

32044119985299



5W



HARVARD LIBRARY

Borrower: BHA

Lending String: HLS

Patron: Takacs, Axel

Journal Title: Crafting the intangible :Persian literature and mysticism

Volume: Issue:

Month/Year: 2013 **Pages:** 70-90

Article Author: William Chittick

Article Title: Chapter title: The Evolutionary Psychology of Jalal al-Din Rumi

Imprint: Via Scan and Deliver Service

Special Instructions:

ILL Number: 4337980



Call #: WID WIDLK PK6406 .C73
2013

Location: HLS

ODYSSEY ENABLED

Charge

Maxcost:

Billing Category: Exempt

Borrowing Library:

Harvard University - Divinity School

Email:

Notes:

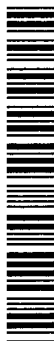
Transaction Date:6/23/2014 1:47:26 PM

S & D Processing Notes:

- ☐ Not as cited
- ☐ Duplicate
- ☐ Multiple articles
- ☐ Exceeds 10% of work
- ☐ Not on shelf
- ☐ On Reserve
- ☐ Too fragile
- ☐ Checked out/on hold
- ☐ Exceeds 100 pages

Initials:_____

Scan & Deliver



ILLiad TN: 4337981

chapter three

The Evolutionary Psychology of Jalal al-Din Rumi

William C. Chittick

When Mr. Khazeni invited me to deliver this lecture, he suggested that I speak on Rumi, which was fine with me. Rumi was my first love in Islamic literature, and that love revives whenever I have the opportunity to reflect once again on the incredible richness and evocativeness of his poetry. I became acquainted with him in the middle 1960s, during a year spent as an undergraduate at the American University of Beirut. When I came back to the United States, I devoted a senior-year project to reading his poetry. Most of my time was spent poring over R. A. Nicholson's monumental translation of the Masnavi. Only after graduation did I start studying Persian, largely because I knew that it would enable me to read Rumi in the original language. Although I did my Ph.D. on another Persian poet, 'Abd al-Raman Jami, my first book (published in Tehran in 1974) was on Rumi.

I published a second book on Rumi, *The Sufi Path of Love*, in 1983, after finishing several other projects. I thought of it as a complement to Annemarie Schimmel's masterly study *The Triumphal Sun*. Although I had planned to do a great deal more translation of Rumi's poetry, circumstances pushed me in other directions. I had foreseen, however, that I would probably not return to a serious study of Rumi's ideas and teachings. This was not because Rumi does not deserve more study but rather because the specific tradition for which Rumi speaks, what one might call "Islamic wisdom literature," is extraordinarily rich. Very few Western scholars have paid much attention to it. When one takes a broad view, Rumi appears as the proverbial tip of the iceberg. To be sure, this tip is laced with the most intoxicating wine, but there is much more to be uncovered and understood.

Twenty years ago I never imagined that Rumi would become one of the most popular poets in the English language. We owe this phenomenon first of all to the translations of Nicholson and A. J. Arberry. But we are also indebted to a number of talented American poets who recognized a mine of gold when they saw it. They took the ore provided by the scholars and reworked it into contemporary English poetry, often without any knowledge of the Persian language or the intellectual and spiritual tradition that Rumi represents.

The broad issue that I want to address today has to do precisely with these English-language versions of Rumi. Lest I be misunderstood, I want to say explicitly that I am delighted that Rumi is becoming a household name and congratulate the American poets who have brought this about. Nonetheless, I remain a devotee of Rumi, not of contemporary English poetry. If anyone asks me about these translations, and people often do, I reply that they are inadequate and usually inept. The reason for this is simply that, generally speaking, they fail to bring out both the literal meaning and the deeper implications of what Rumi is saying. It is true that they often display sparks of Rumi's fire, and this helps explain why they have become so popular. But for those who understand the Persian language, and even more so for those who are familiar with the worldview that animates Rumi's poetry, the translations are lame. They remind me of one of Rumi's famous lines (*Mathnawi*, I:2128):

The leg of the reasoners is wooden;
a wooden leg is awfully unsteady.

Well, the leg of the translators is much more unsteady than that of the reasoners. This is largely because the translators are unfamiliar with the universe of discourse that was articulated by the very same reasoners whose wooden leg Rumi criticizes.

This is where I want to bring in the second figure mentioned in the abstract of my lecture, Afzal al-Kashani, better known in Persian as Baba Afzal. The best guess at the date of Baba Afzal's death is 1213 CE, six years after Rumi's birth. We know almost nothing about Baba Afzal's life, except that he taught and died in the village of Maraq outside of Kashan in central Iran. He was one of the great reasoners of the Islamic tradition. Among his seven or eight treatises, one is a masterly *summa* on logic. He is a rare example of an important philosopher who wrote mainly in the Persian language. Nonetheless, he is not well known even in Iran. Those who have heard his name are more likely to know him as the author of quatrains somewhat in the style of Omar Khayyam.¹

As a philosopher, Baba Afzal has several exceptional qualities, some of which are related to the fact that he wrote in Persian. As you know, most of the Muslim philosophers were Persian by birth, but they wrote their important books in Arabic. By doing so, they guaranteed that they would be read throughout the Islamic world. When Baba Afzal broke with this pattern, he effectively excluded his writings from the philosophical canon.

