

# “I am the Nightingale of the Merciful”: Rumi's Use of the Qur'an and Hadith

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In loving memory of Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003).

The scriptural status of the Qur'an backed by the orthodox dogma concerning it being “the uncreated word of God” lends it a unique position within Islamic religious and literary traditions.<sup>1</sup> The genre of “*tafsir*” has long been the acknowledged domain for Qur'anic hermeneutics. The Qur'an commentators, the *mufasssirin*, carved out a niche for this genre very early on in Islamic literatures. They circumscribed what qualified as source materials for *tafsir* and what did not. Sound Prophetic traditions transmitted in unbroken link from the Prophet on the authority of individuals, preferably his immediate companions, with impeccable reputations, soon became the primary supplier of exegetical materials. In addition, philological analyses drawn from the “state of the art” grammatical discussions taking place in the very vibrant linguistic centers of Kufa and Basra proved fruitful.<sup>2</sup> Other literati, to some extent, Sufis, to a much greater extent, quickly countered authenticity claims rooted in “the weight of the tradition” in *tafsir* works by asserting legitimacy embedded in their “personal spiritual experiences.” The various approaches adopted by important literary and mystic figures to claim such legitimacy remain obscure because this aspect of Islamic poetry remains largely unanalyzed. Allusions to, and quotations from, the Qur'an turn up in several expected and unexpected texts and contexts in myriad languages. Arabic quotations from the Qur'an in poetry composed by Muslims or non-Muslims do not technically qualify as *mulamma'at*, or multilingual poems.<sup>3</sup> Many of these quotations, on the one hand, seem thoroughly “naturalized” and, therefore, unidentifiable. On the other hand, they add a different texture to the poems linguistically and, as such, affect their reception. The varied reasons for embedding Qur'anic quotations in literary compositions range from invoking *barakah* (divine blessings) to seeking divine sanction and legitimacy for one's work and thought. In addition, the composer may simply wish to prove his prowess and mastery of the divine scriptures. However, individuals, particularly one as creative as Rumi, offer a different perspective when they include the Qur'an in their works. This article demonstrates how the great mystic-poet, Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi's (1207-1273 C.E.) unique use of distinct verses from the Qur'an contributes to a holistic understanding of fundamental Sufi principles as rooted in the Qur'an while emphasizing its multivalent applications. Based on analyses of some of Rumi's poems, I will argue that including literary materials from the vast body of poetry produced in a Muslim milieu will enhance our understandings about how the Qur'an resonated, and continues to resonate, among the vast majority of Muslim believers. Widening our scope of what traditionally constituted source materials that qualified as *tafsir* will open up further avenues for studying unexplored points of intersection between literary and religious traditions in Islam.

## Rumi's Poems

Rumi inserted innumerable references to the Qur'an throughout his poetry either by direct quotation or by allusion. This general trend is maintained in Rumi's *mulamma'at*. However, in accordance with the strictly technical definition of *mulamma'at* offered by literary critics of the medieval Muslim world, poems incorporating Arabic for the sole purpose of quoting the Qur'an are not considered *mulamma'at*.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I discuss Rumi's use of the Qur'an and Prophetic sayings, *Hadith*, and analyze his manner of inserting these quotations, both metrically and thematically, in Arabic, Persian and the *mulamma'at* verses. I argue that the complete fusion, which occurs metrically and thematically in these poems, mirrors the fusion between the Divine word and the poet's. For this purpose, I have selected poems that range from quoting the Qur'an rather generously to single direct quotes from, or even allusions to, the Muslim scripture. Poems 247, 261, 1172, 1173, 1948, 1974, 2118, and 2119 are representative of Rumi's general techniques of metrical and thematic insertion and are therefore discussed in some detail.<sup>5</sup> Based on this discussion I draw attention to Rumi's extraordinary mode of incorporating Qur'anic quotes. I propose that, rather than seeking authority from the Qur'anic verses, Rumi offers his own parallel interpretations claiming legitimacy in his own intimate relationship, perhaps even union, with the Divine Beloved.

## Metrical Techniques for Insertion of Qur'anic Quotations

Metrically, Rumi neither observes a distinction nor creates a hiatus or break when he switches from Persian to the Arabic quotations or vice versa. His manner of continuing between different languages and pursuing his theme or argument is completely natural. One of the ways he achieves such a flow is through conjoining the different languages by means of an *idafah*, a genitive construction, either to incorporate the quotation verbatim, fully or partially, or to employ a different language. Another way is by weaving together the Arabic and Persian so completely that there remains no metrical or auditory distinction whatsoever in the transition from one language to another. Poem 1974, verses 5: 1 and 6: 1 are representative of the two techniques he employs throughout his poems.<sup>6</sup> In the first instance, Rumi incorporates the beginning of *surah* 48:1 by means of the grammatical construction, the *idafah*, or the construct state. In the second, he incorporates Qur'an 94:1 with a *sandhi* of the Persian preposition *zi* with the Arabic interrogative marker 'a in the rhetorical question addressed to the Prophet of Islam by the Qur'an, 'a lam nasrabh laka sadraka? "Have We not expanded for you your breast?" Both instances are indicated in bold letters in the following quotes:

5:1 ya-da-ri-in-na-fa-tab-na--bar-gu-sha-ta--bin-ga-ram

Either open the door of "Verily We have granted victory,"<sup>8</sup>  
so that I may see:

6:1 ya-za-lam-nash-rah--ra-wan-kun--cha-r<sup>e</sup>-ju-dar--si-na-am

Or, through "Truly have We not expanded,"<sup>9</sup>  
make four rivers flow in my heart:<sup>10</sup>

Other instances in which an *idafab* is used to incorporate Qur'anic verses are: 1948-1: 2, 4: 2, 5: 2, 8: 2, 9: 1, 12: 2; 2118-3: 2.

Poem 1172, verses 25: 2, 26: 2, 27: 2, contains two Qur'anic quotes and one *hadith* in three consecutive verses. These are interwoven with Rumi's argument in one Persian verse sandwiched between two Arabic verses. The linguistic distinction collapses totally in verse 26: 2 when the Persian third person pronominal suffix "sh" following *nur* is in *sandhi* with the Arabic seventh form prefix "in" of the verb *shaqqa* from Qur'an 54: 1:

25:1 *us-kut-wa-la-tuk-thir-a-kbi-in-tul-ta-tuk-thir-tar-ta-kbi*

2 *al-hay-lu-fi-ri-hil-ba-wa-fah-faz-hu-kal-la-la-wa-zar*

26:1 *kha-mush-ku-no--ku-ta-h<sup>e</sup>-kun--naz-za-ri-yi--an-ma-h<sup>e</sup>-kun*

2 *an-mah-ka-chun--bar-ma-h<sup>e</sup>-zad--az-nu-ri-shin--shaq-qal-qa-mur*

27:1 *in-nal-ba-wa--qad-gbar-ra-na--min-ba'-di-ma--qad-sar-ra-na*

2 *fak-shif-bi-lut--jin-dar-ra-na--qa-lan-na-bij--yu-la-da-rar*

*Silence! Don't talk too much, my brother!*

*If you keep on babbling<sup>11</sup> you'll slacken*

*Vigor's in the wind of passion, so preserve it,*

*"By no means! No refuge!"<sup>12</sup>*

Silence! Cut it short!

Behold that moon.

That moon, which, when it struck the [celestial] moon,  
from its light, *"the moon was cleft asunder"*<sup>13</sup>

*Truly passion has blinded us*

*after it had delighted us.*

*So expose our injury gently,*

*the Prophet said, "injure not!"<sup>14</sup>*

The three verses quoted above are from poem 1172, a 33 verse-long *ghazal* interweaving two separate poems: poem 1017, an all-Persian poem with one Arabic hemistich, and poem 1178, an all-Arabic poem. It may be construed as a typical example of a macaronic poem, which may, originally, have been a set of two separate poems in two different languages brought together either by Rumi, one of his disciples, or a singer from his circle. However, with Rumi's penchant for taking up challenging experiments, it is conceivable that he himself composed one poem in two different languages with two distinct themes running simultaneously in one meter to flaunt his literary abilities.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the poem, at times, feels rather disjointed, confessing a state of heavy intoxication in which one "loses all measure of drink, speech, and behavior." The aberrant behavior of one with a "heart on fire" versus one who is "sober" has already been described in the poem. The sober, as Rumi instructs the guard in the poem, must not be allowed to enter the circle of the intoxicated ones, for the consequences are perilous.

