

## Exploring Rumi's Universal Wisdom Through A Fable From The Mathnawi Ma'navi

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### Abstract

*Poets like Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi are born once in a blue moon. His poetry has inspired generations through its universal wisdom and teachings of peace and mysticism. Mathnawi Mathnawi is Rumi's most acclaimed piece of work expanding on six volumes. His style of narrating a tale is unique as he blends the story telling and mystical teachings in such a way that it becomes a different form, very personal to Rumi, which has no resemblance to the work of any-other poet. Rumi is a teacher of universal wisdom and has educated generations of readers. Every fable in Mathnawi has its own importance and teaching. So it can be said that Rumi's Mathnawi is a source of wisdom and guidance for present and future human generations. In this article we have examined the first fable from Mathnawi to explain how Rumi's poetry delivers a piece of universal wisdom and in addition to the story it becomes a spiritual journey.*

**Keyword:** Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Mathnawi Ma'navi, Wisdom, Persian Poetry, Mysticism.

### Introduction

Poetry is the expression of artistic nature of human beings which makes an attempt to define them. From centuries, human beings are expressing their feelings and emotions in the form of verses irrespective of language or form. This expression has two sides, both in the time of happiness and sorrow. But poetry is not limited to these topics only and it has also expressed human wisdom and thought-provoking universal truths which, throughout the history, have revealed upon mankind the secrets of its body and soul. As in reference to the Rumi's poetry R.A. Nicholson says that poetry is a trackless ocean with no clear boundaries between the literal 'husk' and the 'kernel' of doctrine in which the actual meaning is conveyed (Nicholson, 2000: 22).

There can be many definitions of wisdom, but what they all have in common is that wisdom is the name of the expression which is the essence of human experience of centuries, and which is not affected by the change of time and space. Human wisdom is something that does not remain idle in any situation and in any place. No matter where a man lives, no matter what language he speaks, no matter what worldly law he is bound by; wisdom always comes in handy. And it may be correct to say that this is also a part of the same legacy of knowledge that was given to Hazrat Adam AS.

Poets have tried from the very first days, when humans were learning to tell the stories, that their writings should capture the essence of the things and emotions but in centuries a poet is born who can actually get to the level of creativity where whatever he writes

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becomes a source of universal wisdom and enlightenment for the ages still to come and people yet to be born.

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi is one such personality who has presented the wisdom in his poetry that has been the characteristic of great minds and has conveyed his message through the verses which like an ever-flowing river captivate the reader's mind and soul. He is a complete guide to the people who seek guidance as he has combined the most imaginable vision and experience of divine beauty and mystery with a sober and humble teaching of how to integrate them with daily life. (Harvey, 1999: 16)

Maulana Rumi was born in 1207/604AH in Balkh, present-day Afghanistan. (Afzal, 2018: 52) He received his early education from his father. As a child, he left Balkh with his father and went to Rome and after his father's death became his successor and continued to perform his religious duties. The arrival of Shams Tabrizi, a spiritual personality, completely changed Maulana's appearance and interior and he moved towards the spiritual world. After that he started writing poetry and gave valuable works of literature to the world in the form of *Diwan Shams Tabriz* and *Mathnavi Manawi*. Rumi started reciting *Mathnavi* after *Diwan e Shams*, and it took him nearly twelve years to complete the six volumes of *Mathnavi* (Afzal, 2018: 181). His *Mathnavi* is no doubt the best poetry book of Islamic mysticism (Forouzanfar, 2008: 165).

The general style of the *Mathnavi* is that Maulana starts a fable and narrates a small part of it and then from a verse, takes his reader to his spiritual world and then returns to the next part of fable; but during this whole process, Maulana's excellence is that he does not let the link of conversation be broken. We can say that in *Mathnavi*, couplets form the tale, and the tale turns into a mystical teaching (Schimmel, 2003: 49). All the fables described in *Mathnavi* are interrelated to each other and the last couplet of a fable often brings with it the basic thought on which the next fable is built

Maulana's poetry begins after meeting Shams (Forouzanfer, 2008: 220), and we see that unlike other poets, Maulana's poetry has a hidden tendency to say the unspeakable and is indicative of a state where one is elevated from this material world. The soul of his poetry and its main purpose is to express the mysteries and secrets that cannot be obtained from the everyday talks and discussions and the only source from which one can get them is divine guidance (Humai, 1337:178). The reader of *Mathnavi* experiences this situation at every page and beholds the world of unseen and unspeakable. Maulana's *Mathnavi* is full of verses that contain some kind of universal truth or a piece of human wisdom, which can be called proverbs in literary terms. According to Humai, *Mathnavi* has two types of these proverbs, first the proverbs that are common in other poets and second the proverbs that are Maulana's speciality (Humai, 1376: 1009-1012).

The *Mathnawi* has parts where Rumi in ecstasy just goes on writing couplets like revelations and reader feels the same. These 'ecstatic parts' comprise most of the *Mathnavi* where story line works just as a base structure on which Rumi constructs whole kingdoms of knowledge. For example, in the first fable out of 224 couplets, nearly 100 joined together can tell the whole story and all the rest are the land where Rumi's magic works in so many ways to captivate the reader's mind and to teach him of his Sufi mysticism which speaks for harmony and peace.

