

RUMI SEMINAR

The Rumi poems collected for this seminar include samples of various poetic styles: short quatrains (rubâ`iyât), lyric odes (ghazaliyât), and teaching stories excerpted from the Mathnawî-yé Ma`nawî (an unbroken string of stories amounting to 50,000 lines).

In addition, links to audio tracks are made available so the reader can (optionally) hear some of these poems in the original Persian. There are audio tracks for Readings 1, 2, and 3.

Readings

1. **Quatrain 702 and Quatrain 306 ***
2. **Ode 1393 ****
3. **Ode 1517 ****
4. **“Moses and the Shepherd” (Mathnawî II: 1720-1796) *****
5. **“One night a certain man was crying...” (Mathnawî III: 189-211) ******

* *Ibrahim Gamard, The Quatrains of Rumi, Sufi Dari Books, 2008*

** *Iraj Anvar, Divan-i Shams-i Tabriz: Forty-Eight Ghazals of Rumi, Semar, 2002*

*** *Ibrahim Gamard, <http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/book2.html>*

**** *Reynold A. Nicholson, The Mathnawî of Jalâlu`ddîn Rûmî, Volume II, The Trustees of the “E. J. W. Gibb Memorial,” 1926*

1. Quatrain 702 and Quatrain 306

Audio Track:

“Poem of the Atoms” (Quatrain 702 and Quatrain 306), Persian song by Salar Aghili
<https://soundcloud.com/ain-a-shams/tuesday-track-4-poem-of-the>

Quatrain 702

Translated by Ibrahim Gamard

O day, rise up! For the motes dance [in the sun beam].
Souls dance helplessly from joy.
As for that one for whom the sky and air dance,
I will whisper in your ear the place where he dances.

Notes by Ibrahim Gamard:

- helplessly [be-sar-o pa]: “devoid of head and feet”, an idiom, meaning helplessness, as well as an expansive feeling of joy.
- he dances: refers to dance-like movements inspired by a mystical state.

Quatrain 306

Translated by Ibrahim Gamard

Every mote that is in the air and on the plains
Is crazy like us, if you look at it well.
And every mote, whether it is happy or sad,
Is wandering in amazement because of that joyous, incomparable Sun.

2. Ode 1393
Translated by Iraj Anvar

Audio Track:

Ode 1393, Persian recitation by Iraj Anvar

<https://soundcloud.com/ain-a-shams/ode-1393-iraj-anvar>

- 1 I was dead, I became alive, I was tears, laughter I became.
The fortune of love arrived, eternal fortune I became.
- 2 My eyes are content, my soul is brave.
Mine is the heart of a lion. The radiant Venus I became
- 3 He said: "You are not mad, you are not worthy of this house."
Insanity I chose, and was bound in chains.
- 4 He said: "You are not drunk – go away – you are not of our kind."
I went and got drunk, ecstatic I became.
- 5 He said: "You have not died, you are not drowned in ecstasy."
I died and fell at the feet of the one who revives.
- 6 He said: "You are cunning, you are drunk with fantasy and doubt."
I withdrew from all, a mute, a Sphinx I became.
- 7 He said: "You are a candle, the Qibla of this crowd you became."
I am not with the crowd, I am not a candle, scattered smoke I became.
- 8 He said: "You are a sheik, a head, a guide and a leader."
I am not a sheik, not a leader. I am a slave to your command.
- 9 He said: "You have wings, I won't give you wings."
In the desire of his wings, wingless I became.
- 10 My newfound fortune told me: "Do not walk, do not toil,
because out of mercy and compassion, I am coming towards you."
The ancient love said: "Do not remove yourself from me."
I said: "I shall not." I became quiescent and calm.
- 12 You are the source of the sun. I am the shade of the willow.
Since your rays have fallen upon my head, humble and molten I became.
- 13 My heart took on the luster of the soul. It expanded and split open.
My heart wove new silk, the enemy of this rag I became.
- 14 At the break of dawn, my soul boasted out of exultation.
A slave and a donkey keeper I was, a King and a Lord I became.
- 15 The wrap around you is thankful for your infinite sweetness,
"Since you came to my arms, like you I became."
- 16 The sorrowful earth gives thanks to heaven and the curved dome,
"Because of your revolving glance, a receptacle of light I became."
- 17 The turning wheel gives thanks to the King, for the Kingdom and the angels,
"Because of His magnanimity and grace, enlightened and giving I became."
- 18 The one who knows the truth gives thanks saying that: "I am ahead of all.
Above the seventh heaven a shining star I became,"
- 19 I am of you: O famous moon, look in me and see yourself.
Because of your laughter a laughing rose garden I became.