In the verse immediately preceding the three verses quoted above, Rumi warns his listeners and readers of yet another trap. The bait of the use of language itself is hazardous, for, he cautions, "speech induces all war, bringing about smell and color." In regular intercourse among people, speech has various pitfalls: hair-splitting distinctions, arguments, and disagreements resulting in fights and violence among the masses. When speech is engaged in the service of expressing the inexpressible, however, it wreaks even greater havoc. Thus, the observance of the mystical etiquette of silencing oneself in order to veil the deepest mysteries from the uninitiated is paramount. Reminding himself of this etiquette, then, results in the self-admonition: "Silence! Don't talk too much my brother! If you keep on babbling you will slacken."

It is almost impossible in that state of "having lost all measure of drink, speech, and behavior" to hold back. So, a further warning to the poetic voice follows in the next hemistich, incorporating a quote from the Qur'an offering a frightening image of the natural consequences of babbling: *Vigor is in the wind of passion, so preserve it, "By no means! No refuge!"* Here, Rumi puns on the similar meaning of *rib* and *hawa*, meaning wind, air, etc., but the latter also means passion. The vigor, vitality, and force of this "wind or passion" cannot be unleashed. It must be preserved, for if it is allowed, even momentarily, to surface in its full grandeur, there is no "place of safety" no "refuge." The Qur'an warns the disbelievers, the hypocrites, and those who turn a constant blind eye to God's message that on the Last Day, the Day of Reckoning, there will be "no place of refuge" for them. Likewise, the mystic who allows himself to reveal, in a "state of intoxication," the mysteries entrusted to him cannot expect a safe haven.

Rumi is acutely aware of the fact that regardless of the severity of the warning against divulging mystical secrets, leashing the unruly tongue will prove a formidable task. At this juncture, a significant progression occurs in the thematic pattern of the poem. The two simultaneously running, distinct themes in Arabic and Persian now coalesce as if combining forces to address a rather grave matter. Together, they signal the solemnity of the necessity to remain silent. The Arabic word "*uskut*" is now repeated in Persian, "*khamush*," meaning "silence!" However, here, the warning is followed by a suggestion for an alternate occupation, which might lessen the pressure on the poetic voice to blurt out. The poetic voice suggests: "behold that 'moon,' don't expend your capabilities by babbling away, rather preserve them by concentrating on your ability to 'see.' You might be one of the fortunate ones to view the miracle of the 'splitting of the moon.'" This was the famous miracle of Prophet Muhammed, alluded to in Qur'an 54: 1, when the moon was reportedly cleft asunder in the valley of Mecca within the sight of the Prophet, his companions, and a few unbelievers. Earlier in the poem, Rumi has already quoted the same verse emphasizing that the unbelievers, the people of destruction, refuse to be guided, to have their veils of disbelief and ignorance lifted, even when such a portent from God, the cleaving of the moon appeared before their very eyes:

*Behold the people of destruction:*

*how often have they clearly seen the light of guidance!*

*Even after "the moon was cleft asunder"*

*their veils were not lifted!*

However, in this verse, the same Qur'anic quote serves as an exhortation to behold that other "moon," Rumi's beloved, whose power is such that the celestial moon is cleft asunder when struck by its light. The beholder might witness the "miracle" if he does not expend his energies chattering away, Rumi counsels. Even though one may have the good fortune to witness such a miracle, it does not guarantee that one has the capacity to behold. One could be injured or blinded in the process.<sup>16</sup> So, the poetic voice urges the beloved not to expose its injury, its blindness, caused by the dazzling light of the "moon," by inserting the Prophetic *hadith*, "neither injure nor sustain injury," reminding him of the need to be gentle.

Within the category of direct quotes also belongs 'aqd,<sup>17</sup> which is technically a prose quotation the endings or inflections of which are adjusted in accordance with the requirements of the meter and rhyme of the poem. These also include quotations, which are either condensed or filled-out according to metrical exigencies. For example, poem 2119-22: 1 in which Rumi quotes Qur'an 74: 6 *wa la tamnun tastak-thir* but adds a "li" to clarify the meaning as well as provide the short syllable he needs for the meter:

22:1 *a-la-ya-sa--qi-yan-aw-fir--wa-la-tam-nun--li-tas-tak-thir*  
2 *a-dir-ka-sa--ti-na-was-kir--fa-in-nal--'ay--sha-lis-sak-ran*

*O cupbearer, give plentiful,*

*"and give not, thinking to gain greater."<sup>18</sup>*

*Send around our cups and be drunk,*

*for pleasurable life is for the intoxicated one*

This is an example of a macaronic poem in which two separate themes run simultaneously in two different languages while interconnecting at a referential level. Earlier in the poem, Rumi has already emphasized the importance of generosity in various contexts. First, he urges his beloved to be magnanimous in pardoning and forgiving the lover's sins and trespasses. Then, the beloved, now the cupbearer, is exhorted to be bounteous when serving wine. Rumi summarizes his repugnance for stinginess and his admiration for liberality in the following verse:

*If you've prospered, don't be stingy,*

*give alms in passion, and sift.*

*How wretched is stinginess in food!*

*How excellent is generosity in human beings!*

He adds a further reason for avoiding stinginess: if one attends a banquet, especially one as singular as that of divine ecstasy, then one cannot afford to be stingy in sharing. There is a good chance that one might suffer the ill fortune of receiving similarly abominable treatment at the hands of one without etiquette, a ruffian!

Since you are in the banquet of ecstasy,

subjugate your stinginess,

O neophyte,

Let, a ruffian do the same to you!

This brings Rumi to the verse quoted above with the Qur'anic insertion where the Prophet is exhorted not to expect gains but give selflessly. The Qur'anic verse 6 from *surat al-Muddaththir*, an early Meccan *surah*, with these highly mystical verses, according to tradition, was revealed to the Prophet of Islam as a sign from his Lord to commence his preaching publicly and boldly. However, as he is being reminded to

magnify his Lord, the Prophet is also urged to give selflessly without expecting any gains in return. Rumi expects his cupbearer to follow the model of the Prophet and pass ample drinks without any expectations:

*O cupbearer, give plentiful,*

*"and give not, thinking to gain greater."*

*Send around our cups and be drunk,*

*for pleasurable life is for the intoxicated*

In poem 261-6: 2 Rumi quotes Qur'an 5: 27 *fadhhab anta wa rabbuka faqatila inna ha buna qa'idun* with the following adjustments to fit the meter:

6:2 *idb-hab-wa-rab--bak<sup>19</sup>--qa-ti-la--in-na-qu--'u--dun-ha-hu-na*

*Go, you and your Lord, fight,*

*we shall sit right here!<sup>20</sup>*

Rumi reminds his listeners of the transience of life and the need to avail oneself of every opportunity for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth. According to him, one should not dwell on the past, no matter how glorious or painful it may have been, because nothing remains forever; everything is in constant flux. In order to strengthen his argument he incorporates a Prophetic *hadith* in the previous verse: "Time is a cutting sword," which constantly slices away one's allotted time on earth. Therefore, time cannot be wasted in wallowing or gloating. Humans must avail themselves of every opportunity for growth that comes their way and not squander it away. He sympathizes with those people who blind themselves to their gifts and let opportunities pass them by because they appear to be too tough or demanding. To illustrate his point, he seeks out an example from the life of the Israelites, confirmed by the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. The tribes of Moses left him to fight alone with his Lord and decided to sit back and wait for the outcome, for they felt totally outnumbered by their opponents. According to the Qur'an, they were lacking in faith and courage. They were willing to back up their prophet only on condition of guaranteed success. Not expecting a victory because the opponents were numerous and physically very strong, they did not want to risk their own lives and property. Sacrifice means greater gains, but also willingness to be tried. Earlier the poem talks of Joseph's and Jacob's trial and subsequent victory and growth. This selfish and passive attitude of the Israelites left them lost and wandering in the desert. One whole generation could not enter the land of plenty due to their cowardice and apathetic attitude. Thus, deep faith coupled with courage and readiness to strive for one's own betterment are all exemplified by this short Qur'anic quotation that Rumi has included:

All the means of pleasure have come together;

whatever my heart wished has happened.

