

The dynamics in the image of Muhammad in the writings of Jalâl Ad-dîn Rûmî: From the prophesy to the station of seeing

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THE purpose of this presentation is to examine the various perspectives in which the image of Muhammad occurs in the writings of the great poet of mysticism Jalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî (Rumi) and to shed light on its symbolic significance. In his poems the image of the Prophet is presented by the etymological variations of his name: Muhammad, Ahmad, Mustafâ; each of them symbolizing the multifold aspects of his spiritual message. The dynamics of his image contains the moral and ethical message of the real historical person of Muhammad opposed to the idolatry and polytheism of the pre-Islamic age; it transcends his personal experience and turns him into a symbol of the ultimate divine Word to humankind. By showing him as the archetype of the perfect man and symbol of the divine knowledge Rumi becomes a part from a rich and profound spiritual tradition of Islamic mysticism that makes one of the great contributions to the spiritual life of Islam through the veneration of the Prophet.

The favorite device by which the great mystical poet Jalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî catches his audience from pupils and ordinary believers is the use of those citations, that are in harmony with the mystical visions and ecstatic motions of his soul, his ideas about the prophecy, the creation and the inspiration of the Prophet as the link between the created world and the Creator. Every one of this subject is original and creative and is re-produced by the creative imagination of Rumi thus becoming a part of the paradigm of the mystical thought and the spiritual experience. The main metaphysical questions in his works are the main metaphysical questions in Islam as general and there are always answered in the terms of the religion.

The repository of main images and subjects of Rumi's work is rooted in the allusions of the Holy book of Quran and the subjects of Sunna and their perso-

1326 nalities. One of the most venerated and broadly represented images in his works is the image of Muhammad.

Rumi builds the historical personality of the Prophet, reminding scenes and events from his life. In the scenes from the early years the Prophet is depicted in his childhood (as the stories with Halima, the bowing of the idols, how he lost himself and was found in Kaaba etc.; (M. Book IV);¹ in the early years of Islam we see his attitude to his family, to his companions and the unbelievers. In these scenes the moral and ethical message of the real historical personality of Muhammad is opposed to the idolatry and polytheism of the pre-Islamic age. In every one of these concrete moments of the life of Muhammad the story transcends the historical and realistic dimension and becomes symbol of the spiritual path and the spiritual message of Islam. For Rumi, as well as for every pious Muslim, Muhammad is the personification of Islam, the prophet that gives the religion its unique essence. But as far as Islam is a monotheistic religion with universal message, the historical personality of Muhammad turns into a symbol of the Divine message toward the whole mankind.

The image of the Prophet in the works of Mawlânâ is an intrinsic part of the very rich tradition of the Islamic mysticism that has its deep roots in the VI-II and IX centuries and especially in the mystic works of al-Hallâdj (858-922), one of the spiritual teachers of Mawlânâ. In his teaching Muhammad is the prime cause of the creation and this idea is legitimized by the *hadîth qudsî* – very famous among the mystics:

But for thee I would not have created the heavens.²

The question of the cause for the existence of the world is put in the context of the religious idea of the creation. The main questions that were constantly haunting all the mystics in Islam were connected with the need of reconciliation of the Islamic dogma of the transcendental One and the multitude of the created world. How to reconcile the two extreme dimensions sides of the being – the total remoteness and attainability of God, on the one side, and the variety of the

¹ Rumi, *Masnavi i Ma'navi, the spiritual couplets of Maulana Jalalud-d-din Muhammad i Rumi*. transl. and abridged by Whinfield, E. H. London, 1973.

² The *ahâdîth qudsiyya*, cited in the text are not found in the canonical collections of hadith. They are much quoted and interpreted in the Sufi tradition. S. "Index der prophetischen Traditionen" in: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam*. Muenchen 1992, S. 669-671.

created world, on the other? How to explain that the world whose diversity world came out from the Absolute, Transcendental One can be part of the divine reality without falling into the great sin of *al-sirk*?

In providing arguments about the harmonious coexistence of both sides of the being the Mystic relies on celebrated hadith qudsî, which reads: I was a hidden treasure, but I wanted to be known and that's for I created the world.

According to it the origin of the creation is presented through the Divine Love and the passion of God to know Him self.

So God reveals Himself to the world and in this sense we could say that the world is what God wants to know about Himself; the world becomes the object of God's self-knowledge. Or with the words of Rumi:

For God declares, "I was a hidden treasure,
and I desired to be known." This is to say,
"I created the entire world to manifest My Reality, now
through graciousness, now through severity."
God is not the kind of king for whom one voice is
sufficient. If every atom in the world became

God's herald, they would still be unable to properly proclaim His Truth. (F., Discourse 46, p. 317)³

The image of the hadith is developed by Rumi in the poetical metaphor of the "hidden treasure". With his inspired figurative language the poet designates that all things in the world have one ultimate source, one ground, that makes them part of the Divine plan of the creation. As the "hidden treasure" the Absolute is "facing" the created world with all the phenomena in it; and at the same time it is the most intrinsic part of every created thing that links it with the supra-phenomenal world.