Note: The Qibla is the direction Muslims face when they pray (i.e., towards Mecca).

3. Ode 1517
Translated by Iraj Anvar

Audio Track:

Persian song by Shahram Nazeri and Hafez Nazeri
<https://soundcloud.com/ain-a-shams/day-3-track-12>

- 1 You ask me: “Who do you belong to?” What do I know?
You ask me: “Why are you such a madman?” What do I know?
- 2 You ask me: “How, so weak and infirmed,
can you ascend to love me?” What do I know?
- 3 I am tossed by the waves in the ocean of your love.
You ask me: “Where are you?” What do I know?
- 4 You ask me: “Aren’t you afraid to come,
to the place of the soul’s sacrifice?” What do I know?
- 5 You ask me: “If you are a sacrifice for God,
what signs of Godliness do you have?” What do I know?
- 6 You ask me: “What else do you seek,
beyond illumination?” What do I know?
- 7 You ask me: “Why are you in this cage,
if you are a bird of the sky?” What do I know?
- 8 I was walking on a good path but I lost my way
on account of that Turk of Khata. What do I know?
- 9 Now I do not distinguish adversity from pleasure.
You are the ultimate in pleasurable adversity. What do I know?
- 10 Suddenly, one night, Shams-e Tabriz stole away
my unique duality. What do I know?

Note: In Persian poetry, Khata (a region in northern China) was known for its exceptionally beautiful women.

4. “Moses and the Shepherd” (*Mathnawî II: 1720-1796*)

Translated by Ibrahim Gamard

(1720) Moses met a shepherd on the road, who kept saying, “O God!” and “O Allah!”

(1721) “Where are You?—so I can become Your servant, and mend Your sandals and comb Your head.

(1722) “(So) I can wash Your robe, kill Your lice, (and) bring milk in front of You, O Great (Lord).

(1723) “(So) I can kiss Your small hand, massage Your small foot, and sweep Your little (dwelling) place (when) the time for sleep comes.

(1724) “All my goats are a sacrifice for You. (And all) my (shouts of) ‘Hey!’ and ‘Ho!’ are in remembrance of You.

(1725) The shepherd was talking foolishly in this manner, (and) Moses said, “O so-and-so, to whom is this (being said)?”

(1726) He replied, “To the One who created us, by Whom the earth and the heavens came into view.”

(1727) Moses said, “Hey! You have become very backwards. You have certainly not become a Muslim. (Rather), you have become an unbeliever.

(1728) “What is this foolish talk? What is this gibberish and ignorance of (true) belief? Press some cotton into your mouth!

(1729) “The stink of your unbelief has made the world (to) smell bad. (And) your unbelief has made the brocaded silk of religion (into) an old patched garment.

(1730) “Sandals and sandal straps are suitable for you, (but) things like these aren’t right for (One who is like) a Sun.

(1731) “If you don’t block your throat from (saying) these words, a fire will come to burn up the people.

(1732) “(And) if a fire hasn’t come, what is this smoke? Why has (your) soul become black (and your) spirit rejected (by God)?

(1733) “If you know that God is the Judge and Ruler (of the world), how can this foolish babble and insolent familiarity of yours be acceptable?

(1734) “The friendship of one who lacks judgment and reason is (equivalent to) hatred. God Most High is Independent of (needing) service such as this.

