

RUMI'S PATH OF REALIZATION

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In the Mathnawī Rumi tells the story of a traveller who put up for the night at a Sufi lodge, entrusting his donkey to the gatekeeper. The other Sufis staying there were not an especially scrupulous lot. They took the man's donkey, sold it, and proceeded to entertain him with a lavish feast. Soon the man was singing and dancing to the tune of *khar biraft u khar biraft u khar biraft*—"The donkey's gone, the donkey's gone, the donkey's gone!" Only in the morning, once everyone else had left, did he discover the meaning of the song.

In the story, the donkey represents a human lifetime, or the embodiment that allows for the unfolding of a human soul. Using the same sort of imagery, Rumi frequently speaks of Jesus and his ass—the spirit and the body. Without the ass, Jesus cannot ride to Jerusalem, which is to say that without the body, the spirit cannot reach its true beloved. In this particular story, the song that the traveller picks up from the dervishes represents the knowledge and information that we gain without understanding its significance. Morning stands for death, when the human spirit wakes up to reality.

Rumi uses the story to illustrate the evil consequences that may follow upon *taqlīd*, that is, "imitation" or "following authority." If we simply imitate others in our knowledge and fall short of realizing the truth and reality of what we know, we will lose sight of our destination and be prevented from reaching our goal. In Rumi's tale, once the traveller wakes up and recognizes his own stupidity, he cries out,

Imitating them has given me to the wind—

two hundred curses on that imitation! (II 563) [\[i\]](#)

If we look only at the moral of the tale, the words sound strangely familiar. We have been hearing this lament—"two hundred curses on that imitation"—from Orientalists and Muslim reformers for over a century. It might seem that Rumi, seven hundred years ago, had already perceived that *taqlīd* was leading the Islamic community into decadence and disaster. It also might seem that by criticizing *taqlīd*, he is recommending the revival of *ijtihād*, that is, the exercise of independent judgment in matters of the Shariah. However, these would be premature conclusions. In fact, Rumi is talking about something quite different.

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In the Islamic sciences, *taqlīd* is discussed in two contexts. The first is jurisprudence, where it is contrasted with *ijtihād*. A full-fledged *mujtahid* does not follow the opinion of anyone else in the Sharī'ah, because he or she is able to derive the law directly from the Koran and the Hadith. The vast majority of Muslims, however, do not have sufficient knowledge and training to be *mujtahids*, so they must be "imitators" (*muqallid*). In other words, they must accept the legal rulings of those who possess the proper qualifications.

During the early centuries of Islam, Muslims developed the legal implications of the Koran and the Hadith gradually, but eventually these became quite complex. Even in the early period, becoming a respected expert in the Sharī'ah demanded dedicating one's life to the study of the Koran, the Sunnah, and the opinions of the Companions and the Followers. Eventually, among Sunnis, it was largely accepted that the "gate of *ijtihād*" had been closed, because it had become too difficult to achieve the proper qualifications to be a real *mujtahid*. At best, scholars could issue *fatwas* in new situations. In modern times, it has often been claimed that the gate of *ijtihād* must be reopened so that Islam can enter into the modern world.

The second context in which *taqlīd* has been discussed is the intellectual tradition, especially philosophy and Sufism. Here imitation is contrasted not with *ijtihād* but with *tahqīq*, a word that can be translated as "verification" or "realization." Its basic meaning is to search out the *ḥaqq* of things, that is, their truth and reality. When Rumi speaks of *taqlīd*, it is always in the context of *tahqīq*, not *ijtihād* in the technical sense. [\[ii\]](#)

Ijtiḥād and *tahqīq* pertain to two different realms of religious concern—practice (*islām*) and faith (*īmān*), or transmission (*naql*) and intellection (*'aql*). The jurists occupied themselves with defining right activity, but the philosophers and Sufis focused on right knowledge of things. The former kept themselves busy with the visible realm of activity, but the latter were more concerned with the invisible realm of understanding.

The Koran sums up the objects of faith with one word—*ghayb*, the unseen, the invisible, the absent (cf. 2:3). It was the objects of faith that Sufis and philosophers investigated in order to achieve *taḥqīq*. In the typical list, these objects are God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, the Last Day, and divine providence. They are summed up as the “three roots” of faith, i.e., *tawḥīd*, prophecy, and the Return to God.

When Sufis and philosophers offered the cognitive results of *taḥqīq*, they spoke of various forms of knowledge that might be classified today as metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual psychology. These sciences were central to Islamic “intellectual” knowledge (as opposed to “transmitted” knowledge), and they are precisely the sciences that flesh out the meaning of the *ghayb*. Without understanding the unseen objects of one’s faith, one is believing in empty words. Remember here that Shī‘ites tell us explicitly that *taqlīd* in matters of faith is forbidden. One must have faith in God and his prophets not on the basis of hearsay, but on the basis of understanding the truth and reality of *tawḥīd* and prophecy.

