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THE FIRST ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JALOLIDDIN RUMI AND SHAMS TABRIZI

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Abstract: This article deals with Jaloliddin Rumi's encounter with Shams Tabrizi, his devotion to him, and the importance of their spiritual, and moral knowledge today.

Key words: Mavlono Jaloliddin Muhammad Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, Bayazid Bistami, Zakat, Awliya (Saint), spirituality, spiritual knowledge.

Like other mystical and Sufi poets of Persian literature, Rumi's poetry speaks of love for the world. Rumi's teachings also contain the rules set out in the Koran, which are the essence of Shams-Tabrizi's prophetic instructions: "Know that there is no god but He, and ask forgiveness for your sins" (Question 47: 19). In the interpretation pertaining to Shams, the first part of the verse commands mankind to seek knowledge of monotheism (the unity of God) while the second commands them to deny their existence. According to Rumi, monotheism lives fully through love, and, in his verse, love is described as "a fire that burns everything except the eternal lover when it is burning."

If you mention Rumi, you remember Shams. And if you talk about Shams, you mention Rumi in the same breath. The fact is that, without Shams, there would be no Rumi, and, without Rumi, there would be no Shams.

Early in life, Mavlono Jaloliddin Rumi was already a person of excellent behavior and character who possessed abundant knowledge, performed his divine services with dedication, and earned admiration as a great personality. But Allah (God) wanted him to go to the level of depth and spirituality the guidance of Shams.

Shams' teacher, Tabrizi, asked his students "In Rum (at that time, Anatolia was mentioned in the Islamic world referring to the Byzantine Empire, as Rom ('(Eastern) Rome')) does someone live who is called Jaloliddin and whose leadership is desired; who of you would like to take on this task?"

Without saying a word, Shams laid his right hand virtuously and in the deepest humility on his heart and bowed his head to his heart as if to say, 'With my head, I surrender to the task'. His teacher then said to him "You have understood, in this matter you have to give your head for it".

After Shams learned that Rumi was teaching in Syria, he traveled there. By this time, Rumi had completed his studies in hadith science. His teacher assured him, "There is nothing left for you to learn in hadith science". When Rumi was walking on the street, Shams suddenly crossed his path and said, "Do you think you know everything? So, tell me now, who am I?" and walked away. Rumi replied in surprise, "I can know only what I am

taught. How am I supposed to know who you are?" While Shams turned away from him, ran farther and farther into the distance, he already taught Rumi the first lesson and replied, "If you go into the world of depth and spirituality, you will know everything."

Two years passed. Rumi was in Konya, and Shams decided to go there to put his spiritual guidance into practice. He asked people who knew Rumi about what he liked. When Shams learned that Rumi liked people with clean and noble clothes, Shams dressed himself in the oldest torn rags that he had, dusted himself with a little earth (dirt) and went into the streets of Konya. Since Islamic disciplines were common in this region, no one engaged in forbidden acts; the people carried out their duties and paid their alms tax, or 'Zakat'. The fact that, despite all this, there was not a hint of depth and spirituality made Shams sad. At that moment, an old woman with some liver in her hand walked past him and entered a bakery. She asked the man if he could roast her meat in the already burning oven as a favor. The man replied that he could not do this for nothing and demanded a fee, which the old woman could not pay; the meat, moreover, had been given her as alms. When she sadly left the bakery, Shams, who had witnessed the incident, grew even sadder than the woman. He took the meat, held it to his breast, and roasted it from both sides in the fire of his heart, which burned out of love for Allah. As a result, a supernatural fragrance spread, enveloping the whole city and, gradually, turning its atmosphere more spiritual.

The next day, Shams, in his dusty rags, waited in the street where Rumi always turned off to go home. When they met, he seized Rumi's horse by the halter and asked, "Well, say, is Bayazid Bistami bigger, or the Prophet?" No simple person could ask such a question. Rumi grew indignant and replied, "Bayazid Bistami is an Islamic scholar, but how can you compare him to the Prophet?"

