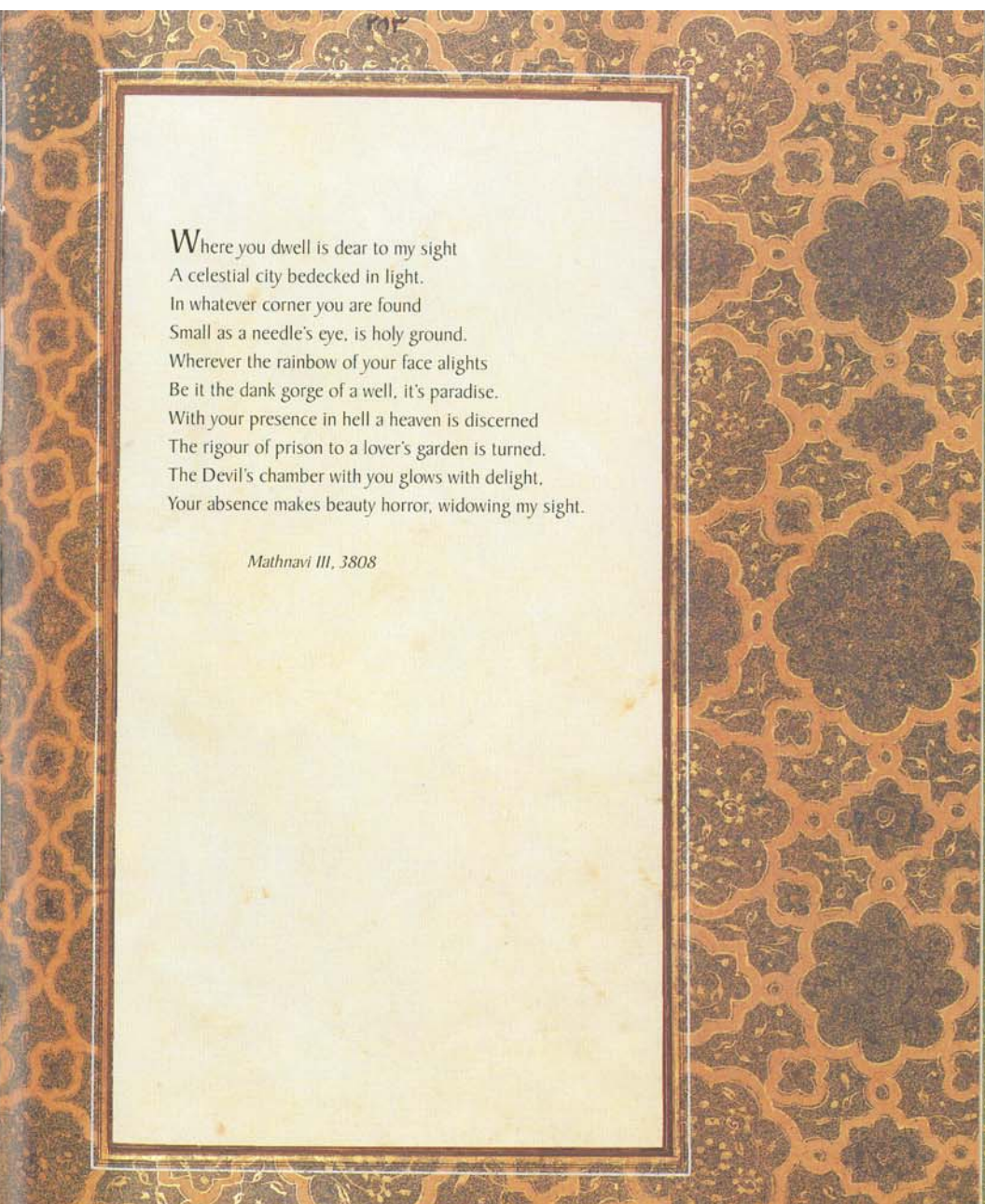
*Divan 1235*

A decorative border on the left page featuring a repeating pattern of stylized flowers and leaves in gold and green on a blue background.

Last night your dreams blindfolded  
You with light. Tonight, you're  
Incomplete, moving and turning  
Like an eel in the pool of my back;  
I say in fabled whispers: "You and I  
Will be one with one, you and I  
Till the world returns to the One.

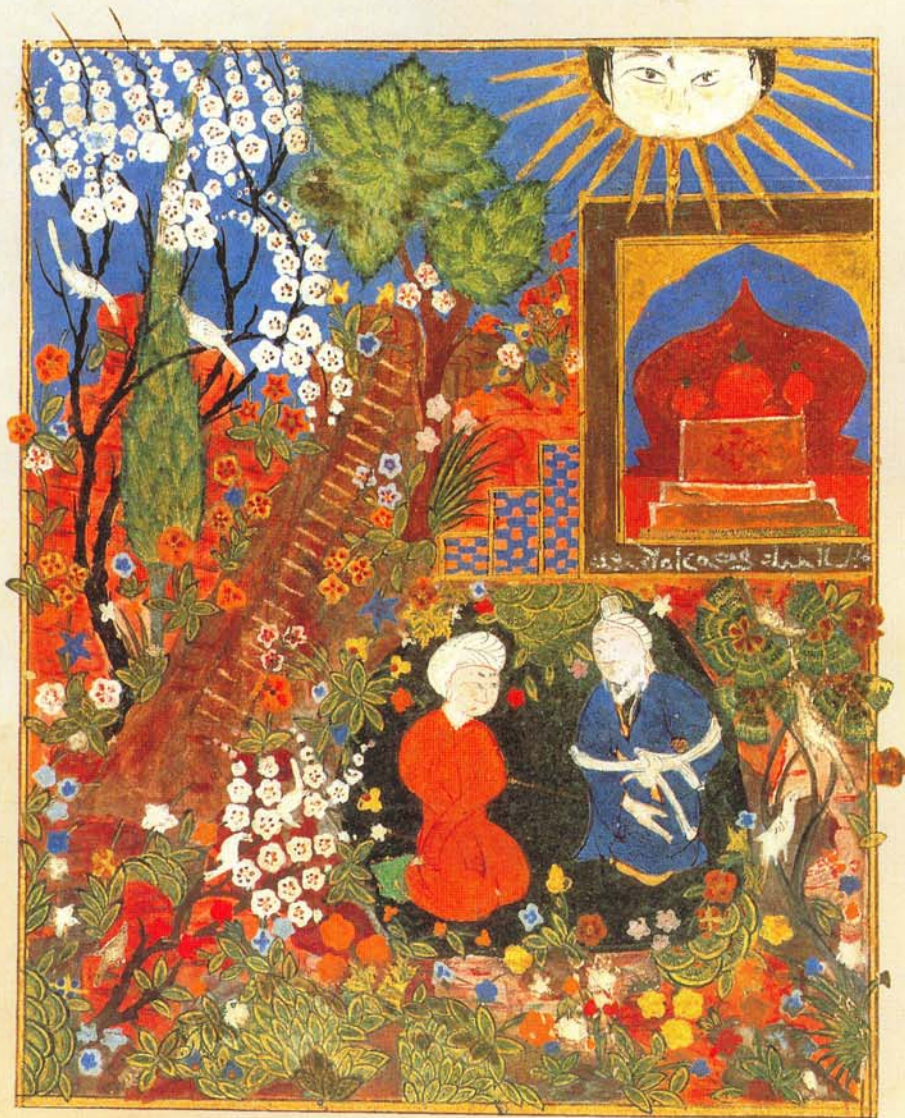
You groan and sigh, and smile  
In sleep saying things that rise  
So deep from the cup of Love.

*Ruba'iyat 1879*

A decorative border on the right page featuring a repeating geometric pattern of interlocking circles and squares in gold and brown on a dark brown background.

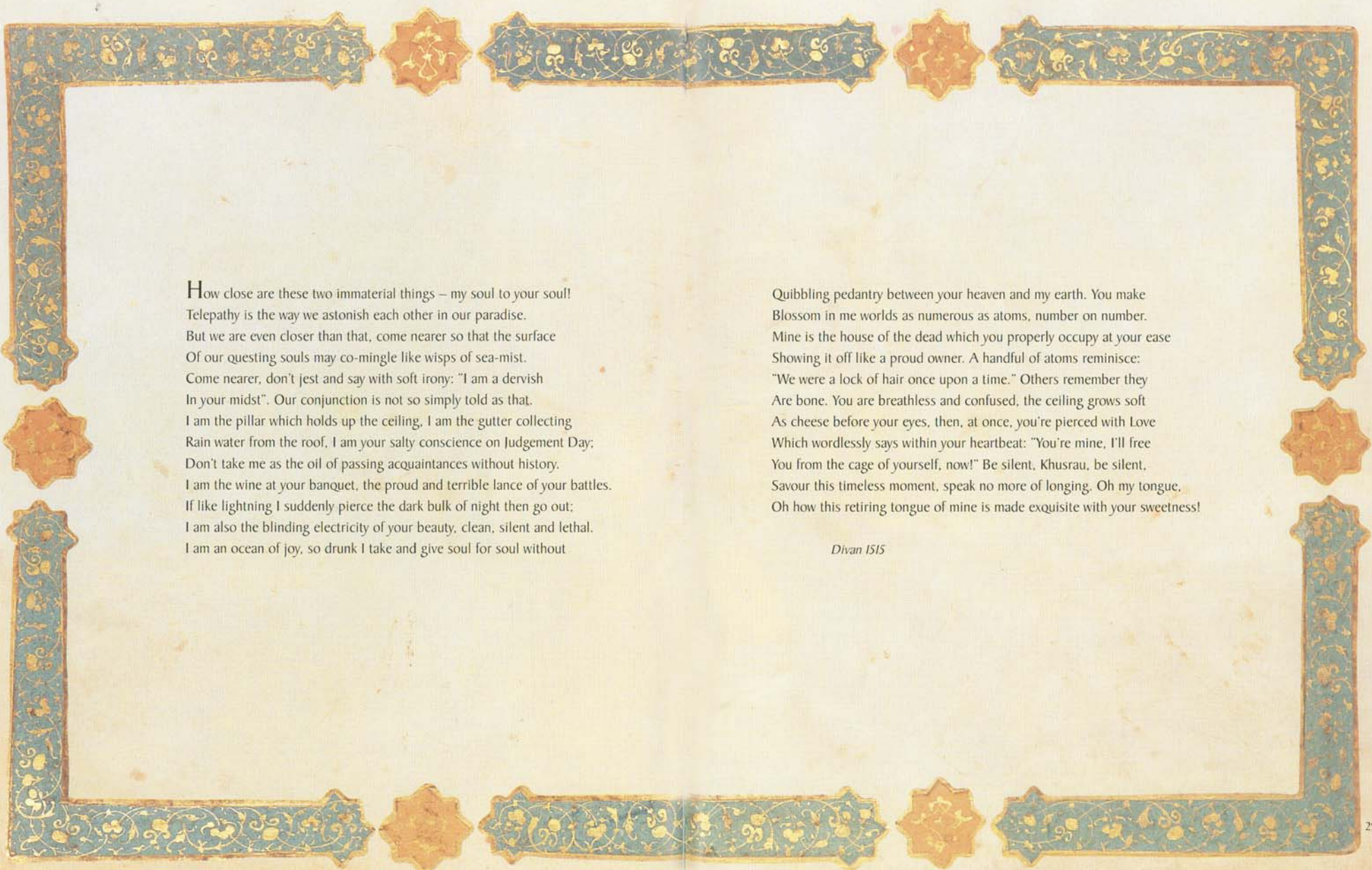
Where you dwell is dear to my sight  
A celestial city bedecked in light.  
In whatever corner you are found  
Small as a needle's eye, is holy ground.  
Wherever the rainbow of your face alights  
Be it the dank gorge of a well, it's paradise.  
With your presence in hell a heaven is discerned  
The rigour of prison to a lover's garden is turned.  
The Devil's chamber with you glows with delight,  
Your absence makes beauty horror, widowing my sight.

*Mathnavi III, 3808*



Each of My creatures has its own path  
Each way to worthy each is in My gift;  
Hardness of heart plucks each from the hearth,  
You are My servant whose words should uplift  
All who hear you and receive My message.  
I am not labour to be lost in the fickle passage  
Of a fine tongue and splendid speech, there's more  
Much more I seek for My creature's prayer to be sure.  
It is the spirit and the spring of inner feeling,  
The innocence of heart that sorely beseeches the Lord  
Which knows not clever language, but appealing  
From his centre My creature finds always the words  
Untainted by conceit and its siblings but fired with Love.  
Words born of bereavement, conceived from burning  
Burning, burning which rises up like thirst above  
The carcass of thought and fine speech, freshly turning  
Their faces to Me in their simple, heart-felt yearning.  
Remember, Moses, the supplicant who sets his heart  
In forms is a shadow; the soul which burns to be a part  
Of the Greater is the living heart within the encrusted form  
Of prayer, which cries out constantly to be taken by storm.  
  