*But, time is a cutting sword.<sup>21</sup>*

*Don't think of what has passed.*

Lay down your life in his love,

don't say like the tribe [of the Israelites] to Moses:

*"Go, you and your Lord, fight,*

*we shall sit right here!"*

The following verse from 1173-7: 2 omits "inna" and "huma" from the Qur'an 108: 3, which in the original reads *inna shani'aka huma'l abtar*.<sup>22</sup>

7: 2 zan-pi-sh<sup>c</sup> --ka-bar-kh<sup>w</sup> a-nam--ka-*sha-ni--'a-ka-ab-tar*

Before I read, "Those who hate you, are without issue"<sup>23</sup>

It seems that Rumi wishes to illustrate that although God's wrath is real and can fall upon certain people and destroy them, His mercy is supreme and precedes His wrath. Therefore, he wishes to read the short chapter from the Qur'an entitled "The Merciful" before this particular verse of the Qur'an. God's wrath was to fall on those among the unbelievers who had continued to taunt and harass the Prophet of Islam for not being fortunate enough to father a male issue. They continuously reminded him that without a son his line would be cut off. This *surah* promises *kanthar*, abundance, to the Prophet while those who slandered or hated him will themselves be the ones to be cut off. This *surah* also serves as the Qur'anic statement against the prevalent understanding in the patriarchal Arab societies, which defined prosperity and success through abundance of male descendants. According to this *surah*, the guarantee of true abundance was what God bestowed of prosperity and felicity in the Hereafter. Other examples of such minor elisions or extensions of Qur'anic verses can also be found in poem 1948-1: 2, 3: 2, among others.

#### Poetic Tafsir

A preliminary study of many of the Qur'anic quotations in Rumi's poems seems to substantiate the hypothesis that he quotes the Qur'an copiously when he wishes to engage in its explication and interpretation, thus performing *tafsir* (exegesis) and, arguably, even *ta'wil* (spiritual hermeneutics).

Interpretation of the Qur'an has always been at the center of Muslim political, religious, ethical, and spiritual life. The Muslim community has had widespread disagreements over the interpretation of the Qur'an. Some Muslim groups have been literalists; some of them have allowed interpretation based on philological and grammatical possibilities as well as on the traditions transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad (*tafsir*), and some groups have gone further and allowed for "allegorical" interpretation (*ta'wil*). The mystics (Sufis) and the Shi'is, particularly the Isma'ilis, are well known for their allegorical interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Historically, the genre of *tafsir*, Qur'anic hermeneutics, in its classical period was characterized by its linear approach. This mode of *tafsir* has been called "atomistic" because, for the most part, it avoided intertextual references and did not move outside of the traditional Qur'anic arrangement of *ayat* in a given *surah*. It is only the more modern commentators who have looked at the *surah* as a unity or have endeavored to outline the Qur'anic ethos prior to interpreting each verse.

The Muslim literati have, by and large, adopted their own mode of using the Qur'an. Throughout the centuries each of the aforementioned groups, as well as Muslim literati from a variety of linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds have incorporated Qur'anic quotations (*iqtibas*) within their works, primarily as "proof texts" (*shahid*).<sup>25</sup> By proof texts, I mean texts used to legitimize one's assertions through the Divine Word. In this mode, the argument often runs as follows: "The Qur'an says such and such. We too, based on the particular Qur'anic verse hold such and such an opinion. It is therefore perfectly legitimate for us to declare that a particular opinion is valid or invalid based on the 'authority' of the

"Word of God." The status of Arabic, not just as the scriptural language, but the "language of Divine choice," was sealed following the victory of the advocates who upheld the Qur'an as the "Uncreated Word of God."<sup>26</sup> Invoking the "blessedness" of the "Divine Tongue" by incorporating scriptural quotations into non-Arabic linguistic compositions is a regular feature of much of Islamic literature. Thus, Qur'anic quotations, *iqtibas*, generally seem to be one of the main reasons Muslim poets compose mixed-language verses (e.g., Arabic-Persian, Arabic-Turkish, Arabic-Urdu, Arabic-Punjabi, Arabic-Swahili).<sup>27</sup> At times, the Qur'anic quotations were also parodied, used frivolously, given irreverent meanings or obscene twists. For example, a poet uses Qur'an 69:11 *hammalnakum fi-l jariyah* We carried you [mankind] in the floating [Ark] in an obscene sense by hinting at the alternate meaning of a floating ark, *jariyah*, a young girl or a slave girl.<sup>28</sup> Theologians frowned upon such usages, just like they did in the case of the application of divine attributes to humans as found in much of panegyric poetry.<sup>29</sup>

Rumi's imagination, vocabulary, poetic idiom, and even the various rhetorical devices he employs are so fully colored by the Qur'anic ethos that Jami, not without good reason, called the sage's magnum opus, the *Mathnavi*, "the Qur'an in Pahlavi [Persian]" as early as the fifteenth century. Outwardly, Rumi is the exegete *par excellence* of the Qur'anic moral and religious teachings through a simple and didactic approach in his *Mathnavi*, which he infuses with colorful stories, metaphors, and imagery from everyday life. Some of the stories he tells are not new at all. Earlier mystics, such as 'Attar and Sana'i, have narrated them.<sup>30</sup> Two major differences of style distinguish Rumi from these earlier authors. Firstly, the frequent authorial interlocutions in his works, which overtly purport to provide digression and playful conversation while underlining the moral to be derived lest it be missed due to the reader's preoccupation with entertainment. Secondly, the invariably happy endings to his stories stand in stark contrast to some grim resolutions in others.<sup>31</sup> Rumi is an unceasing optimist who believes firmly in the Qur'anic message of God's limitless mercy towards humankind. He repeatedly reminds his listeners and disciples of the Qur'anic injunction against giving up hope, for hope is synonymous with faith (*iman*). He quotes the Qur'anic verse *la taqnatu* "don't despair" (39:53) frequently. The lyrical poems in the *Divan* do not afford him the luxury of space to elaborate on the Qur'anic message in detail as does the *Mathnavi*. Nevertheless, he engages in exegesis (*tafsir*) through powerful imagery to elucidate specific Qur'anic verses.

Poem 247 in an ingenious Persian and Qur'anic Arabic linguistic combination is a masterpiece of *tafsir* in a poetic mode of chapter 87 of the Qur'an called *al-A'la*. Such a poetic mode of exegesis holds out interesting possibilities for comparison with a more conventional prose work of Qur'anic exegesis. I have chosen as my point of comparison the classical commentary on the Qur'an, the *Tafsir al-kabir*<sup>32</sup> of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149-1209 C.E.), the famous theologian and philosopher who was a contemporary of Rumi's father, Baha' al-Din Walad.<sup>33</sup>

In the current study I shall limit myself to examining the short *surat al-A'la*, as incorporated by Rumi in poem 247 and al-Razi's commentary on the same *surah*. My comments will focus on the central message raised in the verses and the dif-

fering perspectives and modes of analyses each author brings to bear on them. They will examine the underlying assumptions and meanings available in each form of discourse; the mystico-poetic discourse of Rumi, and the theological-philosophical-legal discourse of al-Razi.

Rumi's treatment of chapter 87, *al-A'la* from the Qur'an in a short five-verse poem, starts out with the mystic understanding that all of creation is constantly engaged in the act of praising God. Thus, he says:

1:1 ban-gi-tas-bi--h<sup>c</sup>-bish- na-waz--ba-la  
2 pas-tu-ham-sab--bi-bis-ma-bul--a'-la

2:1 gu-lo-sun-bul--cha-rad-di-lat--chun-yaft  
2 mar -gu-za-ri--ka-akb-ra-jal--mar-'a

3:1 ya'-la-mul-jah--ra-naq-shi-in--a-hust  
2 na-fi-mush-ki--ni-u-wa-ma-yakh-fa

4:1 na-fa-si-a--hu-wa-ni-u--chu-ra- sid  
2 ru-h<sup>c</sup>-ra-su--yi-mar-gu-za--r<sup>c</sup>-ha-da

5:1 tish-na-ra-ki--bu-wad-fa-ra--mu- shi  
2 chun-sa-nuq-ri--'u-ka-fa-la-tan-sa

Listen to the cry of glorification  
[coming] from above.

Then you too

"glorify His name, the most High."<sup>54</sup>

Your heart grazes upon the rose and the hyacinth,  
since it found

the meadow where

"He brings forth the (green and luscious) pastures."<sup>55</sup>

"He knows what is manifest,"

is the [outer] form of this gazelle,  
its musk-filled navel [is]

"and what is hidden."<sup>56</sup>

When the breath of his gazelles  
reached the soul,

He "guided"<sup>57</sup> it

towards the meadow [of Right Guidance].

How can

the thirsty one forget?