(1735) “Who are you telling this to? Your uncles? Are the body and (bodily) needs among the (Divine) Attributes of the Lord of Majesty?

(1736) “One drinks milk who is (involved) in growth and increase. (And) one wears sandals who needs feet.

(1737) “And if your words are (addressed) to His servant— the one (about) whom God said, ‘He is Me and I am him’;

(1738) “The one (about) whom He said, ‘Truly, I was sick (and) you didn’t visit (Me),’ (meaning) ‘I became sick, not only him’;

(1739) “(And) the one (about whom He said), ‘He became hearing by Me and seeing by Me’—in regard to that servant, this (talk of yours) is also absurd.

(1740) “(For) speaking disrespectful words to one chosen by God causes the heart to die (and) keeps the pages (recording your actions) black.

(1741) “If you call a man (by the woman’s name) ‘Fatima—as if men and women were one kind (only)—

(1742) “He will want (to shed) your blood, as much as it is possible (for him to do so), even if he is pleasant-natured, meek, and peaceful.

(1743) “In regard to women, Fatima is a praiseworthy (name). But if you say it to a man, it is (like) a spear-wound.

(1744) “In regard to us, ‘hand’ and ‘foot’ are praiseworthy; (but) in regard to Holy Purity of God, they are foul and unclean.

(1745) “(The verse), ‘He does not beget nor is He begotten’ is suitable for Him, (since) He is the Creator of the begetting parent and the begotten child.

(1746) “Whatever became embodied has the attribute of birth. Whatever is born, is from this side of the river (of existence),

(1747) “Because it is (made) from (what is physically) existent, decaying, and contemptible; it is something appearing and certainly needs a Causer to appear.”

(1748) (The shepherd) said, “O Moses, you’ve sewn my mouth (shut) and burned my soul with regret and repentance.”

(1749) He tore (his) robe, made a (deep) sigh, and quickly turned (his) head toward a desert plain and left.

(1750) A revelation from God came to Moses: “You separated Our servant from Us.

(1751) “Did you come for the sake of uniting or did you come for the sake of separating and cutting off?

(1752) “As much as you are able, do not step in (the direction of) separation. The most hateful of (lawful) things to Me is divorce.

(1753) “I have given to every person a (particular) nature and temperament, (and) I have given to every person a (particular) form of speech and idiomatic expression.

(1754) “It is praiseworthy in regard to him, but blameworthy in regard to you; it is (like) honey in regard to him, but (like) poison in regard to you.

(1755) “We are (utterly) free from every (form of) purity or impurity (and) from every (kind of) sluggishness or quickness.

(1756) “I did not command (something) so that I might make a profit, but so that I might do a generous kindness for (My) servants.

(1757) “The idiomatic speech of Hindustan is the (mode of) praise for the Hindus, (and) the idiomatic speech of Sind is the (mode of) praise for the Sindians.

(1758) “I do not become pure and holy by their praise, but they become purified and shining (by it).

(1759) “We do not regard the tongue and (outward) speech, (but) We regard the soul and the (inward) state.

(1760) “We are the Observer of the heart, (to see) if it is humble, even though the spoken words may not be humble.

(1761) “Because the heart is the substance, (but) talking (is only) the outward quality. Therefore, the substance (is) the desired object (and) the outer quality is dependent.

(1762) “So many of these phrases, ideas, and metaphors! I want burning, burning. Become harmonious with that burning!

(1763) “Ignite a fire of love in (your) soul (and) burn up thoughts and explanations, completely!

(1764) “O Moses! Those who know polite manners are one kind. (And) those who are inflamed of soul and spirit are another kind.”

(1765) For lovers, there is a conflagration every moment. There are no taxes (imposed) on a ruined village.

(1766) If (the lover) speaks wrongly, don't call him a sinner. If the martyr is bloody, don't wash him.

(1767) For martyrs, blood is better than (being washed by) water. This fault (of being bloody) is better than a hundred correct actions.