Lest anyone think that Baba Afzal wrote in Persian because he had not mastered Arabic, I should also mention that he produced some of the most faithful Persian translations of Arabic philosophical texts ever done, even if we judge him by contemporary standards. And no translator of philosophical texts has been able to match the beauty of his prose. Moreover, he wrote the original versions of at least two of his own treatises in Arabic, although he then translated them into Persian at the request of his students.

If Baba Afzal wrote primarily in Persian, he did so because he was not writing for professional philosophers. Rather, he wrote for a group of highly motivated seekers of wisdom who did not have much training in the Islamic sciences. Any philosopher taking a quick look at his writings might think that they are too elementary and straightforward to merit much attention. A closer examination, however, would show that they have something of the quality of Mosleh al-Din Sa'di's prose, which is famous for being *sahl u mumtani'* (literally, "simple and impossible"). In other words, the language looks easy,

but it cannot be duplicated. The truth is that Baba Afzal's Persian treatises are written in simple and beautiful prose and at the same time are extraordinarily sophisticated presentations of the main teachings of the whole philosophical tradition. This helps explain why Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shirazi), the great Safavid philosopher, could take the trouble to translate one of Baba Afzal's works into Arabic, four hundred years after his death.

To come back to Rumi: when he tells us that the leg of the reasoners is wooden, notice that he is talking about the "leg." He is not saying that rational thought is useless. He is not objecting to the organized and even organic vision of reality that was expressed in Islamic philosophy, the home of logic and systematic rational discourse. Rather, he is criticizing those who think that analysis, investigation, rational argumentation, and scientific proofs provide a leg strong enough to reach the goal of human life.

The key issue for Rumi is "reaching the goal of human life." Here we need to remember that he was speaking within the context of the Islamic tradition, for which that goal was clear even though the language in which it was expressed in different schools of thought could be quite diverse. The Hellenizing philosophers, who are precisely the great logicians and reasoners, had no basic disagreement with Rumi on the issue of the goal of life. Baba Afzal, who articulates the philosophical vision in a language that has little resemblance to any of the schools of Sufism, was no exception, though he would have pointed out that poets have a right to a certain rhetorical excess. Indeed, a bit of that excess can be seen in some of his own quatrains.

What, then, is this "goal of human life"? All the Muslim philosophers, Baba Afzal perhaps most explicitly, held that it is to reach the perfection of what is humanly possible, a perfection that stands beyond ordinary experience and awareness just as the sun stands beyond the moon. If Rumi objects to the philosophical expression of this goal, it is simply because, in his view, rational thought and careful logic cannot provide the energizing power to achieve it. Rational thinkers tend to get bogged down in honing their methodologies. Too often they maintain that human perfection cannot be achieved without the specific rationalistic tools that they themselves developed on the basis of the Greek tradition. Rumi simply replies that their methodology is no leg with which to climb mountains. He calls Ibn Sina, the greatest of the early philosophers, "a donkey on ice."² The only leg that can take the seeker to the top of the icy mountain of transcendence is the transforming fire of love.

I want to stress here that asserting the unsteadiness of the leg is not the same as denying the truth of the worldview articulated and systematized by the philosophical tradition. The proof of this is that Rumi himself speaks for this worldview, though in a language transfigured by poetical imagery.

My foremost guide in the study of Rumi, Annemarie Schimmel, would criticize me here, as she has done in print and in friendly banter, for suggesting that Rumi considers intellect ('*aql*') not only an important tool but also even a necessary asset on the path to God. I reply that the proof lies in the numerous verses that Rumi devotes to achieving the fullness of intelligence. We cannot pretend that these verses become dead letters when other verses tell us to throw away our rational thinking. Moreover, the very fact that Rumi devotes many verses to playing down reason and playing up love indicates that intellectual understanding was a primary focus among his contemporaries and his own disciples. Rumi was no exception to the rule that Franz Rosenthal has enunciated in his fine study of the role of knowledge and rationality in Islamic civilization, *Knowledge Triumphant*. He had no opposition to rational thought per se, as he tells us repeatedly. He simply wanted to insist that reason and intelligence cannot supply the energy needed to traverse the path to God.

Rumi clarifies the necessary role of rationality in several passages in which he compares intellect to the angel Gabriel, who guided the Prophet on the night journey to God. The Prophet could not have traveled up through the celestial spheres without Gabriel to show him the way. In Rumi's depiction, Gabriel in the outside world plays the same role as the intellect in the inside world. Muhammad himself, the greatest of the prophets, needed Gabriel to guide him on the ascent to God. At the very least this shows that others need to have some understanding of the nature of things if they are to escape from egocentricity and short-sightedness.

I do not want to deny that love plays the most important role in the path to God in Rumi's view. Love alone is able to provide the power to put a correct understanding of things into practice. Intellect can only take the traveler so far, then love must take charge completely. When Gabriel took Muhammad as far as the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary, he told him that he would have to ascend the rest of the way to God by himself. If Gabriel tried to accompany him, his wings would burn off.