Since "We shall make you recite,  
so that you do not forget!"<sup>58</sup>

The message in the above poem is one of hope and its intent is obviously didactic. It relies almost totally on the first seven verses of *surah* 87 of the Qur'an, which talk about the reciprocal relationship between God and humans.<sup>39</sup> In Rumi's understanding, then, it is for humans to praise and glorify God. God leads them to "guidance, fresh pastures, and constant companionship." Humans are never left alone and, one of their greatest shortcomings, their forgetfulness (*ghaflah*), is well taken care of by God. Rumi conjures the image of the thirsty one, who cannot forget his thirst, and reminds his readers that that is God's way of ensuring that humans "do not forget" by bestowing constant favors on them as well as creating "need." The Qur'an underscores God's knowledge

of both "the manifest" and "the hidden." Rumi further clarifies this concept of God's omniscience through the image of the gazelle (manifest) and its musk (hidden). Rumi's deep faith in God, his understanding that nature is a manifest sign of God's abundant gifts, is expressed poignantly in this poem. The poem can be seen as a prime example of Qur'anic *tafsir* that aims at practical results—to enable believers to find the resonance of the message of the Qur'an in their daily life. Many abstract concepts such as God's omnipotence and omniscience, grace, caring for humans, etc., are explained at a very concrete and practical level through powerful images of pastures, gardens, thirst, gazelle, musk, etc.

In contrast to Rumi, who begins the poem by urging humans to praise God by imitating the already resounding "cry" of glorification from "above," Al-Razi, in his *tafsir* of this chapter of the Qur'an, starts by asking fundamental philosophical questions such as: Why should humans praise God? What is the need for that? Should this praise of God take a certain form? Should a certain name of God be invoked? Are some names of God better than others? He cites a tradition from the Prophet that asks Muslims to invoke the name *al-Azīm*, the Mighty, in genuflection and *al-A'la*, the Exalted, in prostration while performing prayer. He then embarks on a long, theological discussion of the names or attributes of God and their position vis-à-vis the essence of God. The next verse, "He brings forth the pastures," leads him into the discussion of God's omnipotence, His role as the Creator, etc. and its ramifications. Al-Razi proceeds with an exegesis of the entire *surah* in a similar vein. One of al-Razi's main purposes in this *tafsir* is to clarify for the believers the philological ambiguities. He also broaches some of the questions that he, as a *mufassir* (commentator), anticipates may cross the mind of the believers when they read the Qur'anic verses. Thus, he incorporates in his explanation the entire discussion that was current among the *mutakallimin* (theologians). His overall objective is to make the message of the Qur'an clearer and more accessible to the believers to enable them to practice their faith with understanding.

Both Rumi and al-Razi, as theologians, see their role as educators of the community of believers. Both, however, make very different assumptions before they embark on this task. Rumi, assuming only a basic familiarity with the Qur'an from his audience, sees himself as an intermediary, even authority, between the message of the scripture and the common people. He sees his task as gleaning the intent of a particular verse and converting some of the more abstract concepts into everyday language via vivid imagery to make the divine message comprehensible and accessible to all. He does not, however, have the luxury of space in his lyrical poems to dwell upon the images or tell stories. His most powerful tools, then, are the very images he selects to make his point. His mastery of mystical concepts, language and poetic imagery as well as his versatility with both Arabic and Persian allow him to offer an effective and memorable interpretation of *surat al-A'la* in six brief and pithy verses in the short three-foot *khafif* meter.

Al-Razi, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that his audience is educated, is able to read the scripture, and is familiar with current discussions in the field of theology (*kalam*) and philosophy. He does not see himself as the intermediary between the Qur'an and his fellow believers in as

direct a sense as Rumi does. In other words, he does not see the basic message of the Qur'an as inaccessible or incomprehensible. Rather, he sees a need to enrich that message through scholarly and learned discussion. Taking into account all these assumptions, one would conclude that al-Razi was writing for the handful of educated elite. This is where the contradiction lies. As a preacher, al-Razi is constantly tempted to communicate with the masses. He expects that his exposition of a certain portion of the Qur'an will lead to an increased understanding of the faith of people. It is doubtful that he ever attains this objective of his with the masses because of the sheer inaccessibility of his language and thought. Even if, in very rare cases, we were to find educated readers, one doubts if they would have the patience to plough through 10-15 pages of philosophical discussion before being touched by the spiritual message.

Poem 1948 is a different example of Qur'anic use than that in poem 247, which has just been discussed. Unlike the latter, which interweaves many verses of the same *surah* into one poem, this poem quotes fifteen different verses of the Qur'an, twelve of which are from different *surahs*. Metrically it follows some of the same techniques mentioned already. Thematic intertwining of these seemingly disparate verses into his own rendering provides but a small window into the Qur'anic world-view that Rumi created for himself and which permeated his entire thought structure, rather, his entire being. The ease and ingenuity with which he interlaces his own understandings and arguments with the verses of the Qur'an in a poetic mode is truly enchanting. Each of the Qur'anic references is not an allusion but a direct quote, albeit modified for metrical exigency. The poem presents a remarkably logical sequence of the "pilgrim's progress," explaining the necessity of each spiritual "stage."<sup>40</sup>

- 1:1 ban-g<sup>e</sup>-a-yad-har-za-ma-ni-zin-ri-wa-qi-a-b<sup>e</sup>-gun  
2 a-ya-ti-in-na-ba-nay-na-ha-wa-in-na-mu-si-'un
- 2:1 ki-sha-nu-din-ban-g<sup>e</sup>-ra-bi-gu-shi-za-hir-dam-bi-dam  
2 ta-'i-bu-nal-'a-bi-du-nal-ha-mi-du-nas-sa-'i-hun
- 3:1 nar-d<sup>e</sup>-ban-ha-sil-ku-ni-daz-dbil-ma-'a-rji-bar-ra-wid  
2 ta'ru-jur-ru-hu-i-lay-bi-wal-ma-la-'ik-aj-ma-'un
- 4:1 ki-ta-ra-shad-nar-d<sup>e</sup>-ba-ni-char-khi-naj-ja-ri-kha-yal  
2 sakh-t<sup>e</sup>-mi'-ra-jash-ya-di-kul-lun-i-lay-na-ra-ji-'un
- 5:1 ta-ta-ra-shi-da-na-gar-di-tu-bi-ti-shi-sab-ro-shukr  
2 la-yu-laq-qa-ha-fa-ro-mi-kh<sup>w</sup>a-no-il-las-sa-bi-run
- 6:1 bin-ga-rin-ti-sha-bi-das-ti-kis-t<sup>e</sup>-khush-tas-li-m<sup>e</sup>-shaw  
2 chun-gi-rah-mas-ti-z<sup>e</sup>-ba-ti-sha-ka-nab-nul-gha-li-bun
- 7:1 pa-yi-i-chan-dar-ba-ra-yi-ba-shi-as-ha-bul-ya-min  
2 war-ra-si-bar-ba-mi-khud-as-sa-bi-qu-nas-sa-bi-qun
- 8:1 gar-zi-su-fi-kh<sup>w</sup>a-na-i-gar-du-ni-ay-su-fi-ba-ra  
2 wan-da-ra-an-dar-sa-fi-in-na-la-nab-nus-sa-f<sup>1</sup>-jun
- 9:1 war-fa-qi-ri-kaw-si-tam-mal-faq-ru-fah-nal-lah-bi-zan  
2 war-fa-qi-hi-pa-k<sup>e</sup>-ba-shaz-in-na-hum-la-yaf-qa-hun

- 10:1 gar-chu-nu-ni-dar-ru-ku<sup>e</sup>-o-chun-qa-lam-an-dar-su-jud  
2 pas-tu-chun-nun-wa-qa-lam-pay-wan-d<sup>e</sup>-ba-ma-yas-tu-run
- 11:1 chash-mi-shaw-kh<sup>e</sup>-saw-fa-yub-sir-ba-sh<sup>e</sup>-pi-shaz-yub-si-run  
2 chun-mu-da-hin-nar-m<sup>e</sup>-sa-ri-chis-t<sup>e</sup>-pi-shi-yud-bi-nun
- 12:1 chun-di-rakh-ti-sid-ra-bi-kha-war-shu-waz-la-ray-ba-fih  
2 ta-na-lar-zad-sha-kho-bar-gat-az-da-mi-ray-bal-ma-nun
- 13:1 bin-ga-ran-ba-ghi-si-yah-gash-ta-zi-ta-fa-ta-'i-jun  
2 mak-ri-i-shan-ba-ghi-i-shan-sukh-ta-i-hum-na-'i-mun

A call comes from this azure sky  
all the time.

The *ayah* of "Verily We built it  
and verily We create the vastness of space."<sup>42</sup>

Who hears this call every moment  
without an external ear?

"Those that turn [to God] in repentance, that serve Him,  
and praise Him, that wander in devotion."<sup>43</sup>

Procure the ladder from the "Lord of the ways of ascent"  
and proceed.