Destroy your house and with the treasure hidden in it
you will be able to build thousands of houses.
The treasure lies under it; there is no help for it;

³ Rumi, *Discourses of Rumi or Fihi ma fihi*, transl. by A. J. Arberry, Omphaloskepsis, Iowa, 2001. internet source: www.omphaloskepsis.com.

Hesitate not to pull it down; don't tarry!

For with the coin of that treasure

a thousand houses can be build without labor.

At last of a surety that house will be destroyed,
and the divine treasure will be seen beneath it.

(M., IV, p. 299)

The first "step" in the creation is this first revelation of the Absolute that precedes the created world and organizes it. Through this organizing principle the Divine energy of the Creator is transmitted and the connection between the Divine reality as a transcendental one and the created things is fulfilled.

The people of this world exist in order to manifest and to disclose the "hidden treasure". (M., p. 310)

The Divine Presence in the world is revealed by two symbols: the Spirit of God which also is "the Breath" of God. In its multifold dimensions the Spirit appears as Universal Reason. In the mystical and theological terminology it is the same Spirit of Muhammad, or the reality of Muhammad - the first thing that was created.⁴ But as far as every creation is a determination of the Divine Essence, the first stage in the mystical hierarchy of creation is a diminution of the Divine and remoteness from It. Rumi alludes to this basic mystical idea and to the well known *hadīth qudsī* explaining the etymological association of the name Ahmad to Ahad (the Absolute, the One):

Ahad ("One") is perfection, and Ahmad is not yet
in the state of perfection. When that "M" is
removed it becomes complete perfection. In other
words, God comprehends all—whatever you add

to God is a diminution. The number one is contained in all numbers, and without it no number could exist. (F. p. 396).

This same spirit of Muhammad is the essence of the angels, of the prophets and saints and makes them into authentic witnesses of the creation of the world:

⁴ S. Al-Djurdjani, *Ta'arīfāt*, Beyrut 1984, p. 122: "The Muhammedanian reality is the (Divine) Essence in the (its) first determination (at-ta_ayyun al-awwal)

The saints and the prophets who are more ancient than the world. God implanted desire for the world within their spirits, and only then did the world appear. So they know for a fact and report out of their own experience that the world was created in time.

[...] the prophets and saints who existed millions of years before the world [...] saw this world come into existence, just as you have seen when this house was first raised.

(F., p. 255)

According to the Qur'ân it is the Spirit that was breathed into man and forms the divine origin of the human being (Q. 15:29; 32:8; 38:72).

So we could say that, applied to this concept, the special metaphors of *bâ-tin* and *zâhir* acquire new symbolic meaning. In the context of this mystical symbolism the "outward" is everything that is acquired and is not innate to the human nature that is transient and mortal. At the same time the "inward" is the most true and intrinsic part in the human being that connects him with the Divine. It is the divine matter that forms the divine origin of the man.

The whole world is the outward form of Universal Reason,
For it is the father of all creatures of Reason
(M. p. 313).

In this context Rumi interprets the metaphor of the illiteracy of the Prophet. His "ignorance" is understood in a cosmic sense:

Mohammed is not called "unlettered" because he was incapable of writing or reading. He is called "unlettered" because with him writing and wisdom were innate, not taught. He who inscribes characters on the face of the moon, is such a man not able to write? And what is there in all the world that he does not know, seeing that

1330 all people learn from him? What can the partial intellect know that the Universal Intellect does not possess?
(F. p. 257)

The other dimension of the Spirit is the Logos of the revelation; through its help the people can get the Revealed word of God. As the chosen one (Mustafâ), the Islamic Prophet unifies all constructive and positive forces of the ultimate monotheistic belief. In the prophetic chain – as a historical realization of the Divine message and as a part in the mystical cosmology, Muhammad has unique and outstanding place. His appearance is the synthesis of all prophecies in the human history. That is why he is called “the best creation”, “the seal of the prophecy and the Logos that unifies all the divine messages of the prophets”. But on the other side he becomes a symbol of the esoteric dimension of the Divine Word. He is the Only interpreter of the Divine word, the mediator through which the Divine Word is translated into the world. His supreme spiritual mission annihilates his human existence and transcends the physical world to become the ultimate Mediator of the Word.