In short, intellect and a correct understanding of things can take the seeker only as far as the Lote Tree. But that is nothing to be sneezed at,

because the Lote Tree symbolizes the furthest reaches of creation, understanding, awareness, and everything that can be grasped by human consciousness. If Gabriel is needed for the Prophet to reach the Lote Tree, this means that intelligence and correct understanding are needed for seekers to reach the borderline between time and eternity. Only intellect, which is the divine light innate within each human being, makes possible the understanding that reality is one and that everything other than God is a veil and an illusion. Nonetheless, not even intellectual vision, the highest sort of vision in the universe, can take the seeker into God's own presence.

One more point needs to be remembered in any discussion of intellect in Islamic texts. This is the distinction between what Rumi frequently calls '*aql-i juzvi*' and '*aql-i kulli*', "partial intellect" and "universal intellect." Intellect, Rumi tells us, was created from the same light as the angels; but our intellects are only partial, because they have become dimmed and obscured. Although illumined by angelic light, partial intellect is blinded by the pride and self-interest of the human ego (*nafs*). Partial intellect relies upon its own cleverness, not upon God. In this it takes after its mentor, Iblis (Satan). Satan, if you remember his story in the Qur'an, is very much the self-reliant sort who figures that he does not need help from anyone: certainly not from the prophets, who are followed only by gullible believers.

If seekers of God are to escape ignorance, delusion, and egocentricity, they must find the light of the universal intellect, which becomes embodied in the outside world as the angel Gabriel. It is Gabriel who brings God's revelations to the prophets in the first place and guides them and their followers on the path that takes them back to God. In the Islamic universe Gabriel plays a central role both in revelation and in the spiritual journey, that is, both in the descent of wisdom from God and in the ascent of the soul to God. Gabriel was the means whereby the Qur'an was revealed and likewise was the Prophet's guide on the *mi'raj*. Like other Muslims, Rumi understands this to mean that there is no way to God except by means of the guidance given to the prophets. The Qur'an represents the divine roadmap, and the Sunnah represents the actual journey to the goal. Rumi's universe can contain no individualistic, do-it-yourself spirituality.

In short, Rumi holds that the search for knowledge and understanding plays a fundamental role in any search for God. However, we need to distinguish between two sorts of knowledge. For purposes of this discussion,

I will label one of them “visionary” and the other “rational.” Visionary knowledge is the illumination that comes directly from the universal intellect. Rational knowledge is the obscured light known as “partial intellect.” There can be no ascent to God without visionary knowledge, because such knowledge is identical with the divine light that is embodied in Gabriel, the source of wisdom and the guide on the path. As Rumi says,

Not every wing can fly across the ocean:
only knowledge directly *from* Him takes you *to* Him.³

As for rational knowledge, it derives from the obscured light of the partial intellect. It acts more as a hindrance than as a help, because it is deeply mired in the shortcomings of the individual ego. This is why Rumi constantly tells his readers to forget their own ideas of the way things are and to surrender to the wisdom of the prophets and saints.⁴

Having suggested why, in Rumi’s view, a proper understanding of things is essential to human well-being, let me focus on how proper understanding comes to be articulated. Each of the schools of Islamic thought has its own methodologies and concerns. A school like jurisprudence saw its task as delineating right activity, and a school like theology (*kalam*) set out to defend Islamic dogma with rational arguments. I want to look, however, at the specific approaches to knowledge that were employed in the philosophical tradition, partly because only this discipline dealt with issues that we now recognize as scientific, such as mathematics and astronomy. The mathematical sciences were secondary concerns. The primary focus was on describing and explaining the three fundamental domains of reality: God, the universe, and the human soul. The discussion of these domains takes place in three subdisciplines of philosophy, which can be called metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology. Metaphysics deals with ultimate Reality; cosmology addresses the status of the universe from its beginning to its end; and psychology explains the origin and destiny of the human soul.

It is important to remember that all three of these disciplines have largely been abandoned in modern times. I do not mean that the words are not used but that what goes by these names nowadays has little if anything to do with what was being discussed in Rumi’s time, whether in the

Islamic world or in the West (not to mention the rest of the world). Modern philosophers, after all, have long been telling us that metaphysics is dead (along with God, of course). Long before metaphysics disappeared as a serious concern, most philosophers had abandoned traditional cosmology and psychology. Instead they embraced the findings of various scientific disciplines. Indeed it has come to be part of popular wisdom that the current "scientific" status of cosmology and psychology has shown the falsity of the speculations of the premoderns. Nonetheless, these so-called speculations inform the intellectual vision that lies behind Rumi's depiction of God, the universe, and the human soul.

Even the best of contemporary scholarship on Rumi often contains an assumption that his teachings about the universe and its intimate interrelationships with the human soul are window-dressing. The general picture drawn in the secondary literature and taken for granted in the many poetical translations is that we can ignore all the medieval ideas. After all, it is implied, not only have they been proven false by modern science, but Rumi is speaking about love, not about systematic, rationalistic knowledge.