The religion of the heart is not a stark monument of stone;  
Lovers of God have no religion save yearning for Me alone.

*Mathnawi II, 1750*



How close are these two immaterial things – my soul to your soul!  
Telepathy is the way we astonish each other in our paradise.  
But we are even closer than that, come nearer so that the surface  
Of our questing souls may co-mingle like wisps of sea-mist.  
Come nearer, don't jest and say with soft irony: "I am a dervish  
In your midst". Our conjunction is not so simply told as that.  
I am the pillar which holds up the ceiling, I am the gutter collecting  
Rain water from the roof, I am your salty conscience on Judgement Day;  
Don't take me as the oil of passing acquaintances without history.  
I am the wine at your banquet, the proud and terrible lance of your battles.  
If like lightning I suddenly pierce the dark bulk of night then go out;  
I am also the blinding electricity of your beauty, clean, silent and lethal.  
I am an ocean of joy, so drunk I take and give soul for soul without.

Quibbling pedantry between your heaven and my earth. You make  
Blossom in me worlds as numerous as atoms, number on number.  
Mine is the house of the dead which you properly occupy at your ease  
Showing it off like a proud owner. A handful of atoms reminisce:  
"We were a lock of hair once upon a time." Others remember they  
Are bone. You are breathless and confused, the ceiling grows soft  
As cheese before your eyes, then, at once, you're pierced with Love  
Which wordlessly says within your heartbeat: "You're mine, I'll free  
You from the cage of yourself, now!" Be silent, Khusrau, be silent,  
Savour this timeless moment, speak no more of longing. Oh my tongue,  
Oh how this retiring tongue of mine is made exquisite with your sweetness!

*Divan 1515*



Passing, passing  
The blossom gives way to the fruit;  
Both are necessary.  
One passes into another.  
Bread exists to be broken  
To sustain its purpose.  
The grape on the vine  
Is wine in the making,  
Crush it and it comes alive.

*Mathnawi I, 2930*

Inside me reflecting mirrors,  
Reflecting me beyond mincing  
Words, not beyond what I know!

Apart from my changing body,  
Apart from my invisible spirit  
I am a stranger in the ocean  
Of my being with no identity.

I am not living, can you sniff  
The stink of sludge and decay?

You talk in whispers of my madness,  
But look beyond my babbling science  
To the asylum of truth, I want to say.

Look at me with my containing head  
Topping my dervish cloak, do I remind  
You of someone you think you know?  
This container holds upside-down with  
Swelling joy, a liquid not spilling a drop!  
If a precious drop escapes, it falls to God  
Becomes fixed like the lacquer of pearls.

I grow like a cloud over that ocean of  
Liquid absorbing the vapour into myself.  
When the radiance of Shams shines on  
Me I grow heavy and rich with longing,  
And I rain. Then it's spring time and slender  
Lilies rise up like the shape of my tongue.

*Divan 1486*





These words of mine are no stones  
To pick and throw at passing fancies.  
They're yeast-sounds, bread waiting  
To be broken whilst they're still fresh.  
Leave them overnight and they become  
Hard as rusting bolts, not fit for eating.  
My verse is harboured in lovers' hearts,  
Expose it to the indifferent world  
Busy with its traffic and it chokes to death.  
Like a fish it swims in the lover's blood,  
Land it on the rocks and it gasps for life  
Then slowly dies, cold and stiff as an icicle.  
You must be rich with metaphors,  
Like an ore of gold waiting to be mined  
If you are to digest my words  
When they're fresh. Know this,  
My friend, it's nothing new,  
These words are turned to bliss when you  
Read them with your own imagining heart.

*Divan 981*

I was dead, dead, dead  
Deep in the basement of darkness,  
Then I shot into life.  
I was stricken with grief  
Pounding my eyes, excavating my heart.  
Then I exploded with laughter.  
Love vibrated in me  
I became the vibration.  
Eye-glutted, soul-polished,  
My heart is leonine, my being  
Bright as Venus.  
He said: "You're mild and so reasonable,  
You don't belong here."  
I left and discovered absurdity,  
Became a shackled lunatic.  
He said: "You're not drunk, leave this  
Place at once. Go, you don't belong  
To this brawl of a party."  
I left and learnt drunkenness,  
I let myself go with delight.  
He said: "You've not been slaughtered,  
You're not splattered with joy."  
I was slain before the sun of his face.

He said: "You're as clever as a monkey,  
Juggling greedily with futile notions  
And the luxury of doubt."  
I became an idiot, impoverished, a loose end.


He said: "You're a light, a niche for prayer."  
I'm not a niche, nor light, I'm simply  
Choking smoke drifting in the wind.

He said: "You're the Sheikh, the leader,  
The string in the labyrinth." I know  
I'm none of these, I'm shrinking dust  
Blown hither and thither at your command.

He said: "You've the wings of an eagle,  
There's no need for me ..."  
My yearning for his wings, his airborne form  
Grounds me without even a feather.

Quick fortune with tales to tell, entices me:  
"Don't take the path, don't be vexed;  
I am generous and blessed, I'm your ladder."  
Love whispers with slowly fermenting wisdom:  
"Remain on my breast, lodge your pulse in me."  
I reply: "I'll stay, oh yes I'll stay, my pulse  
Is in your hammock; I remain tranquil and in place."

*Divan 393*



I'm not at home here, here  
In this place of distraction.  
What am I doing here, how  
Did I get on this hard road?  
Even a moment, a pinching  
Second from the Beloved's  
Side is outlawed by Love's code.  
If only this strange neighbourhood  
Had a hint of him – by God  
That would be a feast for me.  
How can a finch, the size of  
A thumbprint slip away from  
This place, even the Simurgh  
Proud pilgrim is tied by the foot.  
Don't slide my heart, don't  
Feint truth, keep your pristine

Place where a column of light  
Grows fat on your steady pulse.  
Choose a plum flush with golden  
Juice rearing life, taste on your  
Tongue only the musk of vintage.  
Treat aroma, devious image  
Playing upside down in the eye,  
The cast of colours taking a bow,  
For what they are: players, ghosts,  
Insubstantial, carping things to  
Displace you with shame and strife.  
Collect the eye, take a holiday  
From your tongue, disestablish  
The senses and compose yourself.  
For you are pressing on the abyss.

*Divan 381*



Listen oh listen to my plaintive cry  
 Listen to my longing or else I die.  
 From the sweet home of my bed I was torn  
 So my pain and crucial longing was born.  
  
 With so many secrets I sing aloud  
 But none sees nor hears in this crowd.  
 Oh for a friend to know my burning state  
 That our souls may mingle and contemplate.  
  
 The flame of Love discourses in me  
 The wine of Love so enforces me.  
 Do you wish to know the fire, the flow  
 Listen my listener then you shall know.

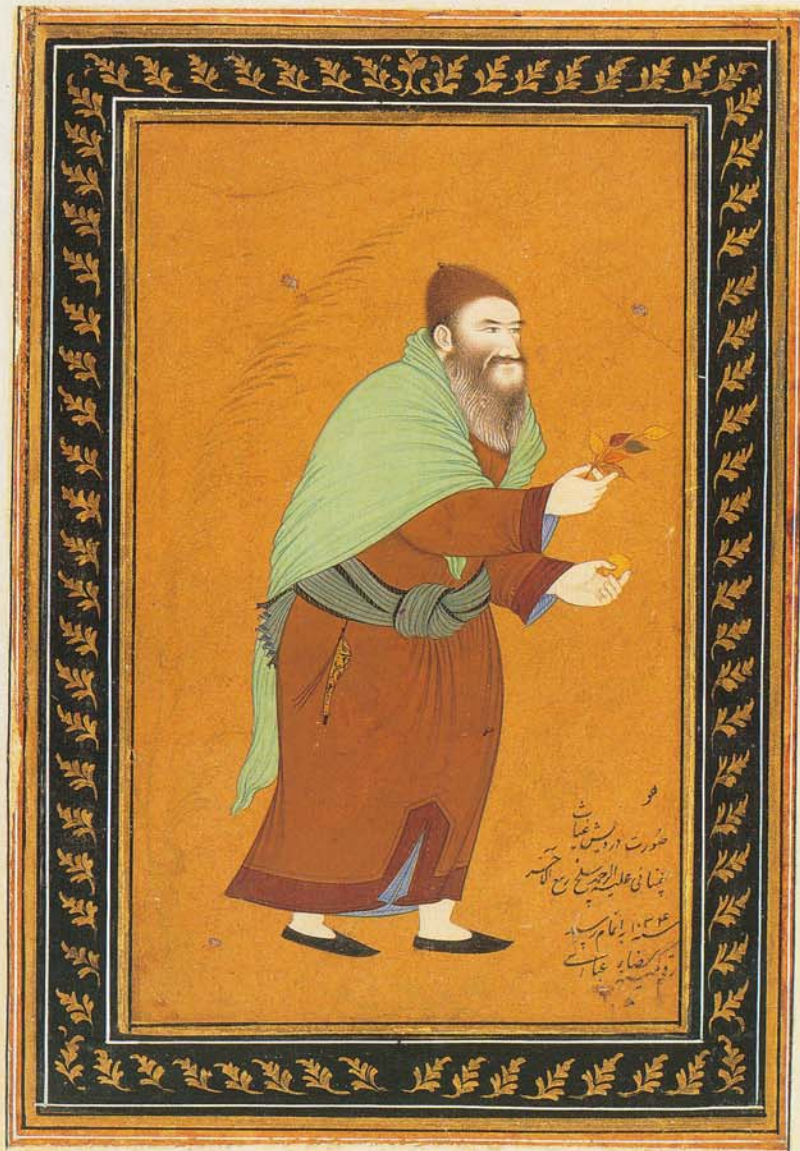
*Mathnavi 1, 1*

The moon, O the moon has returned to me  
This unique moon is no mere trafficker of light;  
It is a creator of fire beyond water's power.  
Look at my body's poor leaking shelter, regard  
The proper element of my soul, Love has made  
The one drunk and has dismantled the other.  
When the landlord and my heart sit together  
At table, my blood turns to wine, Love cooks  
My heart for the feast. The eye is bestowed with  
His image. Then I hear a voice cry out: "Like a baton  
The cup is raised, the velvet wine is blushing with encores."  
Suddenly, my heart is laid open, penetrated by Love  
It sees Love's ocean; like a springing gazelle it leaps up  
Dancing away to that waiting diamond sea, shouting:  
"I can't stay, I must find the way. Come, come now  
Follow me!" The sun appears and finds me here waiting  
For Shams al-Din's radiant face, and all longing hearts are  
Drawn to it like clouds rushing to the midsummer horizon.

