



# Rumi Teaches Blog Posts: 2015

by nashid fareed-ma'at

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## INTRODUCTION

(from *Rumi Teaches Blog Posts: 2013 - 2014*)

In 2013, I started the *Rumi Teaches* blog. As much as there is some mainstream interest in Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi, much of it tends to reduce him to just a mystic poet. The majority of mainstream portrayals of him take him out of the context of Islam, and even less acknowledge the deeper purpose of his work to arrive at the station of realizing the Beloved, the Absolute. To address this poignant gap in how Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi is presented, I was moved to utilize this blog. Sharing guidance and lessons I received, the blog posts seek to inspire a more wholistic approach to reading and applying what Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi taught through his poetry, stories, and words. As the blog continued for over a year, a question arose of what to do with the growing collection of posts, especially since at times the blog focused on specific themes that might be useful in a collected format.

To this end, I present the original posts as they were posted in a book form. I chose not to re-edit any of the posts, partly because of time constraints as well as to retain the original “flavor” of the posts. Reflecting on the first two years of the blog, I can certainly notice a growth in my ability to utilize the blog format to reflect on Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi’s words.

Although the posts have gone through an extensive edit and rewrite process prior to being posted, I am sure my imperfect eyes have missed some errors. For that I apologize. But I pray the intention of capturing

a more wholistic presentation of Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi's work is served despite any shortcomings on my part.

At the time of posting this collection, the *Rumi Teaches* blog continues on. To read the present posts, you can go to the blog webpage at:

< [http://www.blueantelopeproductions.com/rumi\\_teaches\\_blog.html](http://www.blueantelopeproductions.com/rumi_teaches_blog.html) >

In Surrender and Peace,

nashid

November 2016

## Smash a rock against the jar

January 2, 2015

Smash a rock against the jar of companionship with the ignorant,  
And clutch the hem of the robes of the wise ones in the world.  
Don't pause for a moment with the unworthy,  
For the iron mirror collects rust when you put it near water.

(adapted from *The Quatrains of Rumi*,  
translated by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, p. 503)

\* \* \*

This quatrain deals clearly with the issue of companionship, who we choose to have in our lives as friends, lovers, and fellow seekers. Many people tend to be causal with who they allow and keep in their lives, even if such persons are not sincerely committed to living a genuine spiritual life. Yet this goes against the guidance of Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi and other wise ones who draw an uncompromising line between the wise and the ignorant.

First, let's settle on a working definition of ignorant. Islam holds that Allaah, the Absolute, is the only Reality, the only (ultimate) Truth. In this regard, anything that turns a person away from, distracts, or makes a person forgetful of Truth is ignorance. And those who live in ways in which ignorance is the predominant force in their lives would be considered ignorant. In traditional Islam, there is no judgment assigned to this designation since, except for a rare select, we can all fall into ignorance. A person can have clear knowledge of that which turns and directs one to Truth, spend many devoted years living such,

and in a moment can fall into ignorance. There is even the danger that the things that turn us in the direction of Truth can be a basis for ignorance if we make these more important than surrendering to be brought to Truth.

To the contrary, wisdom is that which removes those things that turn us away from, distract, or make us forgetful of Truth so that we can be brought to Truth. The wise caution that humans cannot find Truth, it is a grace bestowed. Ironically, this grace already exists within our hearts, but we often ignore it and, therefore, live in ignorance.

One of the reasons deliberate consideration is given to the company of ignorant (as well as the wise) is because of the contagiousness of ignorance. Even masters carefully consider whether potential students are serious about becoming free from ignorance before accepting them as students. And if students regress back to unrestrained ignorance, traditionally, many masters would send them away until they returned to being serious about renouncing ignorance. There is a metaphor within the Sufi lore: if you want to smell like roses, go sit in a rose garden. By keeping the consistent company of roses, their fragrance will effortlessly settle upon you. And roses are often used as metaphors for the wise. Being that wisdom and ignorance are opposites, you can choose an appropriate metaphor for the fragrance of ignorance, that which a person will smell like if one keeps the company of the ignorant.