The net result of this attitude is that many, if not most, interpreters of Rumi have used his criticisms of rational knowledge to reject the whole body of metaphysical, cosmological, and psychological teachings that inform his vision of things. This might have had some justification if the interpreters were not themselves deeply rooted in a different view of the world that is itself systematic and rationalistic and at the same time profoundly antagonistic to everything that Rumi held as self-evidently true. This modern, alternative view of the world is provided by the scientific learning and scientistic beliefs that inform modern culture. It just so happens that the modern worldview is far less qualified than the medieval worldview to prepare the ground for the transforming power of love.

One result of ignoring Rumi's worldview is that many of his modern interpreters see no contradiction between being a rational, scientific person in the modern sense and being spiritual in the sense that Rumi means. I think Rumi would reply that it is wrong to have one mental compartment for scientific knowledge and another for love of God. The human spirit, also called the "human heart," is a single reality, with no partitions. In order for the heart to open itself up to God, it must have a proper knowledge of what it is opening itself up to. We cannot love what we do not know. Moreover, every

knowledge of God is built on our knowledge of the world and ourselves. If we do not understand the world and ourselves as they are, we will not be able to know God as He is, and without knowing Him we cannot love Him.

In short, the heart needs to see things as they truly are, which means that it must see things as Gabriel, the universal intellect, calls it to see them. Seeing things in terms of the cleverness of the partial intellect blocks the road of love. As Rumi puts it,

The partial intellect is a vulture, you poor wretch.

Its wings are bound up with carrion eating.

The intellect of the saints is like Gabriel's wing,

it flies, mile by mile, to the shadow of the Lote Tree.⁵

In Rumi's view and in the view of the Islamic wisdom tradition in general, the unitary light of intelligence cannot be divided. It can only be dimmed and obscured. The spiritual quest involves successive stages of climbing the ladder to God, an ascent that is prefigured mythically in the Prophet's *mi'raj*. At each step on the ascending ladder, the light of the universal intellect, which is innate in every human being, is intensified. At the earliest stages, in infancy and childhood, the intellectual light is hardly more than a potentiality. Rumi tells us that in actualizing the innate light one person is like a spark, another like a candle, another like a lamp, another like a star, another like the moon, and still another like the midday sun. Only the human selfhood that has actualized the blazing sun of noon can be said to be an "intellect" in the full and proper sense of the word. This noonday sun is embodied in Gabriel and has been fully actualized on the human level only by the prophets and some of the saints.

In Rumi's way of looking at things, intellect and angel are the internal and external manifestations of a single unified reality. This single reality is God's radiance or God's spirit. In contrast, the ego, which is our normal, everyday self-awareness, partakes of the darkness that dominates animal nature, if not of the rebellious fire that inspires Satan. Our human situation represents the marriage of angelic light and animal darkness or angel and devil. The purpose of life is to help the angel overcome the devil. In *Fihī mā fihī*, Rumi makes these points as follows: "The states of human beings are as if an angel's wing were brought and stuck on a donkey's tail so that perhaps

the donkey, through the radiance and companionship of the angel, may itself become an angel. It is possible for the donkey to become the same color as the angel."⁶

So human beings are donkeys who have lost sight of their angelic nature. Their task is to see beyond asininity and find the angel's wing. Gradually, with the help of the wing, they can be transformed into something like angels. Only then can they fly, stage by stage, to the heavens. When they have become the same color as the angel itself, they will have reached the top of the created realm. Only then can love work its full miracle.

In this perspective, which is common to the Islamic wisdom tradition, spiritual transformation builds on the innate light of intelligence. Given that this vision of human psychology has long been ridiculed and rejected in the West, it is especially difficult to keep in mind that it underlies everything Rumi is saying. According to him, our only means to happiness and salvation lies in Gabriel's wing. As long as we insist on being asses, we will have no leg with which to climb the icy mountain of transcendence and we will never reach the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary, much less move on further and encounter God himself.

As soon as we acknowledge that this is Rumi's view of human nature, it should not be difficult to guess how he would react to the whole edifice of modern science and learning. He would see it as a grand monument to asininity. It can be nothing else, because it is built on the accumulated light of a myriad of partial intellects or, as he might say, "vultures." No matter how many sparks we gather, we cannot reconstruct the blazing sun of noon.

The very fact that modern science and learning are constantly being partitioned into ever narrower specialties should be enough to alert us that science has little if anything to do with the unifying light of what Rumi calls "universal intellect." Moreover, what are we to make of the unintelligibility of science as a whole? I do not mean simply that science is unintelligible to the general public. I mean that the vast majority of scientists and scholars have no idea what is going on in narrow specialties other than their own. Even the best of scholars cannot have a real overview of the total situation. Those who try to do so have no authority, because they have given up all the exact and precise knowledge that bestows upon modern learning its specificity and particularity. Outside their own narrow specialties, they can only speak in vague, unscientific terms.

In contrast, the metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology of the ancients and medievals were three subdivisions of one unitary knowledge. The more people understood any of these disciplines, the more they understood the others as well. Each of them fed into a synthetic vision. If we can take the texts at their word, that synthetic vision is simply the awareness of the nature of things, an awareness that is innate to human intelligence.