"The angels and spirit ascend unto Him"  
all together.<sup>44</sup>

Who makes the celestial ladder  
of the carpenter of imagination?

The hand of "They shall all return to us"<sup>45</sup>  
caused his *m'iraj*.

Until you are sculpted with the chisel of  
"patience" and "gratitude,"

flee and recite, "None shall attain it,  
except those who steadfastly persevere."<sup>46</sup>

Look, in whose hand is this chisel  
and submit joyfully.

Don't fight the chisel like the knot,  
for "It is we who will certainly win."<sup>47</sup>

If you advance a few steps you'll be

"The companions of the right hand,"<sup>48</sup>  
And if you reach your own roof [then],  
"And those foremost are the foremost."<sup>49</sup>

If you are from a celestial sufi home,  
O sufi, come up!

And enter the ranks [of]  
"truly we are the people of ranks."<sup>50</sup>

If you are poor, beat the drum,

"Poverty when perfected is God."<sup>51</sup>  
And if you are a jurist, remain pure from,  
"Those are a people without understanding."<sup>52</sup>

If you are like [the letter] 'nun' in genuflection,  
and like the 'Pen' in prostration,

then you too be joined with "What they write"  
like "nun and the Pen."<sup>53</sup>

Be an eye of impudence [which] "Shall see"

before "They shall see."<sup>54</sup>

[Even] if you become meek like a flatterer

what is it before "Those who compromise?"<sup>55</sup>

Become firmly rooted like the Sidrah<sup>56</sup> tree from

"There is no doubt in it."<sup>57</sup>

Lest your leaf and branch shake from the breath of

"Some calamity by time."<sup>58</sup>

Look at that garden which has turned black from

"A visitor visited."

Their deceit scorched their garden

"While they were asleep."<sup>59</sup>

Metrically the *idafab*, genitive construction, joins the Qur'anic verses and a *badith* in 1: 2, 4: 2, 8: 2, 9: 1, 11: 2, 12: 2. Several verses are rearranged to fit the metrical requirements. For example verse 1:2 quotes Qur'an 51:47 as *inna banaynaba wa inna musu'un*, which in the original reads: *wa-l samaa banaynaba bi aydin wa inna lamusu'un*. Verse 3: 1 rearranges the words in the original in Qur'an 70:3 *min-allabi dhi-l ma'arij* retaining the sense of *min* through the Persian preposition *az*, dropping the noun *Allah* and going directly to *dhi-l ma'arij*. The next hemistich, 3: 2 quotes verse 4 of the same *surah*, *ta'ruju-l mala'ikatu wa-l ruhu ilayhi* by changing the order of the two nouns: *mala'ikatu* and *ruhu* and dropping the feminine ending, *ta marbutah*, in the noun *mala'ikab* to fit the meter *ta'ruju-l-ruhu ilayhi wa-l mala'ik*. However, despite these adjustments to the hemistich, Rumi does not succeed in fitting the Qur'anic verse to the meter of the poem. It results in two instances of metrical violations as illustrated in verse three with the syllables in bold font. Verse 5: 2 breaks the original *wa la yulaqqaba illa-l sabirun* by inserting two Persian imperatives *far* (flee) and *mikhwan* followed by an unexplainable conjunction *wan*; which Rumi needs neither for the meter nor for clarifying or enhancing the meaning. Thus he says: *la yulaqqaba faro mikhwane*

[*wa?*] *illa-l sabirun*<sup>60</sup> A direct speech from the Qur'an 26: 44, "*nahnul-ghalibuna*" is introduced with the Persian direct speech marker *ka* in 6: 2.<sup>61</sup>

Many "stages" on the path to spiritual progress are pictorially represented in this poem. The poem begins with the mention of the heavenly call (51: 47) perpetually reminding created beings of their "createdness" and the presence of the "Creator" who has created everything. However, not everyone is able or inclined to "hear" the call, for which a physical "ear" is insufficient, except those mentioned in Qur'an 9: 112. The Qur'an describes them as those who are "repentant, serve and praise God and are totally devoted to Him." Due to these qualities of theirs God will accord these individuals a preferential treatment. In order to rise beyond the stage of the ability to "hear," that is, "to climb or ascend," one needs to turn to the "Lord of ascent" towards whom "all spirits and angels ascend" (70: 3, 4). However, one needs a ladder to "rise" or one needs to make a "*m'iraj*."<sup>62</sup> The only one who can shape this ladder is "the One," to whom "all will return" (21: 93). For this purpose, He uses the two chisels of "patience and perseverance" (*sabr*) and "gratitude" (*shukr*) (28: 80), the two most important qualities necessary for the adept to "ascend." However, this process of being sculpted through *sabr* and *shukr* is not enough by itself. In order to "win" and

not lose at the end, it must be coupled with the attitude of joyful submission (*taslim*) to the One who is the "ultimate cause" of all conditions (26: 44). Some degree of progress on the path will qualify one to share ranks with those of the "right hand" (56: 27). However, consummate progress will place him among the "foremost" (56:10) or the "people of ranks" (37: 165).

Perfection of "poverty" (*faqr*) is one of the paths leading to God as the Prophet has said.<sup>63</sup> However, if one were to choose the other route, the one of "learning and understanding" (*faqih*), then one needs to stay away from those "without understanding" (*la yafqahuna*, 8: 65). The route to learning, symbolized through "writing," must be undertaken by the representative letter "*nun*" and the instrument of writing, the "pen" (68: 1). However, that too, must be accomplished with the attitude of submission and prayers (genuflexion and prostration) so that "they shall see" (68: 5). Most importantly, a staunch faith, which neither makes "compromises" (68: 9) nor becomes uprooted by "some calamity by time," (52: 30) must be cultivated. Faith, then, according to Rumi, must be like the *sidrah*, the lotebush in whose deep-rootedness and stability there is "no doubt" (2: 2).<sup>64</sup> Deceit and greed, whether spiritual or material, often leads to total loss and destruction (68: 19) and, therefore, must be resisted.

As mentioned earlier, the poems in the *Divan* do not allow Rumi the luxury of as detailed an explanation as his didactic work, the *Mathnawi*. However, he manages to focus on strong, concrete images to make his point clear. All the poems discussed above and the ones that follow bring to the fore the dynamism of the images Rumi employs.

### "Intimacy" and "Union"

The most intriguing reference that Rumi makes about the Qur'an occurs in poem 1173-7:1 where he calls a *surah*, *surat al-Rahman*, a *ghazal*. "Here," he says, "is another *ghazal*, the five with the fifty, before I recite 'the one who hates you, will be cut off.'":

7:1 i-nak-gha--za-li-di-gar--al-kbam-su--ma-'al-kbam-sin

2 zan-pi-sh<sup>e</sup>--ka-bar-kh<sup>w</sup> a-nam-ka-sha-ni--'a-kaal-ab-tar

Here is a different *ghazal* (poem), "*the five with the fifty*"<sup>65</sup> "

Before I read, "Those who hate you, will be cut off"<sup>66</sup>

The vast majority of the Qur'anic commentators consider most, if not all, of *surat al-Rahman* a Meccan *surah*. They also concur that it is one of the most sublime and poetic *surahs* of the Qur'an. It is the only *surah* in the Qur'an that contains a refrain (arguably, a *radif*), repeated with such regular frequency. The rhetorical question "then which of the favors of your (dual) Lord will ye (two) deny?" (*wa bi 'ayyi-l ala'i rab-bikuma tukadhbhiban*) is interspersed thirty-one times among the seventy-eight verses that comprise the entire *surah*.<sup>67</sup> The structure of this *surah* creatively integrates two of Rumi's favorite rhetorical devices, the *radif* and the *tarsi'*, which he has put to use probably more than any other Persian mystical poet.<sup>68</sup> His predilection for these devices, coupled with the enumeration of God's favors in this *surah*, which he strongly believed in, may have drawn him to it. This chapter of the Qur'an speaks emphatically of the reciprocal relationship between humans and God. God bestows favors and expects humans to acknowledge those favors by being grateful. Rumi's worldview, as exemplified in his poems and other

writings, is totally colored by this complementary relationship between God and humans. "Not only does the thirsty seek water, even water seeks the thirsty," as he underscores in the *Mathnawi*.<sup>69</sup> The singable quality rendered by the resounding refrain in this *surah* may have been an added attraction for him.