It is our responsibility to be aware of these dynamics when choosing who we allow and keep in our lives. This is a choice of utmost importance: it literally affects the core of our spiritual practice and our lives. Therefore, Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi is explicit and direct when he



says: *Smash a rock against the jar of companionship with the ignorant.* A person can be established in a disciplined, fruitful spiritual practice, and have this completely undercut by keeping a single ignorant person as a companion: a friend, lover, fellow seeker. And the line is clear: it says smash *the jar of companionship* with such persons, not to smash those persons. At issue is our choice to interact with such persons beyond what is absolutely necessary. For example, if you have a job that requires you to work with ignorant people, in the scope of your job duties you work with them. But with anything beyond the duties of the job: pause! The same applies to other duties such as family, neighbors, people in need that destiny places before us.

Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi, as well as other masters, warn us against trying to change or “save” people immersed in ignorance. In another quatrain, Jalaal ud-Diin states:

From [the influence of] the sun’s face you may become moon-like,  
But from companionship with sulfur you will become fire.  
You strive so that an unpleasant one may become pleasant;  
That one will never become pleasant, but you will become unpleasant!  
(*Quatrains* p. 501)

Many of us encounter these warnings after already being in relationships with ignorant people, so what to do? Again, Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi’s advice is explicit: he advises us to smash the jar of our interactions with such persons. At issue is not the people or even their ignorance, but how we engage and interact with such persons. Jars are a contained space that have a defined shape, and if we look at the

jars of our relationships we will see there are distinct patterns and limiting orientations to our interactions. At the root of this is the fact that most of us form relationships with people who validate our ego in some way; and we, theirs. So the jar is part of a larger ego-based approach to life which the spiritual path seeks to reduce and eventually eliminate. Yet, in smashing the jar this ego-based validation is challenged or removed, which usually leads to egos reacting and acting out.

To be explicit, if the jar is ego-based, which is the case with the overwhelming number of relationships formed in ignorance, Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi advises such interactions to be smashed -- not salvaged, reworked, or restructured. And a simple question can indicate whether a jar is based in ego and ignorance: when interacting with this person are you immersed in activities or a state of being that turns you away from, distracts, or makes you forgetful of the Beloved (Truth, Reality)? We shouldn't limit the Beloved to constraining concepts: genuine peace (not merely the absence of conflict) is an attribute of the Beloved. So too is genuine union (not merely separate egos cooperating), and other divine qualities that may manifest in relations that restrain or transcend the ego. When we smash the old jars of ignorant ways of engaging people we can see if new jars will replace them. But the fact that most wise persons have very few friends suggests that more often than not, the old jars will be removed and that's it.

As much as "smashing the jar" may create apparent turmoil, it is something Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi went through himself. When he encountered his master Shams al-Tabriz, he cut off almost all relations with others and resided in seclusion with his wise master. Many thought Jalaal ud-Diin lost his mind to leave his family, friends, and

students to sit at the feet of a traveling hobo. This exclusion even included long-serving students Jalaal ud-Diin was mentoring. When with them, he was immersed in being a teacher, which is not the same as being a seeker of or dwelling in remembrance of the Beloved. But he described Shams as being the Absolute in human form: for Jalaal ud-Diin, every moment with him was focused on the Beloved. During this seclusion, Shams transmitted from his heart the “secrets” that opened Jalaal ud-Diin to his own heart. And in being with Shams (the wise), Jalaal ud-Diin found a refuge from the turmoil of smashing old jars: *And clutch the hem of the robes of the wise ones in the world.*

Note the hem of the robe is the bottom part that is turned inward and sewn. There are powerful metaphors in this. The first being that hem turns inward, which is the shortest, most direct way to Truth. Robes were traditionally worn by people of importance, people who “earned” a status of being given a robe. In many traditional Sufi orders, one of the noted ceremonies is when a student reaches the stage where the teacher bestows a robe on the student. In clutching the hem of the robes of the wise, there is a lowering (humbling) of one’s self to a person who has attained a noted level of spiritual maturity. These are the rose gardens we should to stay in the company of so the fragrance of their wisdom may rest upon us, cleanse us of the stench of ignorance, and ultimately guide us to the abode of transformation. Maintaining the company of the wise in conjunction with a disciplined, fruitful spiritual practice is sufficient to remove all barriers to being brought to Truth. Also, clutching the hem in ancient times was an indication of seeking protection from the one whose hem was clutched. Not just protection in the physical sense, but also the protection of being guided by one who knows how to avoid the dangers of going astray.