One of the many theological arguments for the unitary consciousness found in all human beings is the Qur'anic idea that God taught Adam all the names (2:31). As Rumi puts it,

The father of mankind, who is the lord of "He taught the names,"
has hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein.
The name of each thing, just as it is until its end,
was given to his spirit . . .
Since Adam's eye saw with the pure light,
the spirit and mystery of each name was clear to him.⁷

Having suggested some of the difficulties connected with trying to understand Rumi in terms of current wisdom, let me turn to the issue of understanding him in terms of the sciences of his own day. We know that Rumi considered the leg of reasoners to be wooden. Does this mean that the science and learning of the reasoners was invalid, illegitimate, and, in one word, untrue? I do not think so. From the many passages that Rumi devotes to the sciences, we can conclude that he accepted the learning of his day as a valid mode of seeing with the pure light. He maintained that science and knowledge have a clear purpose, however, and that purpose is certainly *not* to keep us comfortable in our everyday life. Rather, the purpose of learning is to act as a support for the real business of love. Love is total dedication to God and nothing else. The sciences were true because they provided an adequate picture of the world and the human soul. With that picture as guide, we can grasp the nature of the true object of love and devote our energy to it.

In support of this reading, let me cite a single passage from *Fihi ma fihi*. In it Rumi answers the concerns of certain people who are hesitating about entering the path to God, because they fear that all of their learning will come to nothing. He says:

These people who have studied or who are now studying imagine that if they keep on attending here, they will forget knowledge and abandon it. On the contrary, when they come here, all their sciences come to life. The sciences are all paintings. When they come to life, it is as if a lifeless body has come to life. The root of all these sciences is Up Yonder, but they have been transferred from the world without sounds and letters to the world of sounds and letters.⁸

In this passage the word “knowledge” renders the Arabic *‘ilm*, and “sciences” renders *‘ilm-ha*, its Persian plural. A modern reader of this passage would typically assume that Rumi sees no contradiction between love for God and science, because love gives spiritual life to all knowledge, and science is certainly knowledge. It would follow that the science and learning that we pick up from our schools, our universities, and the *New York Times* can all be given spiritual life.

Such a reading would be superficial, however, because it fails to take into account what Rumi means by *‘ilm*. I have said enough already to suggest that in Rumi’s view the modern type of knowledge, which is based exclusively on the ingenuity and pretensions of the partial intellect, would not qualify as real knowledge. Rumi would consider the world that we have carved out for ourselves in our scientific and academic disciplines to be just like the apple that he describes in the *Masnawi*. That makes us the apple’s worms, happy in our belief that we know ever so much more than our poor benighted ancestors.

The reply might be that our universe is no apple, because it embraces a vastness undreamed of by the ancients or the medievals. No matter how big we think the apple is, however, its very divisibility and physicality make it tiny in comparison to the tree of the total universe and the gardener who planted and takes care of the tree. Moreover, our apple is even smaller than the partial intellect that sees it. After all, our own intelligence has come up with this picture of the universe. We discovered the picture in ourselves, in precisely the place where we understood it. Our scientific cosmology is a painting that we create in our minds. What we are depicting is not the real universe, which, in Islamic terms, is “everything other than God,” but rather something of our own immensity. It is myopic to think that the

mathematical theories of modern cosmology have proven anything more than that human reasoning and mental ingenuity have enormous scope. Nonetheless, from Rumi's point of view, no matter what the scope of the partial intellect, it cannot begin to understand the reality of the conscious, intelligent, and intelligible light that is shining in its own depths. It is this light, which knows and understands the names of all things, that gives scientists the rational power to cook up a picture of an infinitely vast universe in the first place.

Rumi has many passages in which he reminds us of a basic point of the Islamic perspective: intelligence and thought are not derivative of the body. On the contrary, the bodily realm and indeed the whole universe are epiphenomena of the universal intellect. Take, for example, these verses from the *Masnavi*:

In your eyes the world is frightful and mighty.
 You fear and tremble at clouds, thunder, and sky.
 You stay secure and heedless from the world of thought.
 Less than an ass, you're an unaware stone.
 You're merely a painted picture, with no share of intelligence.
 You've got no human traits; you're just a young ass.
 In ignorance you see the shadow as the object,
 so you think the object is a game and a trifle.
 Wait, until the day when thought and imagination
 spread their feathers and wings without veil!
 You will see mountains become soft wool,
 and this hot and cold earth will cease to exist.
 You will see neither heaven, nor the stars, nor existence:
 only the Living, Loving, One God.⁹

What then is Rumi talking about when he speaks of knowledge and says that the sciences are paintings of what exists Up Yonder? By knowledge, he means the whole tradition of transmitted and intellectual learning that was studied among the Muslims. The transmitted learning goes back to the Qur'an and the sayings of Muhammad. The intellectual learning goes back to the same place, but it also builds on the philosophy and science of several other traditions, most prominently the Greek. Both intellectual and

transmitted learning are rooted in Gabriel's wing. Remember that in the Qur'anic view of things God sent revelation to all peoples, which is to say that Gabriel appeared among the ancients just as he appeared to Muhammad.