Nevertheless, to refer to a *surah* of the Qur'an as a *ghazal* would be considered rather audacious. Is it just a random remark or poetic license, or can one draw some conclusions about Rumi's attitude to "poetry" and its status based on this statement? Even if by *ghazal* Rumi means the most pristine form of pure creativity, it still seems a bit impertinent, almost subversive, that he would choose to refer to a *surah* of the Qur'an in this manner. Given the rhetoric of the Qur'an itself against poets and poetry and its long history within the literature discussing the "inimitability" of the Qur'an, it is highly unlikely that this reference is made lightheartedly. Does this have any connection with his belief in the origins of his own poetry as "Divine?" Does he view his own *ghazal* on a par with the verses of the Qur'an?

A preliminary study of Rumi's manner of inserting and interpreting the Qur'anic verses in the following examples may shed some light on how he perceived the Qur'an. The beautiful images that spring up quite unexpectedly either when Rumi is introducing a Qur'anic quotation or making a general allusion to some verse or image from the Qur'an serve as vehicles through which Rumi's love and admiration for the Qur'an and the Prophet of Islam become evident. Interpretation of these images allows him to offer his own distinctive rendering of these Qur'anic verses that I have referred to earlier as *tafsir* in a poetic mode. To substantiate further, let us look at poem 1974-5:1 and 6:1 where he not only alludes elegantly to the beginning of two different *suras*, 48:1 and 94:1, as mentioned earlier, but also follows up with his rendition of what, according to him, would be the meaning of "Truly We have granted you victory (Qur'an, 48:1)," and "Have We not expanded for you your breast (Qur'an, 94:1)." For Rumi, the "granting of victory" means the blooming of "a hundred thousand rose-gardens and a hundred thousand jasmynes," and the ability to "see" them. The "expanding of breast" means the transformation of the heart into paradise in which flow the four rivers of water, wine, milk, and honey. The latter is suggestive of the description of paradise in Qur'an 47: 15, among others.

As Rumi interprets these two verses in accordance with the general Sufi orientation, his thoughts are with the Prophet of Islam because both of these allusions embody important events in Muhammad's life. Tradition asserts that Qur'an 48:1 was revealed at the time of the treaty of Hudaibiyah that eventually led to the conquest of Mecca, and 94: 1 refers to the Prophet's inner purification and being "aided" constantly. The next verse invokes the Prophet's title "Mercy to the worlds" as conferred upon him by Qur'an 21: 107. Appealing to this particular attribute of the Prophet allows Rumi to pun on the Persian word "*rawan*" as flowing, river, stream, but also soul. In the context of the four rivers mentioned in the previous verse, the Prophet as a "mercy-river" seems fitting.

- 5:1 ya-da-ri-in-na-fa-tab-na-bar-gu-sha-ta-bin-ga-ran  
2 sad-ha-za-ran--gul-si-ta-no--sad-ha-za-ran--ya-sa-min

- 6:1 ya-za-lam-nash--rah-ra-wan-kun--cha-r<sup>c</sup>-ju-dar--si-na-am  
2 ju-yi-a-bo--ju-yi-kham-ro--ju-yi-shi-ro--an-ga-bin

- 7:1 ay-sa-na-'i--raw-ma-dad-kh<sup>w</sup>a--haz-ra-wa-ni--mus-ta-fa  
2 mus-ta-fa-ma-ja-'a-il-la--rah-ma-tan-lil--'a-la-min

Either, open the door of "Verily We have granted victory"<sup>70</sup>  
so that I may see;

A hundred thousand gardens  
and a hundred thousand jasmynes!

Or, through "Truly have We not expanded"<sup>71</sup>

make four rivers flow in my heart;  
A river of water, and a river of wine,  
and river of milk and honey!

O Sana'i, go, seek help

from the soul of the chosen one (Mustafa).

*Mustafa*, has not come

"Except as a Mercy to the worlds."<sup>72</sup>

Another poem, 2118-3: 1and 2, 4: 2, 5: 1 and 2, alludes to several different *suras* of the Qur'an intertwined with Rumi's comments. These are *suras* 95: 1, 2, 44: 54, 42: 2, 36: 1, and 93: 1. In this short poem, he cites three of the four different objects upon which God takes oaths in the *surah* entitled *al-Tin*; the fig, (*al-tin*), the olive (*al-zaytun*), and Mount Sinai (*Tur Sinin*). However, their appearance in totally unexpected contexts makes Rumi's interpretations charming, yet enigmatic. The lover's greasy, "flattering tongue" is conceived as receiving its oil (substance) from the "olive." Moreover, the act of uttering praise by the lover is seen as planting yet more olive trees. The beloved's sweet lips are said to derive their magic spell from the recitation of the invocation of the "fig." The love of the cheeks of this beloved is such that a thousand companions with "beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes (*hurin'in*)" melt for them. The passion for such a beloved has the same incantatory force as the invocation of the mysterious letters '*ayn*, *sin*, *qaf* and *ya*, *sin* at the beginning of *suras* 42 and 36; they both succeed in driving away all calamities. The brilliance on the face of the beloved and his perfection surpasses both the "Sun of the Forenoon, (*Shams al-Duha*)" in light and "Sinai, (*Tur*)" in stability. The beloved's fatal, yet vital, powers are manifested alternately through his deadly speech and invigorating visage. The beloved's words quoting the Prophetic tradition, "visit less often" destroys the lover only to be quickened by the beloved's spirited countenance like the "Day of Judgment" when all will be resurrected!

- 3:1 za-ba-ni-char-bi-u-ka-rad-da-rakh-ta-ni-pu-raz-zay-tun  
2 la-bi-shi-ri-ni-u-kh<sup>w</sup>a-nad-bi-af-sun-su-ra-yi-wat-tin

- 4:1 a-ya-man-'ish-qu-khad-day-bi-yu-dhi-bu-al-fa-hu-rin<sup>73</sup>-'in  
2 ha-wa-hu-ka-shi-ful-bal-wa-ka-'ayn-sin<sup>74</sup>-qa-fa-aw-ya-sin

- 5:1 shu-'a-'u-waj-bi-bi-ya-'lu-'a-la-sham-sid-du-ha-nu-ran  
2 ka-ma-lu-sa-da-til-wa-fi-ya-fu-qut-tu-ra-fit-tam-kin

- 6:1 fa-kam-min-'a-shi-qin-ar-da-ma-qa-lul-bib-bi-zu ri-gib-ban  
2 wa-kam-min-may-yi-tin-ah-ya-mu-hay-ya-hu-ka-yaw-mid-din

His smooth tongue planted trees  
full of olives.

His sweet lips bewitchingly uttered the *surah*

"By the fig,"<sup>75</sup>

O you, love of whose cheeks melts a thousand

"black-eyed ones (houris),"<sup>76</sup>

whose passion is the eradicator of afflictions like

'ayn, sin, qaf'<sup>77</sup> or 'ya, sin,'<sup>78</sup>

The glow of his face overshadows

"the sun" of "the forenoon"<sup>79</sup> in light.

The perfection of the lords of the faithful  
surpasses the "Sinai" in stability.

The speech of the beloved, "visit less often,"  
has destroyed many a lover.<sup>80</sup>

His countenance has revived many a dead  
like the "Day of Judgment"<sup>81</sup>

Rumi's manner of incorporating Qur'anic verses into his poetry is particularly striking in that he rarely, if at all, uses them as "proof-texts" in the same vein as the other writers and poets who frequently employ the rhetorical device *iqtibas*. His mode is indeed distinct. Firstly, his use of the Qur'an and his insertions of Qur'anic verses and allusions are so natural and intertwined with such skill that it is almost impossible to detect them. It is no surprise, then, that such a learned editor as Furuzanfar missed many such allusions to the Qur'an. Secondly, the authoritative sense of his tone almost vies with the authority of the Qur'anic quotations rather than claiming authority from its words.

As opposed to the general tone of the other authors and poets, Rumi's arguments run thus: the Qur'an says such and such which in reality means "this." He goes even further, as we can see from the examples above, and fuses his interpretation so completely with the Qur'anic quotations, that to draw a distinction between the two is impossible. Hence, for example, he does not feel it necessary to clarify on what basis he has interpreted the "granting of the victory" as "the blooming and subsequent viewing of a hundred thousand rose-gardens and a hundred thousand jasmines" or "expanding the breast" as "making the heart akin to paradise such that the four rivers flow in it." His authority clearly derives its legitimacy from the realm of his personal experience, in particular, from the intimacy, *uns*, and union and annihilation, (*wahdah, fana'*) he feels with his beloved/Beloved.