The danger of keeping company with the ignorant is so poignant that Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi reinforces: *Don't pause for a moment with the unworthy, / For the iron mirror collects rust when you put it near water.* I say again: many sincere seekers undercut their own practice by the company they keep. I've seen people with vast understanding of spiritual matters, immersed in sound spiritual practice remain stagnant or regress in their spiritual journey because of the friends they keep. It is no coincidence that the wise usually very few, if any, friends or companions because there are so few wise persons who are suitable to be beneficial company. Even with Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi, you can count on one or two hands the companions he had in his life after awakening to the heart. Even his interactions with students, which is not the same as companions, were greatly reduced: acts performed out of duty not seeking companionship.

Also note, that Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi warns about the mirror being *near* to the water: sometimes we justify keeping ignorant people in our lives by thinking we're safe because we're not in the waters of ignorance, just near it. But the wise take great care to protect their mirrors from the moisture that exists in proximity to such water. If you've ever treated rusted metal, you know the efforts involved in preventing extended exposure to rusting factors are less trying than the efforts needed to remove rust and its stains. And sometimes, no matter how much you scrub, sand, and polish rusted metal, a rusting stain remains. A metaphor for how we must care for our minds and bodies as these serve as tools of the spiritual journey.

The matter of companions is something we should take very, very seriously. I exaggerate not when I say it is better to be alone than in the company of the unwise. A wise solitude will lead us to the Friend

of all friends in due time, whereas the company of the ignorant will lead us to... (you can finish this sentence if you wish). Yet if we are fortunate to cross paths with a wise one, let us be wise enough to clutch at that one's hem. But there is a duty to restrain, renounce, and release our own ignorance if we wish for the wise to accept us and keep us in their presence. If we remain in ignorance, we cannot fault the wise if they deal with us cautiously or not at all.



## Veils for a good purpose

January 15, 2015

Allaah has created these veils for a good purpose. For if Allaah's beauty were displayed without a veil, we would not have the power to endure it. Through the intermediary of these veils we derive life and enjoyment.

Look at *as-shams*, the sun. Through its light we can distinguish good from bad, and find warmth. Trees and orchards become fruitful from its heat, and their fruits -- unripe, sour and bitter, become mature and sweet. Through its influence, mines of gold and silver, rubies and carnelians are produced. But if *as-shams* were to come nearer it would bring no benefit whatsoever. On the contrary, the whole world and every creature would be burned up and destroyed.

When Allaah reveals Himself through a veil to the mountain, those slopes become fully arrayed in trees and flowers and verdure. However, when Allaah brings revelation without a veil, It destroys the mountain and breaks it into atoms.

(adapted from *Fihi Ma Fihi*,  
translated by A. J. Arberry, p. 65 - 66)

\* \* \*

In Surah *Al-Araf* (Surah 7, Verse 143) of the Qur'aan, the Prophet Muusaa (Moses), a.s., asks the Beloved to show Its face to him. The Beloved replies that Muusaa cannot see It directly, but to look upon a nearby mountain, and if the mountain can bear the revelation of Its Glory then Muusaa would be able to see It. When the Beloved manifests Its Glory upon the mountain, it instantly crumbles to dust.

Imagine if you can a huge mountain crumbling to dust before your eyes due to an unseen force. Even if we saw a bomb blow up a mountain, we would see an explosion and smoke indicating a cause. And there would still be big chunks of rock and remnants of the mountain remaining, but this mountain was completely reduced to dust. Overwhelmed, Muusaa fainted. This was from witnessing the Glory of the Beloved, not direct sight of It. When Muusaa revived, he repented for his request and affirmed that he would be the first (most devoted) of the faithful.