For Rumi, the worldview articulated by Islamic philosophy is true in its broad sweep, even if he would surely object to some of its tenets. To say that a worldview is true is to say that the picture it draws is an adequate representation of the objects found Up Yonder. "Up Yonder" is the world of the universal intellect or the world of God's own omniscience. When Rumi speaks of bringing knowledge to life by awakening the spirit within, he means to say that only when the partial intellect is shaped by an adequate understanding of the nature of things can the angel's wing lift the donkey beyond its limitations and carry it into the infinite expanse of the true universe, which is the realm of light, awareness, consciousness, and love.

Finally, let me turn to the "evolutionary psychology" mentioned in my title. I chose the word "evolutionary" because, among all the misunderstandings of Rumi's teachings, it is evolution that has gained the most attention. Indeed it is common to find Muslims who are proud that Rumi understood evolution long before Darwin did.¹⁰ As should be implicit in what I have already said, however, this is an utter misrepresentation both of evolution and of Rumi. Let me make the reasons for this more explicit. In the process, I will call to witness Baba Afzal's wooden leg.

First, I need to make it completely clear that I am not saying that the word "evolution" is totally inappropriate to describe what Rumi is talking about. The concept of a growing, changing, and evolving soul infuses Rumi's writings and more generally the Qur'an, Islamic philosophy, and the Sufi tradition. If we want to understand the significance of this "evolution," however, we need to grasp what the representatives of the tradition were talking about. We cannot do so without studying their teachings on the relevant issues: we cannot isolate a few passages from the large picture and then say that Rumi believed in evolution in some sort of Darwinian sense.

Once we look at the large picture, we quickly learn that the Islamic worldview sees evolution in the modern, scientific meanings of the word as an absurdity.¹¹ Scientific evolutionism precludes the possibility of design. In contrast, the first principle of Islamic faith, *tawhid* (the assertion of God's unity), demands design from beginning to end. This principle of *tawhid* has three

interlocking implications. First, it means that everything comes from the One God, who is the omniscient and omnipotent source of the whole universe. Second, it means that everything is constantly, moment by moment and without cease, sustained, supported, guided, and controlled by the One God. Third, it means that every creature without exception is taken back to the One God. When Rumi and others talk about what has been labeled "evolution," they are talking about the manner in which human beings go back to God.

This notion of the "return" to God (*ma'ad*), we need to remember, is the third principle of Islamic faith, after *tawhid* and prophecy. The idea of a "return" is meaningless unless we begin by acknowledging that creation has come from God in the first place. In other words, every "evolution" demands a prior "devolution." We cannot *return* somewhere unless we have come from there in the first place. For the Islamic worldview in general, understanding how we came into the world is just as important as understanding that we will soon be leaving. The Qur'an tells us repeatedly that God created all things and that He brings all things back to Himself. Philosophers in particular have written elaborate treatises explaining how this coming and going works. This is the whole realm of ideas that can be called "cosmology and psychology." The usual label in Arabic is *al-mabda' wa'l-ma'ad*, "the origin and the return." This is the title of books by Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, among others.

The basic principle in all Islamic discussions of "evolution" is that the human soul needs to undergo a synthetic and unifying growth by which it can go back in happiness and wholeness to the unitary realm from which it arose. When human beings came into the world, they followed a trajectory that left them in separation and dispersion. The very concept of "creation" demands the appearance of multiplicity from unity. However we go about explaining this appearance of multiplicity, the fact remains that when human beings first find themselves (that is, when they first become aware that they are aware) they see that they dwell in dispersion, separation, and ignorance. All of the Islamic religious teachings, and especially the Sufi and philosophical teachings, aim at overcoming the dispersion of the human self and at bringing about collectedness, integration, and unity. The goal is to awaken the intelligent and intelligible light of God that the Qur'an calls the "spirit." This is the same spirit that God blew into the clay of Adam when He created him. It is the divine light whereby Adam was taught all the names. Spirit is the human *fitra* (original disposition) created by God in His own image. It is

the angel's wing of intelligence and awareness pinned on the donkey of our bodily multiplicity and ignorance.

Neither the philosophers nor many of the Sufis, certainly not Rumi, were content to speak of the growth, development, and evolution of the soul without explaining how the human self came to be dispersed in the first place. The fact of Adam's fall and human forgetfulness was plain to everyone, and it was simply a matter of illustrating how this came about in cosmological and psychological (that is, "scientific") terms rather than in moral and ethical terms. The issue, in other words, is not simply that Adam "sinned" and then fell. Rather, the issue is that our situation in relation to God is demanded by the very structure of the cosmos. Once we understand how we are actually situated, not only "existentially" but also "ontologically," then we can understand that the fall is not just a symbol. It is an adequate expression of what actually happened when awareness became embodied as a result of the divine creative act. In order to articulate the human situation in relation to the cosmos with rational exactitude, we need to have recourse to the three interrelated disciplines of metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology.