*Divan 310*

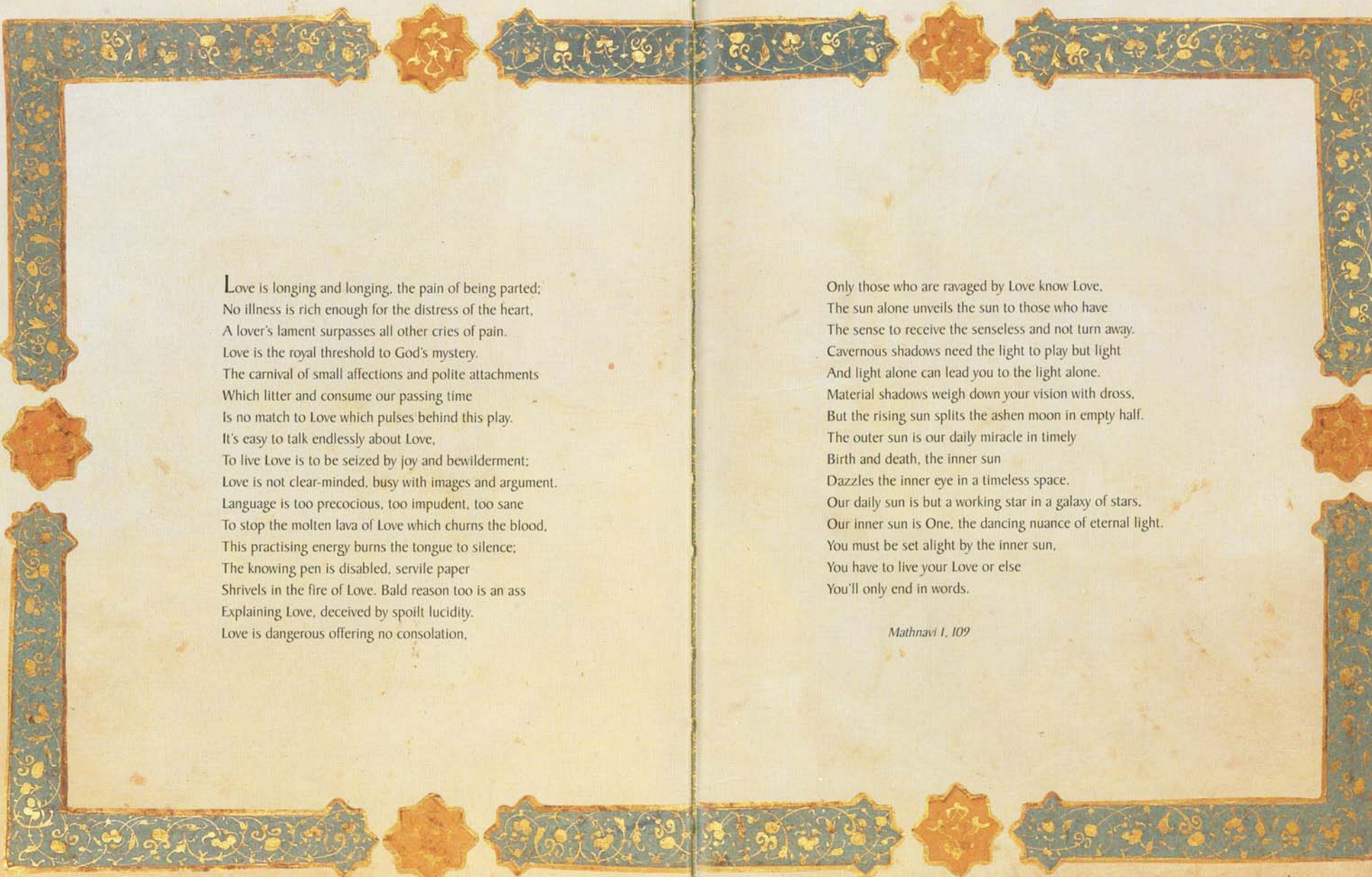
Look to the unrealed horizon dancing in this desert of ours,  
Our restless hearts, our fitful spirit are fleeting impressions.  
Myriad of worlds, place upon place, time in time take shape,  
To which do we belong? When you see a man lose his head,  
Compelled towards the centre of being, then ask,  
Ask him to reveal our secrets, you'll hear from his lips  
The hush of our hidden mystery. How would it be if  
A discerning ear danced before you speaking the language of  
Birds? How would it be if a bird flew up with Solomon's secret  
Attached like a licence to its collar? What can I say,  
What can I imagine? This story is nowhere to be seen in  
The borough of honest knowledge. But there's no way I can  
Remain silent as I'm made more compact with distraction.  
What sorts of birds, hunter and prey, fly in this mountain air,  
In the dancing sun-tipped air of the seventh sky  
Where lies my entrance! Let's leave this stuttering story  
Too mercurial for daily utterance. Only Salah-al Haq wa'l Din  
Can show in the place of fickle words  
The terrible, unspeaking beauty of our hidden Lord and Creator.

*Divan 239*



A beggar smiled at me and offered me alms  
In a dream last night, my heart sprang with delight.  
His beauty and grace which shone from his tattered  
Presence took me by storm until I woke at dawn.  
His poverty was riches, it covered my body in silk.  
In that dream I heard the beckoning sighs of lovers,  
I heard soft cries of agonized joy saying: "Take this,  
Drink and be complete!" I saw before me a ring  
Jewelled in poverty and then it nested on my ear.  
From the root of my surging soul a hundred tremors  
Rose as I was taken and pinned down by the surging sea.  
Then heaven groaned with bliss and made a beggar of me.

*Divan 2015*



Love is longing and longing, the pain of being parted;  
No illness is rich enough for the distress of the heart,  
A lover's lament surpasses all other cries of pain.  
Love is the royal threshold to God's mystery.  
The carnival of small affections and polite attachments  
Which litter and consume our passing time  
Is no match to Love which pulses behind this play.  
It's easy to talk endlessly about Love,  
To live Love is to be seized by joy and bewilderment;  
Love is not clear-minded, busy with images and argument.  
Language is too precocious, too impudent, too sane  
To stop the molten lava of Love which churns the blood,  
This practising energy burns the tongue to silence;  
The knowing pen is disabled, servile paper  
Shrivels in the fire of Love. Bald reason too is an ass  
Explaining Love, deceived by spoilt lucidity.  
Love is dangerous offering no consolation,


Only those who are ravaged by Love know Love,  
The sun alone unveils the sun to those who have  
The sense to receive the senseless and not turn away.  
Cavernous shadows need the light to play but light  
And light alone can lead you to the light alone.  
Material shadows weigh down your vision with dross,  
But the rising sun splits the ashen moon in empty half.  
The outer sun is our daily miracle in timely  
Birth and death, the inner sun  
Dazzles the inner eye in a timeless space.  
Our daily sun is but a working star in a galaxy of stars.  
Our inner sun is One, the dancing nuance of eternal light.  
You must be set alight by the inner sun,  
You have to live your Love or else  
You'll only end in words.

*Mathnavi 1, 109*



There are times when I seem asleep to you  
Without the integrity of faith in this my dreaming state.  
But don't be deceived, my eyes are shut but my heart  
Is as alert as a deer whilst it drinks from the pool,  
My resting body is wired with instinctive energy.  
The Prophet said: "My eyes are sleeping but oh  
My heart is alight with the Lord of us all."  
Your eyes may be open but your heart is sleeping,  
My eyes are closed, but my waking heart stands erect  
Dawn-fresh before the threshold with its own wakefulness.  
My heart's amphibious senses swim in the two worlds  
So don't judge me with the disfavour of your weakling will,  
Which only sees darkness where I behold the coursing light:  
What appears a prison to you is a scented garden to me,  
The highest pitch of action is simply repose for me.  
Your feet are in the muck, to me that sludge is as a rose.  
When you hear the wailing of a funeral, I witness  
A whirling dance at a wedding feast: I'm with you on the earth  
As earth, but as spirit I'm in the seventh circle of heaven.  
I'm only with you in this transient shadow that is my body;  
My joy is beyond the cusp of your frantic imagination;  
Now I've broken free of the dull gravity of knowledge  
I take it and use it and do not let it oppress and abuse me.  
Like insects we are trapped in the web of thought,  
We are entwined in cords of anguish from moment to moment.  
I can visit thought with diplomatic lightness ready and able  
To spring away with a flick of a finger from its net when I will.  
Thought is my prey waiting for my will, I'm a hunter with a heart.





So deliberate is the power in him  
That no grace can escape his shadow.  
Don't blame me for his coldness to you.  
You moan and groan too easily since  
His beauty treated you cruelly.  
But when like a colossus he bestrides  
Both worlds, he cannot help but be cruel.  
His love is enticing even if he  
Grants you no compensating kindness.  
His beauty is constant even if he acts  
With callous rigour on your being.  
Show me a place which is not bathed  
In his light for proper eyes, a chink in  
An edifice which expels his fire with its

Mouldy darkness. The eye and crystal lamp  
House complementary light, join them  
And no one can split them apart.  
The spirit floating calmly on the aether  
Says to itself: "Only God can see God  
In all God's beauty as a mirror unto God."  
But each affirmation is as garrulous  
As it is truthful. God is a jealous creator  
Moulding His face naming it: "By the Dawn."  
Sham's countenance, the sun generating  
Our path and place. Pride of Tabriz, gives  
Endless life impregnated with his light,  
The rest is instant darkness.

*Divan 861*

From moment to moment the soul  
Dies and grows in your presence!  
How can any person plead for a single soul?  
Your feet are like fecund rain feeding a parched land.  
From each footprint a new head springs up  
Yearning for you. How can anyone  
Take leave of you for a created head?  
The moment the pointing soul sniffs your scent  
It trembles in anticipation and scrambles towards you.  
Once you fade and withdraw, my bewildered mind  
Stiffens with grief, sleek hair grows dull and grey  
In lamentation for you. My heart is emptied  
In readiness for your banquet and the  
Exquisite bed on which I may die with joy.  
I'm dissolving myself like salt in water  
So that you may grow and supplement my being.  
My soul, in the churning wake of Shams-e Tabriz,  
Steals along the pearly ocean like  
A rusting ship without a keel.

*Divan 622*

Time passes, time passes wearing out all clocks  
Travelling into the eye of night. The dance  
Of senses is stilled in night prayer  
The path to the Unseen unveils itself.  
Sleep's angel shepherds its flock of spirits towards  
Spectral cities and rose-proofed gardens  
Beyond the deadly confinement of place and time.  
Now the spirit freed from the cell of the sleeping  
Body and the drab images of its daily  
Senses, feels with the heart's revealing eye  
A thousand forms and shapes, origin of origins,  
Of one eternity and unblemished moment.  
You could justly say the spirit has come home,  
Refreshed and a child again in this shy epiphany.  
Its heart now an inner space made clean by contiguous  
Forms coating its skin with recovered bliss.

*Divan 943*

Today and yesterday and unfortunate tomorrow,  
And the series of tomorrows allotted us are surely  
Dreams, dreaming dreamers dreaming reality.  
Time's twilight is closed down by the dawn of death  
Tearing us from the illusion of each carping moment  
Now that we cease to be dreamers dribbling small daily  
Griefs and aches, and enter laughing our keeping home.

*Mathnavi IV, 3654*

Your beauty is glory in nakedness, the melt  
Of smooth skin unsullied with petulant jewels  
And the spoiling touch of silk. Your delicate face  
Is as pure as the milk of the full moon.  
I entangle my limbs with the satin of yours;  
Souls without sin, our unspeckled bodies  
Are young with the spring of innocence  
As we join together to journey  
From place through time to eternity.

*Mathnavi VI, 4618*

I have no idea what makes this heart of mine  
Bend itself to you; what is its essence? Is it fire?  
Is it water? Is it simply a pumping fist of flesh?  
Or is it a stranger, a Peri, an ingenious spirit?  
Where is your origin O heart, what is the food you  
Thrive on? What makes you so hot for non-being?  
Why do you yearn for this ice-pick of Love, for the bliss  
Of no-place and no-time? Why, O heart, you who  
Are deemed to feed my body and mind, do you look to  
Distract me and destroy the order of myself, bring  
Shame to thought and tear down your separation?  
All living things have more sense than you with  
Your partiality for nothingness which draws you  
Like a vortex draws the destiny of swirling water.  
You are intemperate in your haste, drunk, distracted,  
Who will you listen to? How long will you be taken in?  
You are a mountain torrent rushing down steep sides

Clambering over rocks with such impetuosity you take  
My breath away. Nature and its seasons are too tried by you  
To understand your ways; the dew-dressed lily and  
The stately cypress bow under your pressure: you are  
No common rose, no narcissus of the soil. The tapping  
Of the tambourine without the commerce of cymbals,  
Like the mad apostate's lunacies, does not enter the custody  
Of our ears. Your Moses-love speaks wholly to me and says:  
"Become distant, untouchable by the cheap coin of the senses."  
How am I not to take flight, to run away from Samiri?  
But I have made that beyond-distance, cut a telling measure  
Of space even though I live among friends and followers,  
I am like the gold Ja'fari coin buried like frozen lightening in the rock,  
I may cry out a thousand times: "I am gold!" but no one hears  
Until I am mined and minted into a coin of good authority.

*Divan 2480*



This night of Love  
So filled with longing  
It contracts my heart  
Makes a glass thirsty  
For the ruby of your  
Wine, then more, then  
More from your chastity  
Pouring itself into the  
Form of this night  
Of single pointed joy.  
You tease me with  
The golden feathers  
Of your trembling hands  
So intensely light,  
I rise up and drink  
Your wine, confuse  
Myself and emerge  
In you, fusing mine  
With your own and now  
You host yourself.

*Ruba'iyat 1878*

You're so at home in this passing state,  
In the lottery of the here and now,  
In slumber you find yourself in another  
Space no stranger than the waking place,  
Now ill at ease in a forgotten panel of your mind;  
You do not say: "What place is this  
So strange, so different and yet the same?",  
Not at all; the diffident city of sleep  
Is as imaginary as that of sullied day.  
Is it surprising then that the soul, the inner child,  
Which remembers nothing and nothing forgets,  
Should not recall its home and birth place when it's  
Drugged with body's weight, trawled through  
The five-pointed darkness of here and now,  
Wrapped like a star in eiderdown?  
This innocent traveller enters and passes through  
Many states, collecting, like a forgotten  
Piece of porcelain, valedictory dust,  
How can it review its estate and remember,  
When its memory is nothing but rust?