Mohammed, knowing himself to be ignorant and without knowledge of such words, when he heard the wisdom coming through his own lips, he realized that he was no longer what he had been. Something greater moved him. He reported stories about past people and prophets who lived thousands of years before, and he told what would come to pass even to the end of the world. His being was but a thing of years. A mortal being surely can't describe such things. How can a creature born in time give information about the eternal? And so it became known that it was not he who was speaking. God was speaking. God is wholly free of form and words. Its speech is beyond letters and voice. Yet, It delivers Its message by any letters and voice and tongue It *desires*.
(F. 10, p. 74)

In the historical prophetic chain Muhammad is the last of the prophets, he is Ahmad, mentioned in the Quran⁵ and in the Muslim consciousness he is etymologically associated with the Parakletos of the Gospel (John XIV, 26). But in the mystical cosmology and the cosmic hierarchy he is the chosen Mustafâ, whose existence is beyond time and space:

As long as Mohammed's soul was dwelling in the world of holiness and union with God, he grew and thrived, plunging about in that sea of compassion like a fish. But, in this earthly world, even though he was endowed with the rank of prophet and guide to humanity, and granted greatness, majesty, fame and a large following, still on returning to that former joyous life he said, "Would that I neer became a prophet or came into this world."

(F. p. 367)

All the prophets are inferior to him and this hierarchy is legitimized by the Tradition where Muhammad used to say: "I was a Prophet, when Adam was in the state between the water and the clay".

Adam and all the prophets are my followers and gather under my standard.
 Though to outward view I am the son of Adam,
 In reality I am his first forefather
 Because the angels worshipped him for my sake,
 And 'twas in my footsteps that he ascended to heaven.
 Hence in reality our first parent was my offspring
 As in reality the tree is born from its own fruit.

(M. p. 262)

⁵ "Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad."(Q. 61:6)

And according to Rumi we can say that if God is the absolute and complete being then the perfect man is His complete and fulfilled image. That is why only man can know God, because with his creation God has turned him into a symbol of the Divine Knowledge according to the Quran: *And He taught Adam the names of everything* (Q. 2:31). And so being the best and perfect creation of Allah the perfect man knows all names, he is the real link between Allah and the world, as I have stated above. The other creatures do not have this power, because they have incomplete and partial knowledge of God. The perfect man is the celestial Muhammad and can be represented by the historical personality of the Prophet, the saints and the mystics on the path of the Divine Truth. This is the way in which a separation has been made between the perfect man as a symbol of mankind and the concrete individual, who aspires to perfection and knowledge of God. In this sense he can grasp and see things invisible to the other. In the mystical path he symbolizes the station of seeing.

When someone sees with God's Light, they see all things, the first and last, the visible and invisible, for how can anything be hidden from God's Light? If anything is hidden, then that is not God's Light. Therefore this is revelation, whether they call it revelation or not.
(F. p. 235)

As we have seen the dynamic of the creation process is provoked by the ontological love and the passion for knowledge. Love and knowledge are bound together and are mutually dependent terms. The person, who tries to know the Divine reality, always realizes that the uninterrupted and ceaselessly changing image of the world is the manifestation of God's love to self knowledge.

Because of this initial love of God to Him self and because of His passionate desire to treasure the beauty and perfection of His manifestation, Allah shows Himself, manifests Him self through the man. The individual mystic can reach the plenitude and perfection of the existence of the perfect man, but for this he has to reach the state of perfection that is possible only through the mystical experience and revelation. Only then he can know himself and recognize that he is one of the forms of the divine revelation and recognizing that he can know God.

The real knowledge can be obtained through the spiritual practice of the

mystic. And according to Mawlânâ the first and the most important virtue of mysticism is to follow the example of Muhammad, who is the archetype of the perfect man. In this spiritual process every individual mystic is guided by the example of the prophet:

Know that Mohammed is the guide. God says,
 "Until you first come to Mohammed you cannot
 reach Us." This is like when you decide to go
 somewhere; thought leads the way, saying, "Go to
 this place, it is in your best interests."
 (F. p. 409)

Through the real mystical love to God the human and the divine nature in every man are mixed and the human spirit is embodied into the Divine Spirit. Every single human being contains part of the Universal reason that forces him to seek reunion with it.

As far as the Prophet is a symbol of the mystical path his ascension is the prototype of the spiritual journey on the path to God. His *mi_arâdj* was ascension of the spirit and the body and that is why he is the perfect symbol of the integrity of the entire human being in the spiritual process. The quranic theme of the nightly journey of the Prophet became a main motive for describing the mystical experience:

What is "ascension" to heaven? Annihilation of self;
 Self-abandonment is the creed and religion of lovers.
 (M. p. 411)

The annihilation of the Self in love and through love does not bring tragedy and loneliness for the "fallen man" - in the deepest and most intimate part of his essence the mystic knows that he is not alone.

You must journey upon this infinite road with
 the feeble hands and feet that you possess. We
 know well that with feet so feeble you can never
 accomplish this journey. Indeed, in a hundred
 thousand years you will not be able to accomplish

a single stage of this journey. But even as you collapse and fall, with no strength left to struggle farther, then Our loving breath will carry you on. Now in this hour when your powers have left you, when your own means fail, behold Our graces, Our gifts and Our love. You will not witness even an atom of such blessings after a hundred thousand strivings.”

(F. p. 142)