(1768) Inside the Ka`ba, there is no rule for (determining) the prayer direction. (And) there's no regret if the diver has no snow shoes.

(1769) Don't seek guidance from those who are drunk. Why should you command those with garments torn (from ecstasy) to mend (them)?

(1770) The sect of Love (of God) is distinct from all religions; the sect and doctrine of the lovers is God (alone).

(1771) If the ruby doesn't have an (engraved) seal, there's no worry. In the sea of sorrow, Love is not sorrowful.

(1772) After that, God spoke secretly into the inmost consciousness of Moses—secrets which cannot be spoken.

(1773) (Divine) words were scattered upon Moses' heart, (so that) vision and speech were mixed together.

(1774) So many times he became lost of self, so often he arrived (back) to himself, (and) so many times he flew from beginninglessness to endlessness.

(1775) After this, it would be foolishness if I should explain (further), because the explanation of this is beyond (the mind's) awareness.

(1776) If I speak (any further), it would tear out (the ability to) reason (from the listeners). And if I write (about it), it would shatter pens.

(1777) When Moses heard this reprimand from God, he rushed into the desert plain in pursuit of the shepherd.

(1778) He propelled (himself) over the footprints of that bewildered and wandering one. (In his haste), he scattered dust from the flats of the desert.

(1779) It is evident (that) the footsteps of a disturbed man (are) both (different) from the steps of others.

(1780) One step (is) like the rook, (moving) from top to bottom (on the chessboard). And one step (is) like the elephant, going crookedly.

(1781) Sometimes, like a wave, he raises a flag; sometimes, like a fish, he goes (along) on

(his) stomach.

(1782) (And) sometimes (he is) writing on the ground (about) his own state, like a geomancer who is telling fortunes.

(1783) Finally, he found him and looked at (him). (As) the giver of happy news, he said, "Permission has come (to you from God).

(1784) "Do not seek (to have) any polite manners or (formal) arrangement [in your praying]. Say whatever your anguished heart wishes.

(1785) "Your 'impiety' is (true) religion and your religion is the light of the spirit. You are secure (in God's protection), and by means of you an (entire) world is protected.

(1786) "O you (who are) spared by (the verse), 'God does what He wills': go (and) start speaking (to God again), without (any need of) formal respect."

(1787) (The shepherd) replied, "O Moses, I've advanced beyond that—now that I've been smeared by the blood of (my) heart.

(1788) "I've passed beyond the Lote tree of the Farthest Limit, (and) I've gone a hundred thousand years beyond that side.

(1789) "You struck my horse (with) a whip; it turned, made a leap, and (then) passed beyond the heavens.

(1790) "May the Divine Nature be the intimate friend of our human nature! May praise and blessings be on your hands and arms!

(1791) "Now, my (spiritual) state is beyond talking (about). (And) these (words) I'm saying are not (describing) my (true inward) states."

(1792) The image which you are seeing in a mirror is your (own) image; the image doesn't belong to the mirror.

(1793) Is the breath which the flute player blows within the reed-flute suitable (as a quality) to the reed-flute? No, it's (something) suitable to the man.

(1794) Take care (and) know (that) whether you speak (words of) praise or gratitude (to God), it is like the foolish (words) of that shepherd.

(1795) Even though your praise is superior in comparison to that (of his), yet it is worthless in relation to God.

(1796) When the covering has been removed, how often you say, "It wasn't what it was supposed to be!"

Notes by Ibrahim Gamard:

(1724) ‘Hey!’ and ‘Ho!’ [hay-hay, hayhâ]]: these are also the shouts of a shepherd when leading sheep and goats to pasture.

(1727) a Muslim: In Islam, every Prophet of God is considered to have been a muslim—literally, “one who surrenders (to the Will of God).” And the followers of the Prophets, who believed in One God and kept the commandments revealed to His Prophets are considered to have been true muslims.