He claims: *Man andalib-i Rahmanam*, "I am the Nightingale of the Merciful." This nightingale who often wondered where the source of its own songs lay, in moments of complete union, found it impossible to distinguish between its own songs (*ghazals*) and a *surah* of the Qur'an inspired by the very *Rahman*, Merciful, whose nightingale it saw itself as. Thus in selecting *surah* 55 entitled *al-Rahman*, Rumi was not simply expressing his enchantment for its use of some of his favorite poetic devices, he also wished to bring to the forefront his deeply held conviction that God was indeed the Speaker, Composer, and Writer of his poetic enterprise. Were not both these from the same "indistinguishable" source/s: Rumi and his Beloved God, in complete unison?

<sup>1</sup>It is clear that once the orthodox creed of the uncreatedness of the Qur'an (*kalam Allah ghayr makhlug*), first proclaimed by Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) gained strong ground through the well-formulated and well-articulated doctrines of al-Ash'ari (d. 935), the status of the Qur'an and, with it that of the purity of the Arabic language, gained uncontested supremacy.

<sup>2</sup>Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, (d. 923) authored the first complete "traditionist" (tradition-based) *tafsir* still extant, entitled, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Tawil 'ay al-Qur'an*, ed. Mahmud M. Shakir and Ahmad M. Shakir, vol. 8 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1972). All the other later exegetes relied heavily on al-Tabari's *tafsir* as the prototype for the genre and imitated it, to a great degree, in form, and to varying degrees, in content.

<sup>3</sup>In my doctoral dissertation I studied, through the multilingual poems of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273 C.E.), the phenomenon of multilingual compositions in Western and Islamic literary traditions. I also discussed the terms and usage of "macaronic" and *mulamma'at* historically and in contemporary times. I demonstrated through examples that the two terms cannot be treated synonymously. Nargis Virani, "*I am the Nightingale of the Merciful, Macaronic or Upside-Down?: The Mulamma'at, of Jalaluddin Rumi.*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999). For the purpose of this article, though, I do treat "macaronic" and *mulamma'at* as near synonyms, meaning multilingual combinations of various types because that is how the term and the phenomenon are understood in most contemporary writings. However, it is important to note here that the Arabic and the Persian literary traditions, particularly the poetic traditions had, early on, developed various devices through which poetic and prose compositions incorporated quotations and insertions that were sometimes in a different language. Foremost in the category of the rhetorical devices which, at times, allow a combination of two or more languages are the group of devices that enabled writers and poets to insert direct quotes from the Qur'an, *Hadith*, poetry of previous poets, proverbs, etc. *Tadmin*, quotations or insertions from religious, ethical and general secular literature inclusive of poetry from previous poets is the general designation of this category to which belong *iqtibas*, the insertion of verses or fragments of verses from the Qur'an; *irsal-i mithal (matbal)* or *tamtbil*, insertion of proverbs; and *talmih*, allusions, rather than direct quotes or insertions.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of the term and its usage, see Virani, "*I am the Nightingale of the Merciful,*" chap. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Translations of all the poems quoted in this chapter and elsewhere are mine. For ease of reference and in order to give the reader a full flavor of complete poems, I have included portions of the English translations with the relevant section of the poems in the original, with their metrical analyses in transliterated form. Space does not permit me to include transliterations and translations of entire poems here. Therefore, I apologize to readers who may have wished to see the entire poems in the original. Translations of the entire corpus of Rumi's macaronic poems will appear in my forthcoming work, *The Macaronic Rumi: Jalaluddin Rumi's Multilingual Experiment*.

## NOTES

<sup>6</sup>All references to Qur'anic quotations will henceforth be indicated as chapter: verse as they occur in standard editions of the Qur'an. References to Rumi's poems also follow a similar format. Thus, poem 1974 refers to the number of the poem in the *Divan*; Rumi, *Kulliyat-i Shams, ya Divan-i kabir*, ed. Badiuzzaman Furuzanfar, 10 vols. (Tehran: Danishgah, 1336-46). For example, 1011-4: 2 refers to poem 1011, verse 4, hemistich 2, to be coordinated with my tables of metrical analyses. Quotes from multilingual poems adopt the following format: Persian: regular font; Arabic: *italicized*; Quranic quotations in Arabic: *Italicized* and underlined. **Bold font** indicates metrical violations as well as coalescence between different languages. Different fonts are used for Greek, Turkish, and Armenian and will be indicated as and when they occur in the course of the article.

<sup>7</sup>Originally a Sanskrit word, it is now an accepted linguistic term referring to the coalescence of sounds in a language. In Rumi's *mulamma'at*, the coalescence of sounds also occurs across different languages.

<sup>8</sup>Qur'an, 48:1.

<sup>9</sup>Qur'an, 94:1.

<sup>10</sup>A sustained discussion of the thematic insertions of these verses follows in the final section of this article.

<sup>11</sup>The variant "If you continue" preferred for the translation rather than "if you lengthen."

<sup>12</sup>Qur'an 75:11.

<sup>13</sup>Qur'an 54:1.

<sup>14</sup>Prophetic *Hadith*: *la darar wa la dirar fi-l Islam*, "There shall be no harming, injuring, or hurting (of one person by another), in the first instance, nor in return, or requital, in Islam."

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of the possible ways in which the multilingual poems may have come together, see Virani, "*I am the Nightingale of the Merciful*," chap. 4.

<sup>16</sup>This reminds one of Moses' experience on Mount Sinai when, according to Qur'an 7:143, on viewing but a part of God's grandeur, he fell to the ground unconscious.

<sup>17</sup>"*Aqd*, solidification [of prose] as opposed to *ball* dissolution [of poetry]." See W. Heinrichs, "Prosometrical Genres in Classical Arabic Literature," in Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl, eds., *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 270.

<sup>18</sup>Qur'an 74:6, "Give not, thinking to gain greater."

<sup>19</sup>The original subject-case ending of the Qur'anic quote must be modified to reflect the elision of "anta" which then converts the conjunction "waw" into a "waw-al ma'iyah." I am grateful to W. Heinrichs for drawing my attention to the editor's mistake in this case. The dual imperative *qatila* is also wrongly vocalized as *qatilan* in the printed text.

<sup>20</sup>Qur'an 5:27 "They said: 'O Moses! While they remain there, never shall we be able to enter, to the end of time. Go thou, and thy Lord, and fight ye two, while we sit here.'"

<sup>21</sup>Prophetic *hadith* often quoted in Sufi handbooks.

<sup>22</sup>In the word *shaniyaka*, the writing of "ya" for "a" is the Persian editor's reading, which does not affect the meter either way. However, the agreed-upon rules of Qur'anic orthography should prevail for Qur'anic quotations over such Persianisms. All such occurrences are therefore emended.

<sup>23</sup>Qur'an 108:3, "Truly the one who hates you, he will be the one without issue."

<sup>24</sup>For general works on the Qur'an and its interpretations see relevant articles in H. A. R. Gibb *et al*, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, (Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002); Jame Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2001-), Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, eds., *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>25</sup>G. J. H. Van Gelder, "Iqibas" in the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 397.

<sup>26</sup>For a general discussion of this topic please refer to the articles on the "Mu'tazilites," and the "Ash'arites," in H. A. R. Gibb *et al*, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002), vols. 1, 695-696; 7, 783-793.

<sup>27</sup>For a catalogue of various kinds of mixed-language compositions in Islamic literatures see Virani, "*I am the Nightingale of the Merciful*," chap. 2.

<sup>28</sup>Gelder, "Iqibas," 397. The particular verse from the Qur'an is misquoted as *hammalnakum 'ala-l jariyah* in this article. For further examples of the use of the Qur'an in a light-hearted, sometimes facetious manner see Ulrich Marzolph, "The Qoran and Jocular Literature," in *Arabica* (Leiden: Brill 2000) vol. 47, 478-487.

<sup>29</sup>Wadad al-Qadi, "The Impact of the Qur'an on the Epistolography of Abd al-Hamid," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, eds., G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 285-313; Wadad al-Qadi, "The Limitations of Qur'anic Usage in Early Arabic Poetry: The Example of a Kharijite Poem," in *Wagner Festschrift*, 2: 162-81; and A. M. Zubaidi, "The Impact of the Qur'an and *Hadith* on Medieval Arabic Literature," in A.F.L. Beeston *et al* eds., *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 322-43.

<sup>30</sup>See Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Persian Studies Series, 8 (London: Fine Books, 1978. Reprinted, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993), 37 ff.