Islam unequivocally affirms that Allaah, the Absolute, is the Creator of all -- including evil, including veils. In the divine intention of every creation lays a benefit; this should not be obscured by how humans use the gift of freewill to turn in ways that differ from this intention. As has been addressed in previous posts, within the divine intention of evil is the opportunity to withstand its temptations and mature into the strength of living divine guidance and piety. So what is the divine intention of the veils of creation?

Another unequivocal affirmation of Islam, especially among Sufis, is that Beloved is the only Reality. Sometimes this is phrased as: all there is the Beloved, the Absolute. But how many of us are really ready to accept and live this? Even to consider this point conceptually, if the Beloved is all there is then who am "I?" What is this "I" I consider myself to be? Unless we are ready to completely relinquish the "I," Reality is not something we (the "I") can withstand. Even for Muusaa, a prophet of the highest spiritual maturity and surrender, as long as there is the "I" that asks to see the Beloved's face, veils are necessary to prevent his destruction. Until we are genuinely ready to

relinquish the “I,” to have it be dissolved into the only Reality, veils are here to serve *a good purpose*.

The dissolution of the “I” into the only Reality of the Beloved is regarded as being among the highest of spiritual stations. Some regard it as the ultimate purpose of creation: that we are created from Source, journey through this which we call life, only to return to (dissolve into) Source. Part of the intent of the veils is to facilitate this “I” unfolding into the depths of surrender until one is genuinely open to pure dissolution. Ultimately, it is the realization of the Beloved that begets this unfolding. We cannot see the Beloved, but Its beauty gracefully turns us in the direction of this realization. This points to one of the good purposes of veils: *For if Allaah’s beauty were displayed without a veil, we would not have the power to endure it. Through the intermediary of these veils we derive life and enjoyment.* Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi further adds: *When Allaah reveals Itself through a veil to the mountain, those slopes become fully arrayed in trees and flowers and verdure.* Life and enjoyment, the lushness of creation’s manifestations: are we engaging and experiencing these in ways that point us to the beauty of the Beloved? So often we seek to experience these for the sake of our own pleasures, not as a veiled revelation of the Beloved that we (“I”) can withstand without being destroyed.

It should be noted that these divine or natural pleasantries are distinct from the ego-based pleasures we form through attachment. The Beloved and its revelations are the only true enjoyment; all pleasures we seek are only imitations and poor substitutions for this.

To further explain veils, Jalaal ud-Diin Rumi turns to the metaphor of *as-shams*, the sun. It is no coincidence that this is also the name of



his master Shams Al-Tabriz. Often Jalaal ud-Diin uses the sun as an intentional double metaphor, since for him, Shams was the sun that turned him to the path of the heart. The distance of the sun serves as a veil by which its light produces benefits: distinguishing what is good, finding warmth, ripening fruit, producing precious metals and stones within the earth -- all of which can be seen as metaphors to benefits unfolding on the spiritual path. Yet if the veil of the sun's distance was removed, *the whole world and every creature would be burned up and destroyed.*

Are we engaging the veiled light of the Beloved in ways by which we are distinguishing what is good from what is bad, and are sincerely honoring and serving what is good while disengaging from what is bad? Are we engaging the veiled light of the Beloved in ways that a sweet warmth is permeating our lives, a warmth that has the nature of the sun's light? Are the fruits of lives being made ripe, mature, and fruitful from how we engage the veiled light of the Beloved? And is our engagement in such light resulting in the natural alchemy that transforms the buried metals and stones in our lives into precious treasures that will be uncovered by the deepening of our surrender? If we can't honestly answer yes to these questions, we would be wise to examine if we're honoring the divine intention for these veils. These veils can serve a good purpose, but part of whether such is fulfilled or not is determined by the choices we make with our free will.

If we honor and rest in the beauty of what is beautiful, not the pleasures of the "I," this beauty will bring us to the Ultimate Beauty, the Beloved Itself. There is a deepening beauty in living a good, warm, fruitful life beholding buried treasures that in time will be surfaced by our spiritual practice. The more we rest in such beauty we become

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