(1732) if a fire hasn’t come: “i.e. ‘a fire of Divine Wrath’, of which the shepherd’s blasphemous language is the ‘smoke,’ i.e. the outward sign.” (Nicholson, Commentary)

(1738) ‘Truly, I was sick (and) you didn’t visit (Me)’:
“Cf. St Matthew XXV 43-45. The Hadith runs as follows: ‘On the Day of Resurrection God most High will say: “O son of Adam, I was sick and thou didst not visit Me.” He will reply: “O Lord, how should I visit Thee, who art the Lord of all created beings?” God will say: “Didst not thou know that such and such a one, My servant, was sick, and thou didst not visit him? Did not thou know that if thou hadst visited him though wouldst have found Me beside him?...”’”
(Nicholson, Commentary)

(1739) ‘He became hearing by Me and seeing by Me’:
Nicholson commented on this, per Mathnawi I: 1938: “These words are quoted from the famous Hadith-i qudsi concerning qurb-i fará’id [= nearness to God due to required acts of worship] and qurb-i nawáfil [nearness to God due to voluntary acts of worship]: ‘God said, “My servant doth not draw nigh unto Me by any means that pleaseth Me better than performance of the obligatory duties of worship (fará’id) which I have laid upon him; and My servant doth not cease to draw nigh unto Me by voluntary works of devotion (nawáfil) until I love Him, and when I love him, I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me.”’”

(1743) In regard to women, Fatima is a praiseworthy (name): “Fátimah, the Prophet’s daughter and the wife of

‘Alí, is regarded by Shi’ites and Sunnis alike as the ideal of Moslem womanhood.” (Nicholson, Commentary)

(1745) ‘He does not beget nor is He begotten’: “Say: ‘He is God, the One, the Eternal. He does not beget, nor is He begotten. And there is no none comparable to Him.’” (Qur’an 112:1-4) Here, Moses is depicted as quoting from the Qur’an—an instance of Rumi’s disregard for chronology.

(1753) The most hateful of (lawful) things to Me is divorce: “referring to the Hadíth [= saying of the Prophet Muhammad]: ‘God has not created any lawful thing more pleasing to Him than the emancipation of a slave (‘atáq), and God has not created any lawful thing more hateful to Him than divorce (taláq).’” (Nicholson, Commentary)

(1754) (like) poison in regard to you: “Forms of worship vary according to the spiritual capacity of the worshipper; and one man’s meat is another man’s poison. As Junayd [= famous early sufi master, died 910] said, ‘the water takes its colour from the vessel containing it.’” (Nicholson, Commentary)

(1757) Hindustan: now called India.

(1757) Sindians: refers to to the peoples of western India, living along the Sind river, also called the Indus.

(1762) Become harmonious with that burning: there is a word play here between “burning” [sôz] and “become harmonious” [sâz].

(1766) don’t wash him: refers to the Islamic requirement for the corpses of Muslims to be washed with water prior to burial. However, this is not to be done in the case of martyrs (killed in combat), since the blood on their bodies is considered an honor and a blessing, not a defilement. The meaning here is: just as being buried covered with blood is not a wrong burial for a martyr, the speech of a lover of God is not wrong if it appears “covered with errors.”

(1768) Inside the Ka’ba, there is no rule for (determining) the prayer direction: the Ka’ba is the prayer direction [qibla] for all Muslims wherever they are in the world. However, when inside the Ka’ba (which is empty, except for some hanging lamps and a ladder to the roof) there is no rule and one can pray facing any direction one

wishes.

(1780) like the rook [rokh]: the chess piece, also called the tower or castle, which moves straight up and down (or horizontally, from side to side).

(1780) like the elephant: this is the ancient Indian and Iranian name for the chess piece known in the West as the bishop, which moves diagonally.