One of the many distinctions between Islamic evolutionary psychology and modern evolutionary biology is precisely that the Islamic texts always focus on the human soul, not the physical and biological organism. I am not suggesting that the body is not important; nor am I saying that the body does not undergo what might be called an "evolutionary" development. I am simply saying that in the Islamic worldview the body can only be understood in terms of the soul, and the soul in turn must be understood in terms of the divine spirit (also known as the universal intellect) that was breathed into Adam's clay. If we pretend that the spirit does not exist, then we have no way to understand the significance of bodily growth and development. If we ignore the angel's wing, then we are left only with the donkey. The net result will be what we have today: a multitude of practical sciences, each of which examines a specific aspect of human and cosmic embodiment without any awareness of the whole. The goals of these sciences are defined and determined by the obscurity of the partial intellect, not by the light of the universal intellect. In Rumi's terms, these sciences can only eat carrion, because they can see nothing that is not body.

As for Baba Afzal, several of his treatises describe the devolution and evolution of the human soul. His explicit and systematic discussions of the

nature of the Origin and the Return clarify several points that can easily be missed when Rumi is read out of context. Two of these are especially important.¹²

The first is that the stages of evolution correspond with the stages of devolution. In other words, the return to God is a gradual ascent on a ladder whose steps mark the increasing unification and intensification of the spiritual and intellectual light. This can only happen because human beings came into this world by successive degrees of darkening and obscuration. The integrative movement of the return to God is the reversal of the dispersive movement of creation. The details of the descent into matter make up the basic subject of what I have been calling "cosmology," and Rumi often alludes to this descent. In one verse, for example, he writes:

Attractions like this have pulled us from the city of the Spirit,
one hundred thousand way stations to this perishing world.¹³

A second point that Baba Afzal makes completely explicit is that the "evolution" of the soul occurs within the lifetime of each individual human being. In our development from the womb to adulthood, each of us undergoes different stages in which we gradually actualize the qualities and characteristics of minerals, plants, and animals. Once we begin the process of actualizing qualities and characteristics that are specifically human and not animal, we are faced with the task of becoming fully human. Only by becoming human in the full sense of the word can we go back to God in total equilibrium and harmony, because only as full human beings do we actualize the universal intellect. This means that we have many more stages of the journey to travel. It also means that different individuals reach different degrees of spiritual development. The degree to which we become human depends on the degree to which our souls achieve perfection.

Once we understand this from Baba Afzal and other Muslim philosophers, then it becomes easy to grasp the meaning of the following passage from the *Masnavi*:

Why should it be surprising that the spirit's homes,
which used to be its dwellings and its birthplaces,

Are not remembered now? This world, like a dream,
has hidden everything, like clouds concealing the stars.
After all, the spirit has walked through so many cities
and the dust has not yet cleared from its perception . . .
It came first into the realm of the minerals,
and from there it fell in among the plants.
For years it lived among the plants,
remembering nothing of the mineral state because of strife.
When it left the plants and fell in among the animals,
it remembered nothing of the state of plants,
Save only that it inclines toward them,
especially at the time of spring and fragrant herbs . . .
Then that Creator whom you know
kept on pulling it from animality toward humanity.
So it passed from realm to realm,
and now it is intelligent, knowing, and strong.
It does not remember its first intellects,
and it will also be transmuted from its present intellect.
When it is freed from this intellect full of avarice and seeking
then it will see hundreds of thousands of marvelous intellects . . .
Again it will be pulled from sleep to wakefulness
and then it will laugh at its former state.
“What was that grief that I suffered when asleep?
when I had forgotten the actual situation?
I did not know that all grief and affliction
were the work of dreaming, deception, and imagination.”¹⁴

To sum up Baba Afzal's significance for our understanding of Rumi, let me say that he offers a systematic cosmology and psychology, both rooted in a clearly articulated ontology and metaphysics. The picture he draws was more or less standard in the philosophical and Sufi traditions, but it was rarely spelled out with such simplicity and clarity. With Baba Afzal's theoretical teachings in the background, it is plain that Rumi offers a poetical and enticing version of a well-known teaching. At best, it has only a superficial resemblance to evolution in any modern sense.