He then climbed down off his horse.

"I also know how great our Prophet is", Shams replied, "but one thing does not go out of my head. Our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, 'My Creator, I did not recognize You as You really deserved'. Bayazid Bistami, on the other hand, said, 'Am I not the Lord?'. While our Prophet says, 'I did not know Allah', Bistami says 'I am Allah', how does [?] this come about?"

Since the question was challenging, Rumi had to think for a moment. Shams used this time to look deep into him and put the answer in his heart because his goal was not to get an answer to the question, but to spiritually guide Rumi with deep glances. Then, Rumi replied, "the vessel of the Prophet resembles an ocean – all waters flow into the sea, yet it never fills up. The sea neither overflows nor disappears. The vessel of Bistami was very narrow in comparison with that of the prophet; it resembled a lake. If too much water enters a lake, it becomes full and overflows. Bayazid Bistami filled up, ran over, and finally got lost."

In response to this, Shams fell under a trance and shouted out loud 'Allah!' Rumi was also seized by a state that kindled in him the feeling of the highest love, 'Ishq'. He threw himself at Shams' feet and asked him to teach him this. Shams replied that he could not do this on the spot, after which Rumi invited him to his home. Despite the fact that

Shams had concerns and said, “You will not be able to stand my hardships”, Rumi insisted and replied, “I will do my best”.

When they arrived at Rumi’s home, and Shams saw a room with books stacked as high as the door, according to tradition, he demanded from Rumi that he throw the books into the garden pond. Without hesitation, the latter immediately carried all his books to the pond and threw them into it, one by one, until one last one remained. Knowing how precious this book was for him, he, after a brief hesitation, threw it into the pond, as well, yet was sad about it. Shams noticed his state of mind and asked him what he was thinking. “The last book I threw in had been left me by my father and very important to me”, Rumi replied. “Some of its contents I don't remember”.

Thereupon, Shams took a long stick and stirred the pond full of books, asking Rumi to give him a sign as soon as he saw the book. After a while, the book surfaced, and he signaled.

"Bismillah", Shams said, taking the book from the pond and handing it to Rumi. When he opened the book, he was surprised, because although it was in the water for a long time, not a single page was wet, and dust even trickled out of one end. In amazement, he asked “How can this be, the book was in the water for hours, yet it is neither wet, nor damaged”?!

“I'm trying to teach you this, but you have eyes and ears only for your book”, Shams replied, prompting Rumi to throw the book back into the pond; from then on, he would be guided by Shams.

At the time, this procedure was extremely rare. Even today, some will find it incomprehensible. One thing, though, is certain: Rumi was very attached to the books he threw into the water. Whatever he saw, heard, and felt, he would have compared with the knowledge gleaned from those books. However, the knowledge from the books was revealed knowledge. Revealed and hidden (i.e., spiritual) knowledge, are opposites. Between Allah and His Creatures, there exist events that astonish people and cannot be explained in the lines of any book. As with the book that was fished dry as dust out of the water several hours later a number of conditions and events cannot be deciphered by reason or logic. Shams knew this very well, which was one of the reasons Rumi had the books thrown into the pond. He now had Rumi's full attention. Extremely important lessons lie hidden in the event.

Not only Rumi, but also Yunus Emre, Ibrahim Ethem, Uways al-Qarani, and thousands of others, after a while, ended their relationship with revealed knowledge and gained their knowledge from the level of concealment and spirituality. Had Rumi not abandoned revealed knowledge and devoted himself to Shams, he would have been forgotten centuries later. Even today, the matter is the same. It is important not to get hung up on obvious knowledge. As it was then, hidden, spiritual knowledge is of special importance today. How much can we learn from books alone? We cannot achieve depth and spirituality solely through them. To achieve this, one must learn from those who have attained the spiritual depth and surrendered to it. These include blessed friends of God, so-called Awliya, who point to the spiritual path.

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