*Mathnavi IV, 3628*

Stones rush to dance before the  
Laughing beauty of your face,  
Return from hiding once more  
And play like fire on our fickle senses  
So we may learn to unlearn and use a pick  
To crack the cold glacier of knowledge  
Before your dazzling light.  
Restore our rusting souls,  
Unveil yourself that water may discover  
A pearl in your simple reflection,  
Fire toy no more with destruction.  
Your beauty impales the moon,  
Wipes out those indifferent earthly lights  
Which hang and wait to be extinguished.  
When I'm before your face I have  
No time for the peeling mirror  
Of ancient heaven's sensual spaces.  
You have come and with your sigh  
Have created again this narrow world  
Now wide and clement as the sky,  
Let Venus play her harp to fire and fuse  
The solar energy of your loving eye.

*Divan 171*

I will only to an open heart a story tell,  
Listen or your heart shall be lost in hell.  
Take heed, attend and you shall know  
How blind greed sucks you in its undertow.  
Every person whose pox is this sweating sin  
Has a miser's heart in deed and thought within.  
The lust of possession blinds the heart,  
The lust of rank and place keeps you apart,  
Like falling hair it robs the eyes of light,  
Greed nipples its litter with grasping spite.

*Mathnavi II, 578*



We are the fingertips of blind illusion,  
You are the absolute Cause of causes.  
You sing us into being, quick-fading echoes.  
We're like heraldic lions on folded flags,  
One breath from you and we are unfurled  
For a fluttering moment on your dancing breath.

*Mathnavi I, 602*

When for an infinite second  
You leap like an antelope  
Out of time's snaking passage  
You leave attachment behind,  
It fades into the distance.  
Timeless, without expectation  
You're born into non-attachment.

*Mathnavi III, 2075*



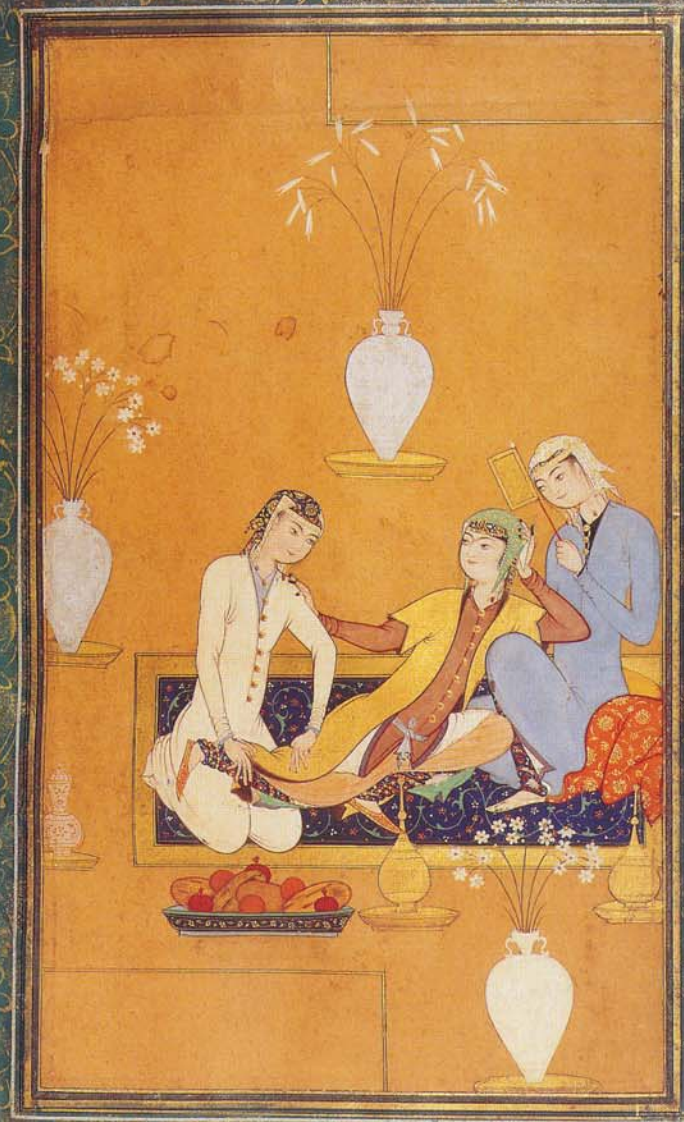
The Master has been intemperate and ill  
Since midnight, he moans and groans and bangs  
His head against our wall like a horse with distemper.  
The world is weeping with pity for him,  
His breaths are like bellows stoking a fire-storm in him.  
This is a strange illness, no fever, no ache, no pain,  
An illness beyond earth's boundaries, from heaven's navel.  
Galen, the physician took his pulse, but he shook his  
Enthralled head and said: "Don't waste your time with my wrist,  
Explore the entangled garden of my heart,  
Use methods finer than your common surface-ways."  
He is defiled by none of the antique sicknesses  
Neither by black bile nor yellow, nor colic, nor the  
Whimsical affliction of dropsy, his illness is beyond  
Reason's narrow estate, it hits the headlines with mystery.  
Yet he's flush with energy from Love which cares for him

It's bizarre: he doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep  
Like a mother. Moved to pity, I say aloud:  
"May God grant him relief from this sickness,  
He deserves it who has injured no one."  
Heaven's reply is equivocal: "There's no remedy,  
None that can screen the inspired duplicity of his lover's rage,  
He needs not the chains of paltry advice nor morsels of pity,  
He has fallen into grace beyond incorrigible piety.  
When did you see Love? You have no knowledge  
Of its language, so be silent, try none of your cheap charms  
Nor the poisonous pharmacy of deceit which is your trade".  
Rise up O Shams-e Tabriz rise up, source of light, rise up  
And soften the congealed and gelid spirit of your lover with fire.

*Divan 321*

I said to my heart, this stranger who embellishes me:  
"Why do you behave in such an unruly manner?"  
My heart replied with silent music:  
"Why don't you join me in Love,  
Extract the worn-out teeth of words  
Become one with delight?" Even if you were  
Life-giving water you cannot shun the fire of Love.  
You are as sharp as a knife oiled with subtleties,  
You are like the restless wind without gravity,  
You are seething with images; yet like an unwitting  
Mirror you hold the reflection of beauty within this  
Stranger your heart. Empty souls reflect  
Empty thoughts on others, but you are a  
Lamp in the pit of your earth-bound body.  
You are as fine as the eyelash of Certainty.  
From which mine were you created like a shining ruby?  
Now you need to be set in the ring to become  
A jewel on the finger of Love.  
Your unsheathed anger shall shame  
A thousand fertile compassions;  
O Shams-e Tabriz how beautiful is your form,  
How rich are you in the loam of your being!

*Divan 2760*



Today I saw clearly that gem, my Beloved, who  
With a prophetic leap took hold of the rope to heaven  
Like the spirit of Mustapha.  
How the sun frowned at his boldness,  
It spluttered with the intemperance  
Of a clogged heart when it spied his shining face.  
His incandescence turns water and dull clay  
From objects to glowing slaves of splendour.  
I cried out: "Where is the ladder  
On which I may climb to heaven?"  
He said: "Your head is the rung, place it  
At your restless feet, step upon it and you shall step  
Upon the head of the stars. Dive upwards  
Swim through the air, like this  
Take your heart with your head and come!  
Now the paths to heaven open up  
Like tongues of flame in you, you shall rise,  
Rise up to heaven like the silken sounds  
Of the faithful during morning prayer."

*Divan 19*

Your eyes must complete their course of Love  
For you to beat a path to courteous truth;  
Spend not your time with cold faces in dead places  
Or else your breath will freeze your breast and heart.  
From the pulp of yearning go beyond its form to seek  
More than solace in the natural suffering called Love.  
If you're obtuse and heavy as burdened clay enclosed  
By gravity, you'll never lift off and circle the sky;  
Come as fine as a thousand dancing particles of dust,  
So float and find your feet in the silken path of light.  
Choose to break or else be broken by the epic  
Of your maker; for death will break your fleeting self  
Like an empty shell without a pearl. When a leaf  
Withers, in season new roots duly restore it green:  
Why then flirt with rootless loves  
That steal your eyes from the Unseen?

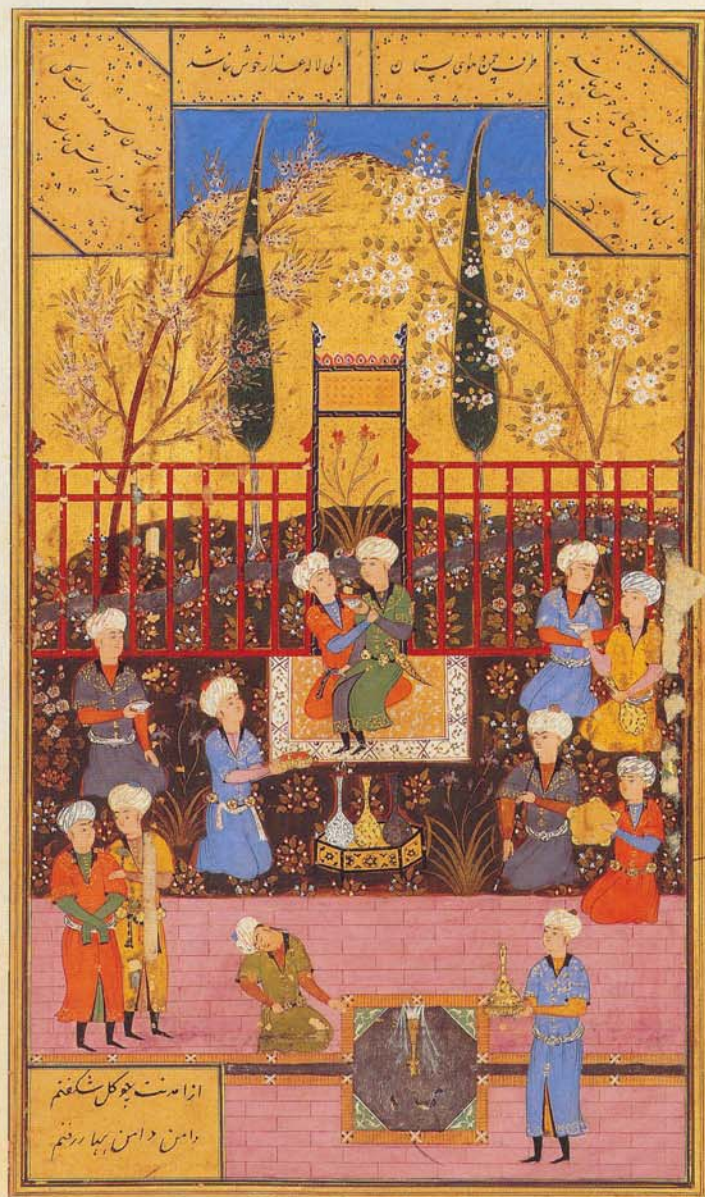
*Divan 2865*

I am so drunk with the sagacious beauty of your face,  
So taken by the intoxicated pupils of your gazing eyes.  
O master, so netted my heart, that asylum  
Of anxiety and longing, writhes with Love.  
There is true affinity between eye and eye of lunatic and drunk.  
Take pity on my wasting heart and look on me fondly  
As the sun looks with gentle magnanimity on the crumbling  
Severance of broken things. Gaze on me  
With the spring-season of your eyes  
So that oaks may grow from a single acorn.  
Your hybrid eyes are concentrated origins  
Ready for ecstasy and blood with their fervour.  
Those eyes have invaded me and taken  
What they will from my heart  
So that the bewildered youth runs naked  
Here and there in the empty house.  
We will enter the garden of your face and abandon the house,  
Demolish a thousand like houses with our bare hands  
In eager expectation, turning them into powder.  
Salah-al-Din you are like a moon without a shadow;  
You have no need for this song of mine,  
No more the houri's golden hair has of a comb.

*Divan 2412*

Seek to replace the lead of your eyes  
With a living ear which learns to die;  
For sacred words too fine to pierce the frost  
Of blind hearts, live in hearts with light embossed.  
The Devil insinuates the hearts which lie  
As crooked feet only crooked shoes try.  
You may intone sacred words and ancient sounds  
With the mechanical tick of a clock expound;  
For a fool words will fall on barren ground  
Even if you mint them on the willing page,  
Even if you speak them slowly like a sage;  
Oh sinner! The devil may take you at your word  
But wisdom's too wise by you it's not heard.