NOTES

1. A fine edition of most of Baba Afzal's works was published fifty years ago: Mujtaba Minuvi and Yahya Mahdavi, *Musannafat-i Afzal al-Din Muhammad Mara'iqi Kashani*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1331-37/1952-58; reprinted in one volume, Tehran: Khwarazmi, 1366/1987). For a translation of more than half of these, with a long introduction to his life and thought, see William C. Chittick, *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
2. Rumi, *Kulliyat-i Shams ya divan-i kabir*, edited by B. Furuzanfar, 10 vols. (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1336-46/1957-67), verse 35277. For more on Rumi, see my books *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi: An Introduction* (Tehran: Aryamehr University, 1974) and *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).
3. Rumi, *Mathnawī*, book III, verse 125; English translation: *The Mathnawī of Jalālūddīn Rūmī*, edited and translated by R. A. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London: Luzac, 1925-40).
4. Lest I be misunderstood, perhaps I need to repeat that, despite the necessity of visionary knowledge on the path to God, Rumi holds that love conquers all. Love alone is "the flame that burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved." It is love that delivers the prophets and saints not only from their rational and individual limitations but also from the light of the universal intellect, inasmuch as that light is anything other than God. The universal intellect may be the very radiance of God himself, but it is not identical with him. Love alone can bring about utter oneness.
5. Rumi, *Mathnawī*, book VI, verses 4138-39.
6. Rumi, *Fihī ma fihī*, edited by B. Furuzanfar (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1348/1969), 107.
7. Rumi, *Mathnawī*, book I, verses 1234-35, 1246.
8. Rumi, *Fihī ma fihī*, 156. Those familiar with the history of Islamic thought will recognize in this passage a theme that is captured by the title of Ghazali's most famous work, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Bringing to Life the Sciences of Religion). The *Ihya'*, however, deals only with the ritual and ethical teachings of Islam, not with sciences such as metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology. As Ghazali tells us at the beginning of the work, it is concerned only with *mu'amalat* (interactions), not *mukashafat* (unveilings), which are the realm of the philosophical sciences. The distinction between these two sorts of learning corresponds roughly with the distinction that is often made between the "intellectual" (*'aqli*) and the "transmitted" (*naqli*) sciences. For his part, Rumi breathes life into both sorts of learning.
9. Rumi, *Mathnawī*, II, 1039-45.
10. In this they are relying on the opinions of a host of ill-informed scholars, many from the Indian subcontinent. I suspect that the main impetus for this sort of reading is the desire to domesticate modern science by showing that one of its key tenets was in fact discovered by a Muslim. This is a specific instance of the opinion commonly expressed by contemporary Muslim thinkers that modern science is built on the discoveries of medieval Muslim scientists. Thus, the reasoning goes, if Muslims had continued the scientific progress that they had begun a thousand years ago, they would have developed science and technology and would not now belong to the Third World. The mythic function of such an idea is clear, but to claim historical factuality for it is to misread both modern science and traditional Islamic learning.

11. The first objection that Muslim believers in evolution make to such a statement is typically of this sort: "God is all-powerful, so He could have used biological evolution to 'knead Adam's clay.'" First of all, this argument assumes teleology and design, which are anathema in theories of biological evolution. Even if we suppose that design should be allowed, we are left with serious theological difficulties. For example, the appeal to omnipotence neglects that God also has many other attributes that condition omnipotence. God is not simply omnipotent; He is also wise, for example, which is to say that He does things in an orderly, systematic, and intelligent way. He is certainly all-powerful, but He does not have the power to do things in a stupid way, because that would contradict His wisdom and omniscience (which is not to claim that we necessarily understand His wisdom). God never exercises His omnipotence like a capricious king and has shown His wisdom in what has appeared in the universe. The universe, in Islamic thinking, includes the whole of creation, both the more real and the less real. The more real is the spiritual or the intelligible, the less real the sensory or the bodily (these are the two worlds that the Qur'an calls "heaven and earth" or "unseen and visible"). Given that God does things in an orderly and wise fashion, He does not break His own laws ("miracles" break only the laws of nature, not the laws of God).

It was self-evident in traditional Islamic thinking that body is not independent of spirit or, with even greater reason, of God. Modern scientism has taught us to think that the body is the root cause and that everything else is an epiphenomenon. In this view what primitive peoples and unscientific thinkers call "soul" and "spirit" can be explained by biology and neurochemistry. This scientific view is in fact a "scientistic" view, which is to say that it is simply a belief, because it cannot be proven empirically. The belief is reductionist and leaves us with the body as subsisting without "spirit," which is like saying, in Islamic terms, that earth subsists without heaven and the world subsists without God. No, God created heaven and earth together, though they are not equal and do not possess the same attributes and powers; nor do they perform the same tasks. Where there is body, there is always spirit, even though, before the human spirit is breathed into Adam's clay, the spirits that govern the clay are called "angels." Remember that it is the angels who brought the clay so that God could knead it, shape it, and employ it in creating Adam's body. But there is no "human being" until the spirit is blown into the clay.

The flat universe of modern science, which at best allows believing scientists to posit a God beyond the world, could never appeal to traditional Islamic thought, because such a view of things ignores the intermediary realms, two of which played major roles in Islamic thinking: the world of spirits and, between spirits and bodies, the world of images. Our scientistic worldview is not able to think of anything remotely worthy of the name "spirit" except as altogether outside the universe (e.g., a Deist God) or as a phenomenon that occurs after the body. But the whole point of discussing the Origin along with the Return in Islamic thought is to show that the body can be nothing but a sedimentation and an epiphenomenon of the spirit. Intelligence and awareness precede the body, and the orderly structure of the body and of the biological and neurochemical worlds simply manifests the intelligence of the spirit, which works wisely in all things. As Rumi puts it, the body is the "shadow of the shadow of the shadow of the spirit." The body derives from the spirit, not the other way around. Baba Afzal among others devotes a good deal of space to showing how this works.

12. I am not forgetting that long before Rumi and Baba Afzal many philosophers, Greek and Muslim, had discussed the devolution and evolution of the human soul as well as the repercussions of these two trajectories in the bodily realm. But with Baba Afzal we have an earlier contemporary of Rumi who is completely explicit on these issues and writes in a Persian prose that is often reminiscent of Rumi's own writings. If one were inclined to argue for the "influence" of the philosophers on Rumi (and I am not), Baba Afzal would be one of the more likely sources.
13. Rumi, *Kulliyat-i Shams*, 2217.
14. Rumi, *Mathnawī*, IV, 3632ff.