Here we will analyse the first fable from Volume 1 of *Mathnavi* 'The story of the king's falling in love with a handmaiden and buying her' in order to explain how Rumi's poetry provides us with a deep insight into the world of wisdom and universal thoughts and deeds without depending on length and sometimes even on the original story. This fable is about a king who sees a handmaiden (concubine) and buys her for himself. The maid after being in king's custody, becomes ill and the physicians are unable to diagnose the illness. Finally, the desperate king turns to God for help. He is informed that an eminent physician would come to him for the treatment of maid. The physician arrives and examines the maid and finds that she has no physical illness, but she is heartbroken as she

has fallen in love with a handsome goldsmith of Samarkand. The physician suggests the king to call the goldsmith by tempting him with money and gold. When the goldsmith arrives, he meets with the handmaiden, and they live six months together. In this time, the maid is cured from illness. Then by the heavenly command, the physician makes a poisonous syrup for the goldsmith. After drinking it he loses his beauty, and the maid falls out of his love and after his death becomes attached to the king.

In this fable along with the story and mystical teachings, Maulana has also brought some pearls from the ocean of universal wisdom. Here we will examine 13 verses from this fable to explain Rumi's style and explore his wisdom:

تو جهانی بر خیالی بین روان (Rumi, 2017: 7)

Behold a world (turning) on a phantasy! (Rumi, 2011: 28)

In this verse Rumi has said a lot more than it seems to be at first as he gives his discourse on the abstractness of thought and the material happenings which, sprouting from it, make the whole world a place of dreams coming true and people striving for their goals which are nothing but some sensations of mind and this is what keeps the world moving.

لیک کار از کار خیزد در جهان (Rumi, 2017:7)

But in this world deed issues from deed. (Rumi, 2011: 28)

This is Rumi's take on how relations are formed in this world and sometimes without us knowing, things shape in a way that two people meet under very unexpected circumstances. Result of one thing is the beginning of other and the chain never stops like here King says this on meeting the Healer and explains that now when he is needed in the court, is not the reason why King respects him and he wanted to meet him long before knowing anything about all this but the circumstances had to have like this and the handmaiden turned out to be the cause.

از ادب پُرنور گشته ست این فلک (Rumi, 2017: 8)

Through discipline this Heaven is filled with light (Rumi, 2011: 29)

As it was said earlier, Rumi has deviated from the storyline here and is giving arguments on what is discipline and how indiscipline has adverse effects on the people who commit it. He says everything in the universe exists due to discipline and balance and nothing can exist without it. This is what Rumi's universal wisdom is and how his narration makes these verses eternal, disciplining the souls of generations.

بوی بر بیزم پدید آید ز دود (Rumi, 2017: 9)

The smell of every firewood appears from the smoke (Rumi, 2011: 31)

It is a fact that everything gives hint of its cause like smoke of different burning materials is different. Rumi has narrated it in such a beautiful manner saying that everything can be traced back to its origin like talking with a person reveals his knowledge and this can be proved anywhere and anytime. Rumi in his Mathnawi, has given hundreds of examples like these to support his arguments.

عاشقی پیداست از زاری دل (Rumi, 2017: 10)

Being in love is made manifest by soreness of heart (Rumi, 2011: 31)

Everyone knows that being in love with someone is a feeling that has its roots deep in the heart and this relation with the heart is universal in the sense that no one can, without a loving and caring heart, claim to be in love.

نیست بیماری چو بیماری دل (Rumi, 2017: 10)

There is no sickness like heartsickness (Rumi, 2011: 31)

This verse, united with the previous one forming a couplet, is another take on heart and love by Rumi as he says that no illness is there like the illness of a broken heart. Those who are kissed by love are difficult to cure than those who have been diseased by the material world.

شرح عشق و عاشقی ہم عشق گفت (Rumi, 2017: 10)

It was love (alone) that uttered the explanation of love and loverhood (Rumi, 2011: 31)

Here Rumi so artistically explains a universal reality on which books and books have been written that one cannot know what love is if he is not in love. So, love is its definition itself and no other dictionary can define it.

آفتاب آمد دلیل آفتاب (Rumi, 2017: 10)

The proof of the sun is sun (himself). (Rumi, 2011: 31)

The simplest example, we can say, of Rumi pouring wisdom into the mind of the reader. No explanation is needed either as Sun is the proof that there is a Sun.

بست را از نسیه خیزد نیستی (Rumi, 2017: 11)

That which is (in hand) is reduced to naught by postponing the payment. (Rumi, 2011: 33)

Another piece of universality of Rumi's thought which applies in every field of life that by delaying, a thing becomes impossible.

که علاج اہل ہر شہری جداست (Rumi, 2017: 12)

For, the treatment suitable to the people of each town is separate. (Rumi, 2011: 34)

Every geographical location has its own environment, which without keeping in view we can never understand a person. Every place has its culture and tradition different from others, so no matter when and where you are, you should have its knowledge to deal with people there.

دشمن طاوس آمد پر او (Rumi, 2017: 15)

The peacock's plumage is its enemy. (Rumi, 2011: 39)

Rumi says that the reason why people want to keep beautiful things just to themselves, away from their natural abode, are those beautiful things themselves. It is their existence that shapes one's feelings towards them.

سوی ما آید نداہا را صدا (Rumi, 2017: 16)

The echo of the shouts comes (back) to us. (Rumi, 2011: 39)

Voices echo and like them everything comes back to us like the reaction of an action and our fate in this world takes its form by our own conduct towards it. This is a universal truth, and Rumi teaches this in just a single verse which, when recited or read anywhere or anytime, never becomes irrelevant.

با کریمان کار با دشوار نیست (Rumi, 2017: 16)

Dealings with the generous are not difficult. (Rumi, 2011: 40)

It is always easier to be with good people who show affection about a person than being with the bad ones who don't care about anyone except for themselves. This is the Mystical teaching of Rumi as in the Sufi path the whole debate is just on being a good person from whom no one gets harmed.

As we can see from the examples given above, Rumi's poetry, Mathnavi specifically, is a treasure of wisdom as Sangalji says talking about Mathnavi that truths that cannot be expressed in any way and with any words and phrases are expressed in this book with miraculous statements (Sangalji, 1337: 103).

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