*Mathnavi II, 315*

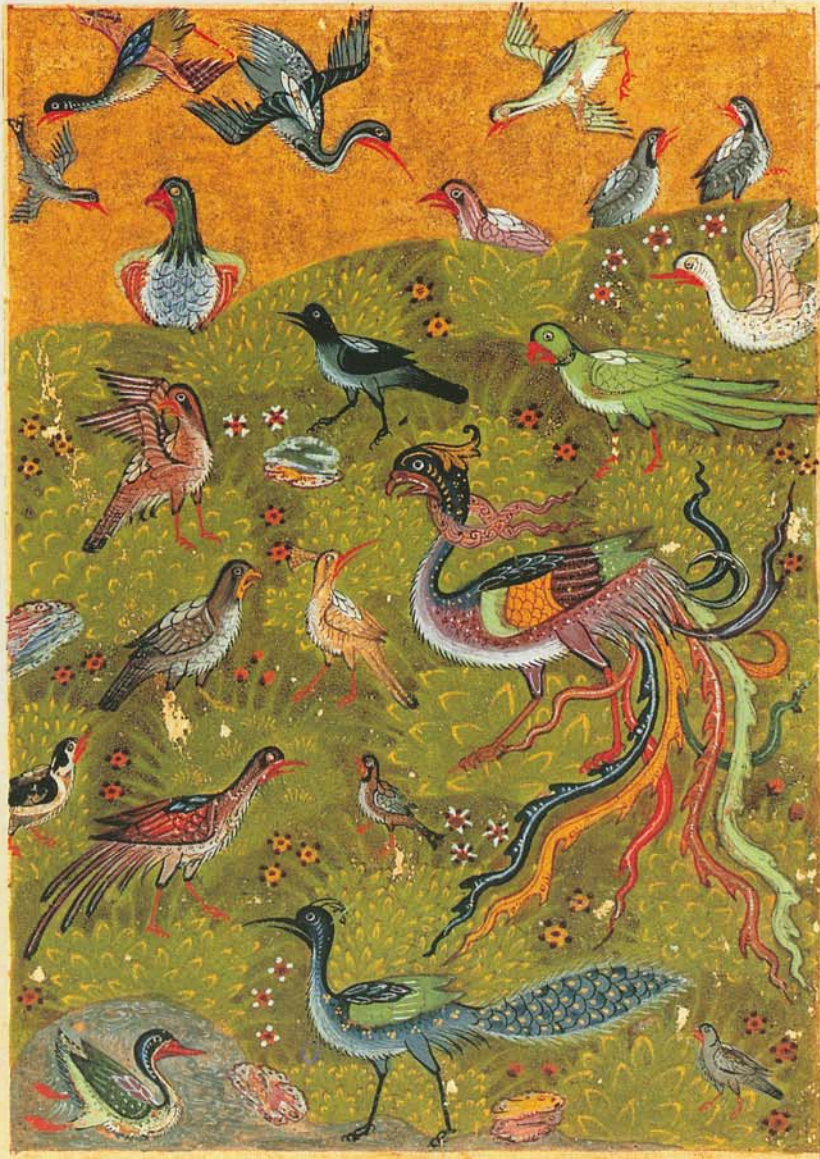


We speak of God who is hidden  
 Describing the indescribable.  
 You philosophize, I only criticize  
 Another refutes us both.  
 Yet another,  
 There are always others,  
 Will pontificate and vilify  
 And pin truth down like  
 A dead butterfly.  
 Everyone prognosticates  
 And assassinates with  
 A knowing word, a nod,  
 A distant seeking look;  
 Each insinuates even to  
 Himself even that he knows.  
 All these busy mouthing truths  
 Cannot speak the hidden Truth;  
 Yet each carries in itself  
 An antidote for its being  
 As blindness contains insight,  
 As the fleeting moment  
 Unveils eternity. Be patient  
 With your counterfeit truths,  
 Like false coins to the real.  
 Is their value to be measured.  
 So, like God's word in the Book  
 We learn to discriminate –  
 All is not true nor all entirely false –  
 As a small dose of poison  
 A potent medicine makes,  
 So our partial errors our thirst  
 For impartial Good do slake.

Heart in tumult, our hermit beings blunted with  
The rasp of inward noise; here now,  
There in tomorrow's heart. Ears stuffed with  
Cotton wool, eyes distracted by a single hair  
Sharp as a blade of grass. We wait anxiously for  
Tears of grief to spill over like lava onto our cheeks.  
Let Love invade you and consume that deadening wool,  
Let your heart become an audience like Hallaj,  
Like the audacious Saints of Purity.  
You know what happens if you place a naked flame  
By cotton wool, the fire will eat up  
Its desiccated convulsions. You are skirting  
On the lip of Love so prepare yourself, throw open  
The mantle of your senses to joy. For the lover's death  
Is a willing return on the way to the One;

If, entangled in the fingers of grief,  
You fear death, this is no place for you.  
So far as this existence is a prison  
Which bricks up our senses,  
The destruction of this cell is  
Our innocent ambition.  
But his prison is like a palace,  
His palace is a heaven.  
There's no lasting monument in this life  
Where even mountains are like balls of cotton  
In this faithless circus of passing beauty.  
There's no belonging in the hovel  
Of space and time, there is no loyalty.

*Divan 246*



Look! Quickly, look there among the trembling feathers  
Of the copper beech, there, you see them – birds making  
Ready to ride the dawn skies. They'll rise up soon, rise up  
Leave behind their conferring selves, to skim the seventh  
Heaven turning and changing with the stripling light.  
They're no ants that serve a modest sky, their eggs are golden.  
Asleep, they cradle the sun and moon in their folded wings,  
When they swish over the face of the waking sky they're fishes  
With souls of whales; they're like wild roses dancing in the wind.  
They adorn the skies with capricious patterns, wings beating  
Like palpitating hearts. They are independent beings, teasing hell,  
Skimming heaven, free of blessings and curses they'll lord it  
On the day of resurrection they're so close to our handcuffed  
Souls no bodies can quite acquit. The bravado of their display,  
The swooping dives and daring curves upward to heaven daze  
The mountains with subtlety and the sudden converted sea,  
Now bitter now sweet; their agile flight refines bodies into indebted  
Souls; souls in turn are winnowed through the pale of Eternity;  
Dull stones are blooded into rubies and the hollow bones  
Of unbelief are filled with the marrow of dancing truth, picking  
Its way over the debris of our senses. They're so clear, so finely,  
So thrumming fast they're invisible to the eye. If you want to  
See them look quickly with your turning heart, powder your face  
With the dust from their claws, make ready to go to the ball.  
Prepare to blunt the sharp point of your questing mind so it may  
Look up into the skies and blossom as rose and eglantine.  
Now, if all this could be said, I would say it in such words  
That the chorus of angels and caustic jinn who seal our play  
Would shake their fiery locks and cusp their hands to pray.

*Divan 730*

Again with burning lips I swore  
An oath in last night's heart,  
I confess with a sigh again I swore  
An oath on your ruby blood.  
I swore that I would fix  
My longing gaze on your chaste smile.  
I swore that I would not flinch  
Even if you struck me with a blade.  
My faith in you is green and strong  
It would rise again unscathed. I suffer,  
My heart is torn from your breast  
Which none can cure but you.  
You may wilfully cast me into fire  
But I am an ingot glowing for you.  
I swear I am dust, dry powder  
Rising from your path, as hapless atom,  
A circling world held by your gravity  
I turn and turn in your wake.

*Divan 1559*

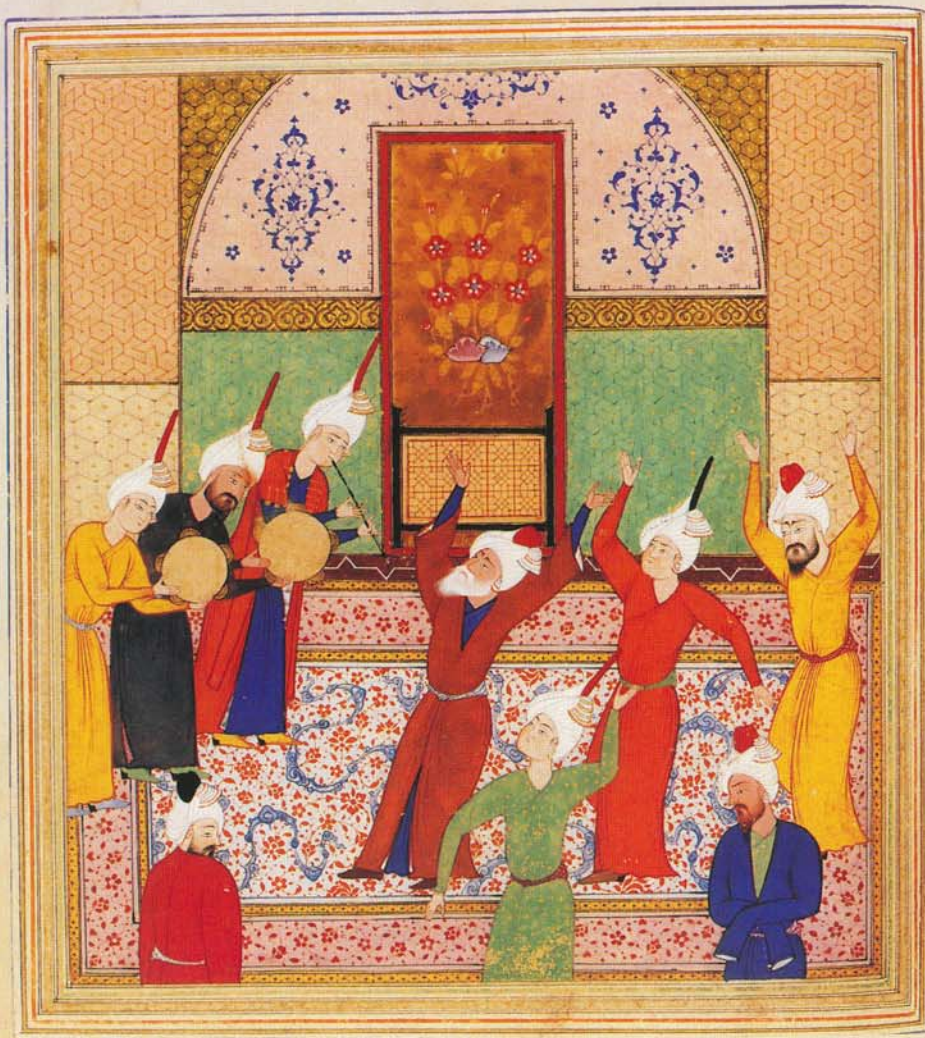




O friend do you see this sky-planted  
Tree of knowledge, you who know?  
See how high, how generous  
The rich tapestry of shade from it flows,  
The merciful vein of water as great  
As life-giving as pliant as the ocean.  
But in your ignorance you see only  
The opaque husks, the futile motions  
Of forms, for you fail to drink from  
The fountain-head of the One; you only see  
The names which crush and crowd  
The traffic of your senses – sun and tree  
Capricious lake dressed in silver, growling clouds  
Heavy with thunder – make their entry  
As auspicious names, glinting facets  
Of the diamond of the One again and again.  
Countless words and notions kissing  
The fine compliant air like a curtain of rain.  
The One may be Father to you, to me Another,  
To yet another a new-born Son,  
He is Justice and Wrath, Mercy and Vengeance,  
Revelation of faith, cherished. He runs  
Like a river through the fertile eden

Of particular forms disposing of dancing names,  
All this show seems sundry different, contradictory,  
Paradoxically it's all the Same;  
Made up of a million prancing disruptions  
Which our credulous minds deceive  
As we chase the froth of names as truth and destination  
To the end of life and only believe  
In what we see and say, we miss the mark,  
The salt which makes us thirst we cannot conceive  
Of in what is inconceivable – so why tie yourself  
So closely as your blood with seductive labels  
Only to be sullied, taken apart, besmirched,  
Gulled and clogged like dung-filled stables?  
Travel lightly O friend with your enchanted senses,  
Take careful stock leaving names behind  
So you may be guided to the pity and pith of things  
Where resides the One: there your heart you'll find.  
We quarrel and coral our faiths in walled enclosures  
Of demeaning words, those preposterous names.  
But only pierce the surface of your eyes, see  
Beyond your blinding sight, bathe in His eternal flame.

*Mathnavi II, 3668*



Circling, circling like zekr coming and going, circling round and round ...  
 With all true pilgrims I circle the cause of Love.  
 I'm not like the sly jackal, ears cocked, sniffing death as it approaches carrion.  
 I'm a gardener, shovel on shoulder seeking sun-sugared dates.  
 Striding through thorns  
     round and round ...  
 The fruit I circle and seek is not a dry, acidic pustule on a sour tree.  
 My dates are brown as honey, they encourage my faithful body  
 To circle on wings like Taiyar  
     round and round ...  
 The world is a serpent covering a treasure, I float above it  
 Flickering like a serpent's tail. My grief is not paltry though I wheel slowly  
 Like a heron about this sacred place  
     round and round ...  
 I do not want to own, to be fluent with worldly goods;  
 I need the Prince, I long for the solace of his wholeness.  
  