<sup>31</sup>Based on my reading of Rumi's *mulamma'at*, I hope to undertake an article-length study on the "macaronic" nature and style of his didacticism through the reinterpretation of a few stories from the *Mathnawi*. This "macaronic" mode of argumentation has very little to do with the use of mixed-language. Rather, it is the introduction of an entirely different perspective, an "upside-down" approach. I hope to further show that what appears on the surface as didacticism contains a germ of "Menippean element" which questions the very foundations of long-held assumptions, beliefs, and tenets. They force the audience/participants to reevaluate their fundamental positions. Rumi establishes this approach in the course of what I would call "frequent authorial interlocutions." Often, these "detours" from the main story argue in a fundamentally different mode and do not result in clear logical and rational conclusions; i.e. two plus two rarely, if ever, adds up to a four. Such interludes, then, play a subversive role and compel the readers/listeners, not only to retrace their steps to confirm who the speaker or the protagonist of the story is, but they also serve to introduce the optimum amount of discomfort thus forcing a reappraisal of their own long-held, unquestioned assumptions.

<sup>32</sup>Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* or *Tafsir al-Kabir* (Cairo: Dar al-Tiba'ah, n.d.), 8: 535-547.

<sup>33</sup>I have three reasons for choosing al-Razi's *tafsir*. First, it is one of the more substantive and therefore more interesting of *tafsirs*, in my opinion. Second, the author was a near-contemporary of Rumi and an actual contemporary of his father. Third, Rumi and al-Razi were both theologically trained practicing preachers in their respective communities. What I hope to illustrate through this brief comparison is the stark contrast in their approaches to the Qur'an as well as their teaching methodologies for the masses despite their common objectives.

<sup>34</sup>Qur'an 87:1, "Glorify the name of your Lord, most High."

<sup>35</sup>Qur'an 87:4.

<sup>36</sup>Qur'an 87:7.

<sup>37</sup>Qur'an 87:3.

<sup>38</sup>Qur'an 87:6.

<sup>39</sup>Following is a translation of the relevant verses from *Surat al-A'la*, 87: 1-7:

Glorify the name of your Lord, Most High  
Who has created and given you proportion  
Who has decreed and guided  
And who brings forth the (green and luscious) pas-

tures

And then made it (but) swarthy stubble

We shall make you recite

So you shall not forget

Except what God wishes

For it is He who knows what is manifest and what is hidden.

<sup>40</sup>For a general discussion on the subject see John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1987); Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, (London: Methuen, 1977). For Islamic mysticism see, Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

<sup>41</sup>This is perhaps one of the most blatant metrical violations. However, it is hardly audible in oral recitation. See note 74 for further explanation.

<sup>42</sup>Qur'an 51:47, "With power and skill did We construct the firmament for it is We who create the vastness of space."

<sup>43</sup>Qur'an 9:112.

<sup>44</sup>Qur'an 70:3-4, "From God, Lord of the ways of ascent, the angels and the spirit ascend unto Him in a day, the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years."

<sup>45</sup>Qur'an 21:93.

<sup>46</sup>Qur'an 28:80.

<sup>47</sup>Qur'an 26:44.

<sup>48</sup>Qur'an 56:27.

<sup>49</sup>Qur'an 56:10. Constant allusions to verses from *Surah al-Waqi'a* that speak of the final day when humankind will be divided into three groups: the companions of the right hand, the companions of the left hand, and those foremost. The fate of each will be decided dependent on the category to

which they belong

<sup>50</sup>Qur'an 37:165.

<sup>51</sup>This is a Prophetic saying.

<sup>52</sup>Qur'an 8:65. Here Rumi puns on the common trilateral root (*f q b*) of the word for jurist *faqih* and those without understanding *la yafqahuna*.

<sup>53</sup>Qur'an 68:1, "Nun. By the Pen, and by what they write."

<sup>54</sup>Reminiscent of the Qur'an 37:175, "And watch them and they shall soon see" and also 68:5, "Soon you will see and they will see."

<sup>55</sup>Qur'an 68:9.

<sup>56</sup>The Lotebush is generally depicted as being at the end of the universe beyond which none can pass (Qur'an 53:14).

<sup>57</sup>Qur'an 2:2.

<sup>58</sup>Qur'an 52:30.

<sup>59</sup>Qur'an 68:19.

<sup>60</sup>For some inexplicable reason, the editor has changed *yulaqqaba* as it appears in the Qur'an to *yulaqqiba*.

<sup>61</sup>It is rather intriguing to note that this phrase in its original occurrence in the Qur'an is put in the mouths of the magicians of Pharaoh who invoke his power before throwing their rods by saying, "By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win!"

<sup>62</sup>While *Mi'raj* typically refers to the Prophet's heavenly ascent during his "night-journey," Rumi plays on its double meaning as "ladder" and juxtaposes it with the Persian *nardiban* also meaning "ladder."

<sup>63</sup>*Al-faqrū idha tamma fa huma'llah* "poverty when perfected is God," is a *hadith* often quoted by the Sufis.

<sup>64</sup>Three of the four instances in the Qur'an where *sidrah*, the lotebush, is mentioned, it symbolizes heavenly bliss especially in 56:28 where the "companions of the Right Hand" will dwell among the lotebush without thorns. This tree is also mentioned in connection with the Prophet's *Mi'raj*, heavenly ascent, when he is supposed to have seen Gabriel, the angel of revelation, near the lotebush (53:14). The tree itself is shrouded [in mystery] (53:16). Rumi has already alluded, earlier in this poem, to *Mi'raj* and "the people of the right hand," thus; the appearance of the *Sidrah* is a natural progression. However, there is one instance, Qur'an 34:16, where wild lotebushes, good for neither fruit nor shade, are mentioned in a negative light.

<sup>65</sup>The reference here is not to some lyrical poem, *ghazal* 55, but to chapter 55, *surat al-Rahman*, of the Qur'an! Referring to a *surah* of the Qur'an by its number is unusual even today in Muslim circles. It is probably for this reason that the learned editor did not recognize it as an allusion to the Qur'an.

<sup>66</sup>Qur'an 108:3, "Truly the one who hates you, he will be the one without issue."

<sup>67</sup>Ibn Rashiq, the medieval literary critic treats repetition (*takrar*) as an effective form of the figure of speech. He points to the repetitious refrain in *surah* 55 and states that this repetition belongs to the signs of *ʿiʿjaz*, the miraculous inimitability, of the Qur'an See Ibn Rashiq, *al-'umda fi mabasin al-sbi'r wa-adabih wa naqdih*, ed. M. M. Abdalhamid (Beirut, 1971), 2: 75, also cited by Burgel, "Speech is a Ship and Meaning the

Sea': Some Formal Aspects of the Ghazal Poetry of Rumi," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, eds. Amin Banani, Richard Houannisian, and Georges Sabagh. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57-58.

<sup>68</sup>Christoph Burgel is of the opinion that Rumi's frequent use of repetition is one of his less obvious responses to the Qur'anic impact that is so palpable in all his writings.

<sup>69</sup>Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, *Mathnawi-i Ma'navi*. Edited and translated by R. A. Nicholson, 8 vols (London: Luzac, 1925-40), I-1741.

<sup>70</sup>Qur'an 48:1, "Verily, We have granted thee a manifest victory."

<sup>71</sup>Qur'an 94:1, "Have We not expanded thee thy breast?"

<sup>72</sup>Qur'an 21:107, "And, We did not send thee except as Mercy to the worlds."

<sup>73</sup>The editor's vocalization *hur-il-'in* is impossible according to Arabic grammatical rules and therefore has been emended here. All occurrences of this term in the Qur'an, e.g. 44:54, 52: 20, 55:72, 56:22, mention the two-noun combination in the indefinite.

<sup>74</sup>The printed text represents the three mysterious letters 'ayn, sin, and qaf as one word "asq." which under no circumstance can fit the meter. Therefore, they are emended according to the metrical requirements. However, both 'ayn and sin are overlong syllables not permitted in Arabic prosody. Technically, Persian prosody does not permit it either. Thus, it is a metrical violation in both traditions. However, this is a typical example of how the oral recitation undermines the written rules because these words, when recited orally, may conceivably either treat the "nun" end-sound as a nasal pronunciation not to be counted (as allowed by Persian prosodists) or hum the nun sound maintaining the rhythm of the poem instead of stumbling over the meter and revealing the violation.

<sup>75</sup>Qur'an 95:1: "By the fig and the olive...."

<sup>76</sup>Qur'an 44:54, 52:20, and 56:22.

<sup>77</sup>Qur'an 42:2.

<sup>78</sup>Qur'an 36:1.

<sup>79</sup>Qur'an 93:1.

<sup>80</sup>The Prophet is said to have counseled one of his companions, Abu Hurayrah, "Visit rarely, and you will be loved more."

<sup>81</sup>Qur'an 1:4.