(1788) the Lote Tree of the Farthest Limit: refers to a verse from the Qur'an (53:3) involving the Prophet Muhammad's Heavenly journey [mi`râj]: "[... an angel] endowed with surpassing power, who in time manifested himself in his true shape and nature, appearing in the horizon's loftiest part, and then drew near, and came close until he was but two bow-lengths away, or even closer. And thus did [God] reveal unto His servant whatever He deemed right to reveal.... And, indeed, he saw him a second time by the lote-tree of the farthest limit...." (Qur'an 53: 6-10, 13; translated by Muhammad Asad). "The legend relates that when the Prophet was about to enter into the presence of God, he said to Gabriel, who had been his guide thus far, 'O my brother, why hast thou fallen behind me?' and that Gabriel replied, 'Were I to come one finger-tip nearer, surely I should be consumed.'" (Nicholson, Commentary)

(Notes excerpted from commentary by Ibrahim Gamard: www.dar-al-masnavi.org/book2.html.)

5. “One night a certain man was crying...” (Mathnawî III: 189-211)

Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson

One night a certain man was crying “Allah!” till his lips were growing sweet with praise of Him.

The Devil said, “Prithee, O garrulous one, where is the (response) ‘Here am I’ to all this ‘Allah’?”

Not a single response is coming from the Throne: how long will you cry ‘Allah’ with grim face?”

He became broken-hearted and laid down his head (to sleep): in a dream he saw Khadir amidst the verdure.*

He (Khadir) said, “Hark, you have held back from praising God: how is it that you repent of having called unto Him?”

He said, “No ‘Here am I’ is coming to me in response, hence I fear that I may be (a reprobate who is) driven away from the Door.”

He (Khadir) said, “(God saith), That ‘Allah’ of thine is My ‘Here am I,’ and that supplication and grief and ardour of thine is My messenger (to thee).

Thy shifts and attempts to find a means (of gaining access, to Me) were (in reality) My drawing (thee towards Me), and released thy feet (from the bonds of worldliness).

Thy fear and love are the noose to catch My favour: beneath every ‘O Lord’ (of thine) is many a ‘Here am I’ (from Me).”

Far from this prayer is the soul of the fool, because to him it is not permitted to cry “O Lord.”

On his mouth and heart are lock and bolt, to the end that he may not moan unto God in the hour of bale.

He (God) gave to Pharaoh hundredfold possessions and riches, so that he claimed (Divine) might and majesty.

In his whole life that man of evil nature felt no (spiritual) headache, lest he should moan unto God.

God gave him all the empire of this world, (but) He did not give him grief and pain and sorrows.

Grief is better than the empire of the world, so that you may call unto God in secret.

The call of the griefless is from a frozen heart, the call of the grieving one is from rapture:

(‘Tis) to withdraw the voice under the lips, to bear in mind (one’s) origin and beginning;

(‘Tis) the voice become pure and sad, (crying) “O God!” and “ O Thou whose help is besought!” and “O Helper!”

(Even) the moan of a dog for His sake is not void of (Divine) attraction, because every one who desires (Him) is a brigand’s captive

— As (for example) the dog of the Cave, which was freed from (eating) carrion and sat at the table of the (spiritual) emperors: **

Until the Resurrection, before the Cave it is drinking in gnostic wise without (any) pot the water of (Divine) mercy.

Oh, there is many a one in a dog’s skin, who hath no name (and fame), yet is not without that cup (of Divine knowledge) in secret.

Give thy life for this cup, O son: how may victory be (won) without (spiritual) warfare and patience?

Notes:

* Khadir: The name given to the mysterious guide of Moses (Qur’an 18:65), associated with the Prophet Elijah, and also said to have discovered the Fountain of Everlasting Life. The name “Khadir” is related to the color green, which symbolizes being “ever-fresh.” In the Islamic sufi tradition, the Prophet Khadir is believed to be a spiritual guide for seekers during unexpected moments—especially for advanced seekers, before mysteriously disappearing. (Gamard)

** See the Chapter of the Cave (Qur’an 18). The story of the People of the Cave is related in this chapter: a small group of “youths who believed in their Lord” sought refuge from persecution by fleeing to a cave, where God showed mercy upon them by preserving them in sleep for three-hundred years, until it was safe to practice their devotion to God openly. During their three-century slumber, the Qur’an describes “their dog spreading out his fore-paws on the threshold” (18:17).