 At each waiting moment, Khidr guides my circling feet whirling crazily  
 Like the lusting needle of a compass seeking true North  
     round and round ...  
 Can't you see I'm ill? I need a Galen for my fermenting mind seeking the vintner.  
 Don't you realize I'm the sky-hungry Simurgh flying over Qaf  
     round and round ...  
 The hidden treasure, ill-seen ill-sung? Can't you see I cannot stop circling?  
 Spinning agitation turns me like a top spilling circles on circles, here and there,  
     round and round ...  
 You say: "Slow down now, be more dignified!"  
 I'm sick of the trick of dignity, I am travelling, yes I am travelling  
     round and round ...  
 In a whirlpool of distraction. Bread is my pretext  
 The baker my warrant. I'm not measured by the density of gold,  
 I am inaugurated in my circling  
     round and round ...  
  
 I have entered the airy, dancing lightness of Love.

There are so many selves,  
So many selves swimming like eels  
In the liquid of my mind,  
So many fickle impressions.  
Which one is me?  
Listen to my nonsense, be patient,  
Don't try to muzzle my foaming mouth!  
I'm not in control, don't plate me in with the glass  
Of your comments and easy concern,  
I'll shatter and crush it into sand.  
I can't help it, I am a cipher for your moods;  
When you're filled with joy,  
The zero I am is impressed with pleasure;  
When you're dark I become dark as a cave.  
It's always the same, your bitterness is my brine,  
Your sorrow is my fatal grief.  
When I am with you I am your lofty sky,  
Your placid sea. You're anchored reality,  
I am too created in this occupied body.  
I am nothing but a mirror in your palm,  
Reflecting the play of your fingers.

I take on the skin of your feelings.  
You are the cypress in the garden of our being,  
I am its obedient shadow;  
I am a servant of the rose setting up house beside it.  
If I act without you my hands are torn  
By thorns, caked with ashes.  
With you the thorns and ashes become  
Rose petals and jasmine composed with perfume.  
At each instant my heart pumps blood for you,  
The vessel of my body is fragile crystal for Love of you.  
Every second my fingertips stretch out to trace your face  
So you may burn my skin, rip open the garments of my soul.  
I am a beggar who has received the silver grace  
Of Salah-al Din which cools my constricted  
Heart like a mountain stream.  
He is the light, the glowing flame illuminating the world  
But who am I?  
From the yearning curvature of my soul  
I know I'm simply his bowl.

*Divan 1397*



You cannot shun sunlight  
No more than a suave rose  
Survives without its liquid beams.  
Plant your inner space with seed  
Where feathers of flame play gracefully.  
There's something higher we know  
But you say not more,  
Not this, not that;  
I do not know.  
You are tied up in *nots*.  
But beyond your cautious *nots*  
You must see and say what  
Really is without not knowing.

*Mathnavi VI, 634*

When your actions and thoughts strike  
That living spark in you, engender your soul,  
You work from that subterranean flow of  
Joy that runs like a laughing torrent in you.  
All other origins bring only dried fruit, no  
Love, no energy sinews your emotive being.

Be not made hollow by the noise of others,  
Lead by the nose by blind or devious men.  
There's one way which leads to the spring,  
One rope to use for the bucket to scoop up  
Clean water – the trackless way of selflessness.

Be filled with wanton, willing, lusting self  
And you are in prison with clipped wings, or  
You are a piece of cod sizzling in the pan.

The world grows mad on the ferment  
Of angry actions, the authorities can only inflict

Visible punishments. Now regard with the unpractised  
Inner eye the unseen presence of Judgement then  
You will understand the nature of your soul's torment.

We are like toads croaking in the damp darkness  
Of a well, there's no way we can know the vernal  
Breath of a sunlit field in this carnal occupation.

Your many selves can point like iron particles drawn  
To a magnet, or like the swishing dance of a school of fish  
Now this way, now that, move with grace and harmony.

Even a great palace floating like pregnant cumulus in air  
With intricate balconies and joining towers washed  
By rainwater, with clement infinity sparkling everywhere,  
Can be contained in the merciful shade of a single tent.

*Mathnavi VI, 3487*



Without you I'm entombed,  
My flesh rots obediently  
And falls away from the bone.  
But just your fleeting presence  
Brings life to me and fills this  
Marginal body with brassy resurrection.  
Where you are there is my fragile body  
And thirsty soul so longing for you.  
I'm a reed waiting, rigid for your breath;  
Touch it and you create harmony.  
I'm addicted to your play,  
An instrument in search for you.  
Without you I'm buried in mourning,  
Eaten up with grief.

*Divan 1641*

Don't flounder in the preambles of the past  
Wounded with regrets; don't let autumnal  
Nostalgia blind you to the sounds and scents  
Of the present's Spring; you're a native of  
The pellucid moment, make it infinite beyond  
The curving snake of passing time and space.  
Learn to die in the infinitely elusive moment.

*Ruba'iyat (reference unknown)*

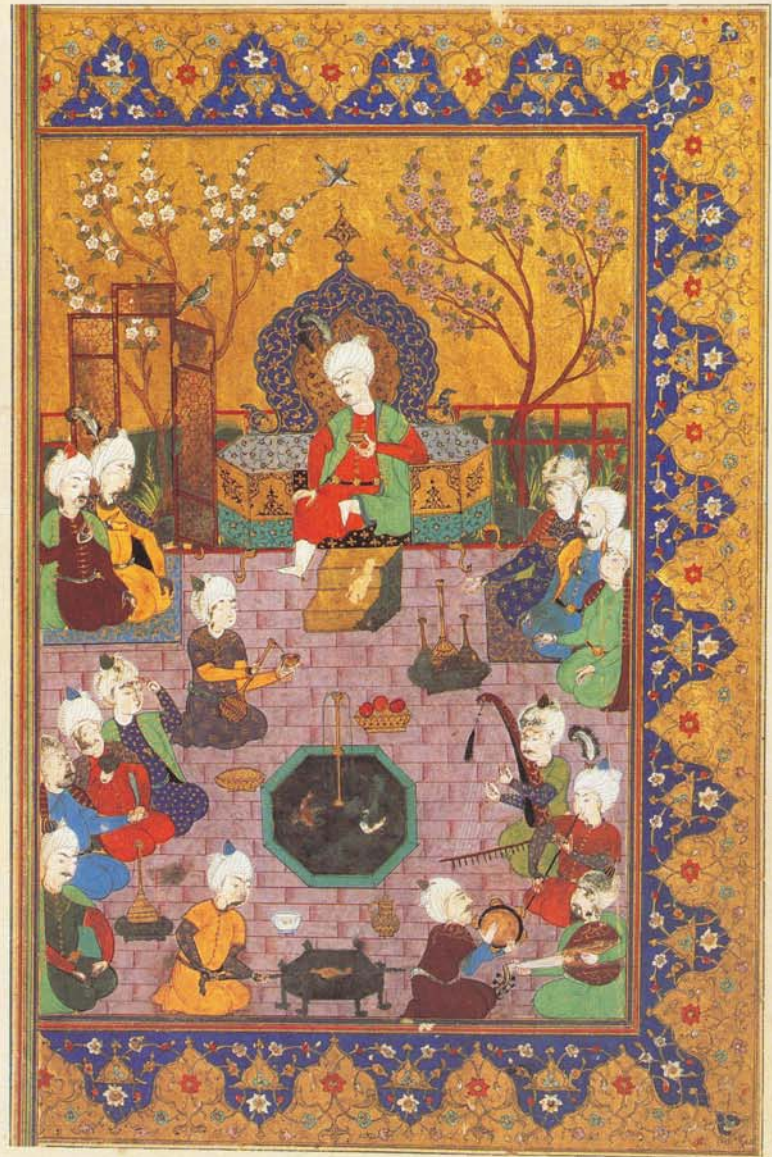
I was a speck of dust measured in molecules  
Now I am a rising mountain peak, snow-capped;  
I was forgotten like coffee grains in an empty pot  
Now I am surging light leading a multitude.

You erased my famine, unpicked my anger  
Your energy charges my voice, it radiates my heart;  
Now I am alive with the ore of words pouring  
From my lips like molten lava glittering with joy.

*Ruba'iyat 1966*

Once again to open to the melody  
Of the reed of good fortune, listen;  
Sing my soul, dance my heart,  
Clap your hands and stamp your feet.  
The dark shafts of a mine are now glowing  
Ruby-red, and the world is festive with welcome.  
The table is set for the coming celebrations.  
We are drunk on Love, blatant with hope  
And adoration of the Beloved's cheek  
Fresh as a meadow in spring.  
He is the sea, we are the sea mist;  
He is the treasure, we are dilapidated beggars;  
We are mere hapless particles in the radiant  
Light of the sea. I am so amazed, so bemused,  
Do not scold me for being boastful,  
If only you knew how I am enjoyed  
By the Beloved! With the light of Mustapha  
I am ready to split the moon.

*Divan 2967*





SEEKING THE BELOVED

Whirl and rejoice, find the ruby of your heart  
Through circling degrees, your body becoming  
A planet of the soul embedded in still serenity.  
You are your arching senses sending energy  
To the centre of the dance; the Beloved calls out  
To himself rising like leviathan rejoicing.  
Wars are fought here in your dancing blood  
Chamber convulsed with joy, it looks upon God  
From the famine of its lowly state with longing sighs.  
Angels pierce you in your turning with the cool  
Needles of their eyes, you are wounded with  
Their peace you whirl and rejoice happily drowning  
In that enchantment where no body may enter  
No sun nor moon; as the dancer brings forth the dance.

- R. A.

## Index of first lines

A beggar smiled at me and offered me alms . . . 45  
Again with burning lips I swore . . . 80  
And this is Love – the vertigo of heaven . . . 20  
Circling, circling like zekr coming and going, circling round and round . . . 85  
Dawn – conceived light: the pregnant moon . . . 14  
Don't flounder in the preambles of the past . . . 94  
Each of My creatures has its own path . . . 27  
From moment to moment the soul . . . 52  
Heart in tumult, our hermit beings blunted with . . . 76  
How close are these two immaterial things – my soul to your soul! . . . 28  
I am so drunk with the sagacious beauty of your face . . . 72  
I am you and you are me, you in me, me in you . . . 21  
I gaze at the porcelain of your face and my heart lights up . . . 16  
I have no idea what makes this heart of mine . . . 56  
I said to my heart, this stranger who embellishes me . . . 68  
I was a speck of dust measured in molecules . . . 95  
I was dead, dead, dead . . . 36  
I will only to an open heart a story tell . . . 62  
I'm not at home here, here . . . 38  
Inside me reflecting mirrors . . . 32  
Last night your dreams blindfolded . . . 24  
Listen oh listen to my plaintive cry . . . 41  
Look to the unreaped horizon dancing in this desert of ours . . . 43  
Look! Quickly, look there among the trembling feathers . . . 79  
Love is longing and longing, the pain of being parted . . . 46  
Music opens our hearts and surely ensnares . . . 13  
Now that your soul has entered my all-too-present flesh . . . 15  
O friend do you see this sky-planted . . . 82

Once again to open to the melody . . . 96  
Passing, passing . . . 31  
Poet - first a seeker of Truth . . . 7  
Seated here attached to the present of this royal place . . . 19  
Seek to replace the lead of your eyes . . . 73  
So deliberate is the power in him . . . 50  
Stones rush to dance before the . . . 61  
The Master has been intemperate and ill . . . 66  
The moon, O the moon has returned to me . . . 42  
There are so many selves . . . 86  
There are times when I seem asleep to you . . . 49  
These words of mine are no stones . . . 35  
This night of Love . . . 59  
Time passes, time passes wearing out all clocks . . . 53  
Today and yesterday and unfortunate tomorrow . . . 54  
Today I saw clearly that gem, my Beloved, who . . . 70  
We are the fingertips of blind illusion . . . 64  
We speak of God who is hidden . . . 75  
When for an infinite second . . . 65  
When your actions and thoughts strike . . . 90  
Where is he? . . . 22  
Where you dwell is dear to my sight . . . 25  
Whirl and rejoice, find the ruby of your heart . . . 98  
Without you I'm entombed . . . 93  
You cannot shun sunlight . . . 89  
You're so at home in this passing state . . . 60  
Your beauty is glory in nakedness, the melt . . . 55  
Your eyes must complete their course of Love . . . 71

## Notes about the Poems

p.13: *Mathnawi IV, 733*. Sufism extends and expands the Pythagorean theory of the heavenly music of the spheres to include the human soul. The Sufis maintain that Adam, the progenitor of humankind, heard the heavenly music when he was in Paradise. Henceforth, all human beings have been capable of recognizing that music in their souls, and are drawn by it towards God, the Beloved.

p.14: *Divan 649*. In Persian literature, the full moon is the paradigm of beauty.

p.15: *Divan 2313*. The 'reed of my longing' is a reference to the *nay*, the reed flute used in Sufi music. Its notes are the lamentations of the lover's soul for the Beloved.

pp.16-17: *Divan 2253*. This *ghazal* (lyrical love poem) is about the primordial attraction of the lover to the Beloved. The lover becomes golden from the shining light of the Beloved. The lover has no desire other than to drown in the infinite sea of the Beloved's love. As in the game of polo, though the mallet hits the ball, the ball will always place itself in the centre of the mallet's head.

p.19: *Divan 322*. A description of the mystical union between the souls of the lover and the Beloved. Khorasan in the east and Iraq in the west are used to express a geographical manifestation of this transcendental union.

p.20: *Divan 1919*. In the mystical tradition, madness often symbolizes the dissolving of the self, which in turn opens the mystic's heart to the true experience of Reality.

p.21: *Divan 1254*. Rumi compares himself to a shadow of the Beloved, which he beseeches the Beloved not to cut off. In the Sufi tradition, when a shadow becomes absorbed into the light, it is no longer separated from its source and achieves *baqa*, immortality.

pp.22-23: *Divan 1235*. Rumi compares Shams, a symbol for the Beloved, to the light of a candle in the midst of darkness. His soul yearns for Shams, whose name, like the name of the Beloved, should be repeated by lovers. According to Rumi, kissing the hand of Shams at the point of death sweetens the mouth and removes the bitter taste of death.

p.24: *Ruba'iyat 1879*. The relationship between a true lover and beloved is not time-bound. This relationship, which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, is a reflection of the eternal relationship between the lover and the Beloved.

p.25: *Mathnawi III, 3808*. For the mystic lover, man-made borders and divisions are meaningless – it is the presence of the Beloved that conveys true meaning to a place. According to Muslim mystical tradition, when Joseph was dropped into a well by his brothers, the rays of light from his beautiful face, representing the beauty of the Beloved, shone like the full moon and lit the dismal well so that it looked like Paradise.

p.27: *Mathnawi II, 1750*. From a famous story in the *Mathnawi*. One day, Moses heard a shepherd talking to God. The shepherd was a simple man, so he used simple words and simple language. Moses rebuked him for addressing God in this way. The shepherd was heartbroken, but then God called to Moses, telling him that God hears each and every one of God's creatures in the language of their own heart. It is the truth of the heart that matters to God, not the words of the mouth.

pp.28-29: *Divan 1515*. This *ghazal* describes the ecstatic state of the lover at the time of mystical union. The word *dervish* symbolizes humility and honesty. Here, it is applied to the Beloved. Like the rest of the poem, this verse uses much word play. *Khusrau* is the name of a legendary

Persian king who was in love with Shirin (literally meaning sweet). Their romance is described in the works of Nizami (a 12th-century Persian poet). The verse is a pun on the name of Shirin; the mystic lover is simultaneously talking about Shirin, the beloved of *Khusrau*, and *shirin*, the sweetness of the poem's ethos.

p.31: *Mathnawi I, 2930*. The process of transformation in time is as necessary as transformation outside time. One process is temporal, the other eternal; they complement one another. The sweet fruit cannot come into being unless the flower first lives and dies – in the seed lies new life.

pp.32-33: *Divan 1486*. Rumi compares his soul to a mirror reflecting the Truth, which he therefore cannot pretend not to know. For Rumi, Shams is the person who contains the reflection of the Truth, and thus Rumi knows Shams in his soul.

p.35: *Divan 981*. For Sufi poets, words are a part of their life experience – in this case, literally the daily bread which sustains life. The 'bread of Egypt' is probably a reference to the unleavened bread which the Hebrews baked and ate in haste prior to leaving Egypt. Rumi would have known about this from the Qur'anic references to the story of Exodus.

pp.36-37: *Divan 393*. The literary and mystical importance of this poem is the constant contrasting of opposites. The mystic's experience can be expressed only in irrational and antithetical opposites.

pp.38-39: *Divan 381*. Sometimes a seeker takes a wrong turning and follows a false path. Rumi believes that any deviation or distraction from the path of the Beloved is to walk along the dangerous road of destruction of the soul. Yet even the mighty Simurgh, the mythical bird in Persian literature, is sometimes caught in this snare, let alone the insignificant finch. The heart knows that only the world of the Reality has life; everything else is false; fighting against the Truth.

p.41: *Mathnawi I, 1*. The opening lines of the *Mathnawi*. The Persian reed-flute, *nay*, which is often associated with ceremonies of Sufis of the Mawlawi Order, symbolizes the human soul. The soul, like the reed, is full of air but has no sound. But when the reed is emptied of wind, just as the soul is emptied of the self, then the breath of the mystic who longs for the Beloved will fill the reed. It is then that the reed will sing for the Beloved the beautiful melody of the soul of the lover.

p.42: *Divan 310*. In the Sufi tradition, mystical experiences take place in the heart. In this *ghazal*, Rumi's heart is enlightened by Love, and reaches union with the Beloved by throwing itself into the ocean of the mysteries of Love.

p.43: *Divan 239*. Rumi talks of the boundless space of experience, both physical and metaphysical, which a Sufi must go through. He uses the image of a severed head rolling towards the centre of the mystery as the symbol of a lover who is drawn self-less and will-less towards the Beloved. If only the Hoopoe, the bird who was the messenger between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, would reveal the secret to us. But one needs a discerning ear to understand such a message, the message which is revealed in the seventh heaven. In *The Conference of the Birds* by Attar (a 12th-century Persian poet and mystic), the Hoopoe is the symbol of a spiritual leader. The reference in line 17 is possibly to Salah al-Din Zarkub (d. 1261) who, after the disappearance of Shams, became involved in the spiritual and mystical development of Rumi.

p.45: *Divan 2015*. Poverty of the heart is of great importance in the mystical tradition. It means emptying one's heart and mind of all worldly attachments, thus surrendering oneself totally and freely to God or the Beloved. In the biblical tradition, rings were inserted in the ear as a sign of servitude. Here, the mystic willingly and joyfully accepts the ring of servitude from the Beloved, for in this servitude lies true freedom.

pp.46-47: *Mathnavi I, 109*. Rumi's description of love is a passionate amalgam of human and divine love. To achieve this effect, he combines the word for the sun in Persian (*shams*) with the name of his master and beloved, Shams. The result is that the reader constantly moves between the immanent and the transcendent, the conscious and the trans-conscious.

p.49: *Mathnavi II, 3547*. Rumi explains the difference between consciousness as experienced by the five senses and the esoteric experience that takes place in the heart of a mystic. Though the eyes of a mystic are shut, he or she beholds and discerns with the eye of the heart.

pp.50-51: *Divan 861*. This *ghazal* is about the emanation of the Light from God or the Beloved. The phrase 'By the Dawn' is the first word of Qur'an 93:1 (known as *The Sura of Glorious Morning Light*). This light, the light of the morning sun, is also the esoteric Light of the mystic. In the poem, this mystical Light is extended to the face of Shams, whose name literally means 'the sun'. Thus the metaphor is also a pun on his name.

p.52: *Divan 622*. Rumi begins by stating how life and death continuously follow each other in the domain of God (the Beloved). Yet the mystic lover will not refrain from seeking the Beloved, though this means surrendering life itself. In preparation for union with the Beloved, the lover continuously empties the heart of all phenomena so that it may be filled with the Divine.

p.53: *Divan 943*. Revelatory dreams are important in mysticism, since certain mystical experiences can occur during such dreams. Rumi explains that the spirit, when freed from the burden of daily life's consciousness, can experience the beauty of its original spiritual abode.

p.54: *Mathnavi IV, 3654*. According to Sufis, a person who imagines that this world is the measure of all reality is as misguided as a dreamer who is unaware that he or she is dreaming.

p.55: *Mathnavi VI, 4618*. In the *Mathnavi*, Rumi puts forward what would have been a daring and almost heretical concept to religious orthodoxy. He suggests that coming to the presence of the Beloved who is clothed in glory and majesty is an inferior experience compared to beholding the Beloved stripped of the veils of these attributes. But a human being can behold the Beloved only when he or she has reached a state of total inner annihilation.

pp.56-57: *Divan 2480*. Rumi questions the essence of the heart. He likens the heart to a person living among a people, but not of that people. Similarly, the soul must free itself from the constraints of the body, because the soul is like a nugget of gold which is not appreciated until mined out of the earth. In the Qur'an, it is said that Samiri was the man who made the golden calf and led the children of Israel to worship it. Moses, who banished him from the camp, told him that his punishment was to become 'untouchable'. Later on, the word 'untouchable' became associated with disease and leprosy.

p.59: *Ruba'iyat 1878*. The word *saqi*, usually translated as 'cup bearer', is a metaphor for the Beloved's continuous emanation. When a person completely empties his or her heart and mind of every thought and feeling not related to the Beloved, then that person will become the container of mystical wine emanated from the Beloved.

p.60: *Mathnavi IV, 3628*. The soul is like a traveller who seeks the perfect city, the city which it will recognize immediately as its city of origin. There is no separation, no isolation, and there are no strangers in that city. There, the soul is re-united with the Beloved.

p.61: *Divan 171*. When the Beloved's divine beauty is revealed, even the inanimate world of stones becomes infused with the ecstasy of love. Nothing can be compared to that beauty, *jamal*. The moon and the sky are but a hanging light and a rusty mirror compared to the beauty of the Beloved.

p.62: *Mathnavi II, 578*. Greed is the darkness which will prevent the eyes and heart of a person from receiving the light of Truth. Though this person possesses all the wealth in the world, he or she will be spiritually empty.

p.64: *Mathnavi I, 602*. Humans might think that they exist, but they are only the non-existent; their being is no more than a breath of wind. The only true existence is the One, the absolute Being, the Divine.

p.65: *Mathnavi III, 2075*. Rumi explains the phenomenon of timelessness as experienced by the mystic. When the metaphorical and mystical leap from material time to non-material time occurs, then the duality of time and non-time vanishes and all that remains is Time.

pp.66-67: *Divan 321*. This *ghazal* describes the outward manifestations of an inner affliction. When a person is truly in love, he or she appears to the common eye to be ill. To the enlightened eye of the mystic, this apparent affliction is in fact a blessing.

p.68: *Divan 2760*. Kohl is a very fine powder, used for beautifying the eye. In the original poem, kohl is used as the symbol of a contrite and humble heart and, by extension, of the mystical experience which takes place in the heart of the lover. It is this which beautifies the eye of Certainty – the absolute knowledge or mystical experience, which is permanent. This is set in contrast to rational knowledge, which is transient. It is acquired by the rational faculty and is subject to change.

p.70: *Divan 19*. Mustafa is one of the prophet Muhammad's names. The Beloved's spiritual ability to experience the Divine is compared to *mi'raj*, the mystic *Vision of Ascension of the Prophet to the Seventh Heaven* (Qur'an 17). The placing of the head upon the feet is a reference to the prostrating posture in Muslim prayer. In orthodox religious understanding, this is how one bows to God. In the mystical tradition, God becomes identified with the Beloved.

p.71: *Divan 2865*. According to the Sufis, one could make the mistake, when looking at beauty, of seeing merely the face or the form. This limited outlook does not enrich the spirit. That is why Rumi explains that the true mystic looks at beauty but sees Beauty. This is the experience that transforms a simple grain of sand into a precious pearl: this is what enables the human to become Human.

p.72: *Divan 2412*. Hourī is a nymph and also the virgin of paradise. Salah al-Din is the great Muslim leader of the Crusades, known in English as Saladin.

pp.73: *Mathnavi II, 315*. Sufis and jurists often did not see eye to eye about religious matters, and Rumi was no exception. Here he compares the heart of a spiritually ignorant person – though one who is highly educated in worldly subjects – to a deaf ear that cannot hear the Truth, but only distorted sounds.

p.75: *Mathnavi II, 2923*. According to Rumi, all philosophies as well as all religions contain some truth, which is why human beings search for truth in different doctrines and disciplines. Charlatans, in order to gain worldly goods, take advantage of people's gullibility, and portray half-truths as the Truth.

pp.76-77: *Divan 246*. This *ghazal* expresses the difference of perception between the mystic and the non-mystic. For a Sufi, the body is no more than a prison, which must be symbolically set on fire to free the incarcerated spirit. A mystic does not expect faithfulness from this world, because all worldly loyalties are meaningless when compared with the true fidelity between the lover and the Beloved. Hallaj was an iconoclastic Muslim mystic and poet of the 9–10th century.

His unorthodox views on the Unity of Existence with diverse manifestations led to the charge of heresy being brought against him. He was martyred in 922 CE.

p.79: *Divan 730*. In the mystical tradition, birds can represent the soul. Their beauty manifests the beauty and perfection of the soul of the lover. They are the free spirits who move comfortably between heaven and earth.

p.80: *Divan 1559*. In the original Persian, the phrase represented here as 'ruby blood' is 'by your life'. The lover accepts any punishment from the Beloved, even death. In the Sufi tradition, the lover trusts the Beloved totally. The lover rises like a particle of dust out of the path of the Beloved, and willingly returns to dust.

pp.82-83: *Mathnavi II, 3668*. This poem is part of a long section in the Mathnavi on how not to be misled by what outwardly seems to be real knowledge. A king has been searching for the tree of knowledge whose fruit bestows eternal life, but has failed to find it. A Sufi explains that the reason is that he has been looking for the tree rather than for the transcendental meaning of the tree. Those who seek the Beloved in names and concrete terms will fall into confusion and failure. The real seeker must look for inner meanings and through them be guided to true Knowledge.

p.85: *Divan 1422*. *Zekr* literally means remembrance. In Sufism, it is the ceremony in which the 99 Beautiful Names of God are repeated, sometimes accompanied by music. *Khezr* (in Persian) or *Khidr* (in Arabic), means green. In the mystical tradition, he is a legendary figure who symbolizes the spirit of renewal, and is the guide of the seeker. Here, the Simurgh symbolizes a spiritual leader and adept mystic. *Qaf* is the mythical mountain where the Simurgh lives.

pp.86-87: *Divan 1397*. In the mystical tradition, only God or the Beloved has true Existence. All else is a reflection of that true Reality.

p.89: *Mathnavi VI, 634*. The original story in the Mathnavi is about a man, waiting to meet his Beloved, who falls asleep and misses her. Rumi is trying to explain that when people who are too busy negating and denying the Reality are given the chance to experience that Reality, they fall into the abyss of unconsciousness and miss their opportunity.

pp.90-91: *Mathnavi VI, 3487*. This is from the story of Joseph in the Mathnavi, based on Qur'an 12. Joseph spent a long time in prison because, instead of putting his trust in God as the only omnipotence, he asked the butler to plead for him to Pharaoh. The butler, who was not an enlightened mortal and subject to daily cares and preoccupations, forgot all about Joseph. Rumi says that trusting in the power of the transitory world and its people is like asking the blind to lead the blind.

p.93: *Divan 1641*. The life experienced by a mystic separated from the Beloved is akin to death and decay.

p.94: *Ruba'iyat (reference unknown)*. Time is relevant to the world of existence and must be conquered. Timelessness belongs to the world of true Existence.

p.95: *Ruba'iyat 1966*. Here Rumi expresses the belief that the Beloved is the cause of all changes. It is love and service of the Beloved that causes a person, a simple speck of dust, to become like an eternal mountain.

p.96: *Divan 2967*. The splitting of the moon is a reference to Qur'an 54:1. The theme of this *sura* is the final judgement and truth of Revelation. If the moon is split asunder, the end of the world is nigh. Rumi's soul is so elated by the revelation which he has received from the Beloved, that he dares to split the moon, face the final judgement and be joined to the Beloved.

## About the Manuscripts

During his life, Jalaluddin Rumi's home city of Konya in Anatolia was an important centre for the production of fine manuscripts. Their quality can be judged from the earliest surviving copy of Rumi's *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi*, which was produced in the city in 1268-9 CE, and which is still preserved there in the museum attached to Rumi's tomb.<sup>1</sup> It would be difficult to find a better example of the supranational character of medieval Islamic culture. The form and style of illumination found in this book was dependent on models developed in the Arab and Iranian lands during the 8th to 12th centuries CE, principally in the context of Koranic manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Here, though, the book was a work in Persian, recently composed by a poet from what is now part of Afghanistan. The painter responsible for the decoration, Mukhlis ibn Abdallah, called himself al-Hindi, 'the Indian' – and he practised his art in a city that then had a mixed Turkish and Greek population. To a large extent, this supranational artistic unity was maintained throughout the long period when Rumi's works were produced in manuscript. The artistic presentation of these texts certainly changed over time, but a shared heritage and contemporary exchanges between important centres such as Istanbul, Isfahan and Agra preserved many common features.

In Rumi's time, non-figural illumination was the principal form of book painting in the Islamic world and, over the following six hundred years, a great number of manuscripts containing Rumi's works were decorated in this manner. In the beginning, the illuminations incorporated numerous geometric motifs, but this repertory rapidly lost ground to plant-based designs, including arabesques bearing the palmette motif and scrollwork set with fantastic chinoiserie blossoms. The extent of the illumination varied according to the resources of the artist's client, but it usually included an ornamental frame around the opening pages of text. In the grandest manuscripts and albums, there was illumination on every page, and this work came to include decorated margins. These were often painted or dyed in a tone that contrasted with the central area of the page, and then painted with an overlying pattern in gold that was sometimes further enhanced with other colours.

Illumination of this kind can be found in a magnificent 16th-century copy of the *Divan* of Hafiz, several examples of which are reproduced in this book. In these, the only geometric element to have survived is strapwork composed of rotating lobed figures (pp. 25, 54, 65, 94). Floral scrollwork is supplemented here and there by chinoiserie clouds (p. 64), or by cranes and other birds (pp. 24, 55, 58, 59, 68, 69, 95).

Soon after Rumi's death, towards the end of the 13th century CE, non-figural illumination was supplemented by a revival of book illustration, which developed rapidly under the patronage of the newly converted Mongol rulers of Iran and their ministers. The earliest surviving examples of these paintings occur in scientific and historical manuscripts but, from the 14th century, poetic works were also illustrated. Some of these had a strong Sufi content, as demonstrated by the miniature reproduced on page 84, which shows a group of dervishes engaged in an ecstatic dance to the music of a flute and two tambourines.

Where the miniatures were inserted within a narrative text, their content related directly to the story told by the text. An example reproduced here (p. 78) is from the *Mantiq al-Tayr*, or *Conference of the Birds*, by Attar, which was also one of Rumi's sources of inspiration. Another type of painting, the illustrated frontispiece, was more common in manuscripts of lyric verse. It consisted of a painting covering two facing pages, or two matching paintings facing one another.

and it always preceded the text. The paintings on pages 58 and 69 form the frontispiece to the Hafiz manuscript mentioned above, while details from two other examples (pp. 12, 97) depict a standard theme for these compositions: a seated prince occupies the place of honour at an *alfresco* entertainment, which was, we are to understand, the ideal setting for listening to poetry. Miniatures such as these were created within well-organized scriptoria, in which spare paintings, old cartoons and fragments of calligraphy were kept for reference. On occasion, such material came into the hands of connoisseurs who pasted them in albums. Gradually it became the custom to create drawings, paintings and calligraphic specimens specifically for inclusion in richly illuminated albums. Such album pieces are often in the form of single portraits of types or actual persons (see pp. 30, 40, for example). One group of individuals deemed particularly worthy of such portraits were Sufis, either because of their picturesque appearance or behaviour, or because of their spiritual qualities (see pp. 34, 44, 48, 63, 81, 88, 92).

Youthful beauty, both male and female, was also a subject of these paintings, and in this case the images could be used as aids to contemplation. Rumi believed that human beauty can be appreciated as a metaphor for the absolute beauty of God, and that by gazing at living examples or depictions of them we can gain some understanding of the Divine. The album painting shown on page 34 depicts a young Mevlevi dervish, a follower of Jalaluddin Rumi, and his bland good looks show how the Ottomans visualized this theme around 1600 CE; the youthful courtiers shown on pages 58 and 69 are the product of the Safavid imagination of roughly the same period. Even at this time, four centuries after Rumi's death, a common currency of Islamic aesthetics was maintained in both literature and the visual arts, even if a certain regional diversity influenced their realization.

<sup>1</sup> Zeren Tanindi, *1278 Tarihli En Eski Mesnevî'nin Tezhipleri*, *Kültür ve Sanat*, no. 8, Ankara, 1990, pp. 17-22. The date in the title is an error.

<sup>2</sup> Makhlis ibn Abdallah's other known work (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, ms. 1466) is indeed a magnificent Koran manuscript, which he illuminated in Konya in 1278 CE. See David James, *Qur'ans and Bindings from the Chester Beatty Library*, (London), 1980, no. 69.

## Author Acknowledgments

As with most books, there are many people behind the persona of the author who have helped to bring the book into existence. There is the influence of other writers dead and alive; in my case the presence of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi pervades every line of the poetry. However, there are people who have had a more immediate influence in the writing of this book. I would like to thank my editor Cathy Fischgrund, for having enough trust in me to commission me; Mehri Niknam, whose knowledge of Persian and familiarity with the poems of Rumi in the original has ensured that the poems I have interpreted are reasonably anchored to the originals; the poet and translator, Jerzy Peterkiewicz, who has given me invaluable help with his instinct for the right word or image; Douglas Krikler for his help and Nahla Nassar for her expertise in finding the illustrative material; and finally Kristine Pommert for her inspired advice and support during the gestation and writing of the poems. Without them this book would not have been written.

## Photographic Acknowledgments

For permission to reproduce the paintings on the following pages and for supplying photographs, the Publishers thank:

The Bodleian Library, Oxford:  
12, 13 (border); MS. Fraser Add. 73, f. 1v-2r  
78: MS Elliott Add. 246, f. 25v  
84: MS. Ouseley Add. 24, f. 119r

Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London:

front jacket, 96 (border), 97: MSS 712, f. 1b  
2-3 (border details), 24 (border), 110-111 (border details): MSS 719, f. 166b  
5 (border detail), 16-17 (border), 32-33 (border), 50-51 (border): MSS 778, f. 109b  
22-23 (border), 28-29 (border details), 36-37 (border details), 38-39 (border), 46-47 (border details),  
56-57 (border details), 66-67 (border details), 76-77 (border), 82-83 (border details), 86-87 (border  
details), 90-91 (border details): MSS 778, f. 110a  
14-15 (border), 52-53 (border), 60-61 (border), 70-71 (border): MSS 399, f. 2a  
18: MSS 913, f. 27a  
20-21 (border), 72-73 (border): MSS 348, f. 484a  
25 (border), 65 (border): MSS 719, f. 143b  
30, 31 (border): MSS 649  
34, 35 (border): MSS 505  
40, 41 (border), back jacket (detail): MSS 509  
42-43 (border): MSS 945, f. 2a  
44, 45 (border): MSS 997  
48, 49 (border): MSS 638  
54-55 (border), 94-95 (border): MSS 719, f. 128b-129a  
58, 59 (border): MSS 719, f. 2a  
62 (border), 63: MSS 647  
64 (border): MSS 719, f. 10r  
68 (border), 69: MSS 719, f. 1b  
74: MSS 778, f. 58a  
80 (border), 81: MSS 650  
88, 89 (border): MSS 780  
92, 93 (border): MSS 842

V&A Picture Library:  
26: MSS 15 13-1962 f. 42

Rafiq Abdulla MBE is a South African born Muslim. He has written and presented numerous radio programmes about Islam for the BBC, including a series of talks on the Prophet Muhammad and the Four Caliphs, and a programme on the life and work of Jalaluddin Rumi. He has written award-winning screenplays for Channel 4, poetry and articles for a range of journals, and he is a frequent book reviewer. Rafiq Abdulla describes himself as a secular Muslim and a lover of the arts, particularly music and poetry. He has recently been honoured with an MBE for his community work, especially for his ecumenical work among Muslims, Jews and Christians.

DISCOVER THE ANCIENT WISDOM OF THE WORLD IN THE SACRED WISDOM SERIES: ILLUSTRATED, MODERN TRANSLATIONS OF GREAT SPIRITUAL WRITINGS.

Books in the series include

TAO TE CHING

Translated by Stephen Mitchell  
ISBN 0-7112-1278-3 £12.99

ALPHA AND OMEGA

Visions of the Millennium  
Foreword by John Tavener  
ISBN 0-7112-1418-2 £9.99

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

Translated by R. C. Jamieson  
Foreword by H. H. the Dalai Lama  
ISBN 0-7112-1510-3 £14.99

Frances Lincoln titles are available from all good bookshops.

FRONT JACKET: *An Alfresco Feast*, detail (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, MSS 712, f.1b)

BACK JACKET: *Seated Youth Holding His Turban*, detail (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, MSS 509)



AND THIS IS LOVE –  
the vertigo of heaven  
Beyond the cage of words,  
Suddenly to be naked  
In the searchlight of truth ...

ISBN 0-7112-1509-X



9 780711 215092 >