Knowledge achieved through *ijtihād* explicates the legal implications of the Koran, the Sunnah, and the opinions of the forebears. Knowledge achieved through *taḥqīq* uncovers the reality of the objects of faith. Indeed, all the objects of faith pertain precisely to the realm of “realities,” *ḥaqā‘īq*. Like *taḥqīq*, this word (the plural of *ḥaqīqa*) derives from the same root as *ḥaqq*. A reality is something that is “worthy” (*ḥaqīq*) to be and that is really and actually found in some realm of existence. In the technical language of philosophy, the realities are also called the “quiddities” (*māhiyyāt*), and, in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī, the “fixed entities” (*a‘yān thābita*). If the realities pertain to the realm of the “unseen,” it is because our sensory faculties cannot perceive them, even if they can be perceived by the intellect, or the heart, or the eye of faith.

Everything that exists in the visible and invisible realms is some sort of reality or, depending on definitions, manifests a reality. There are levels of existence in which realities appear in different modes, levels that are very much at issue in the intellectual tradition. It is precisely these that are investigated with the help of concepts like the “Five Divine Presences” of the Sufis or the “gradation of existence” (*tashkk al-wujūd*) of Mullā Ṣadrā. An important part of *taḥqīq* is discerning the specific realm of existence to which any given reality belongs.

Metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual psychology are all concerned with discovering and explicating the realities and the realms in which they exercise influence. It is well known that the Muslim philosophers, in contrast to specialists in transmitted knowledge, frequently investigated realities in ways that we associate with modern science. If this is so, it is because the philosophers were interested in understanding realities in every possible mode, not only in respect of their significance for transmitted knowledge. They looked upon the things that appear in the visible cosmos—the realm of “generation and corruption” (*kawn wa fasād*)—as embodied realities or as outward signs and marks of invisible realities. They understood that all realities derive from the First Reality and return back to it.

Everything that modern scientists study in their various disciplines pertains properly to “intellectual” knowledge, not “transmitted” knowledge. Scientists do not concern themselves with discovering the proper ways of acting as defined by transmitted knowledge. Rather, they are bent upon discovering “realities,” even if they have no concept of the levels and degrees of reality as traditionally understood.

According to the Islamic division of knowledge, to say that modern science investigates realities means that it pertains to the realm of “faith,” which deals with the nature of reality on whatever level. Just as the Muslim philosophers and many of the Sufis wanted to understand the realities and their degrees—that is, they wanted to understand the very reality of God himself and all the implications of his reality for the universe—so also modern scientists are trying to grasp the objects of “faith,” which are precisely the realities that can properly be known by the “intellect.” They are, apparently at least, engaging in *taḥqīq*, not *taqlīd*. The significance of this fact for the tradition that Rumi represents will become clear after we look more carefully at the difference between *taḥqīq* and *taqlīd*.

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The word *taḥqīq* does not really have an English equivalent. The semantic field of the word *ḥaqq* embraces the ideas of truth, reality, authenticity, rightness, appropriateness, validity, worthiness, justice, obligation, and incumbency. *Ḥaqq* is a Qur’anic divine name that is commonly used as a synonym for Allah in the Islamic languages. As a divine name, it means that God is the absolute *ḥaqq* in all senses of the word, and that anything other than God can at best be called *ḥaqq* in a derivative and relative sense.

Taḥqīq is the second form of the verb derived from *ḥaqq*. It means to establish what is true, right, proper, and

appropriate. In the context of the philosophical sciences, it can mean to search out the reality of things, to investigate, verify, ascertain, and confirm. In Sufism, it had been discussed long before Rumi in the sense of finding the *ḥaqq*—the real, the true, and the appropriate—and then acting in conformity with its demands. Ibn 'Arabi singles out *taḥqīq* as the goal of the seeker on the path to God. As I have argued elsewhere, if we must choose a label to place on Ibn 'Arabi—a label that he would be willing to accept and that would do justice to his concerns—we can do no better than *muḥaqqiq*, “realizer,” a person who has achieved *taḥqīq*.

Ḥaqq, it needs to be remembered, is not simply a name of God. The word is used over 250 times in the Koran, in many cases referring to created things. Several verses speak of the universe in terms of its conformity with *ḥaqq*, such as, “It is He who created the heavens and the earth with the *ḥaqq*” (6:73).

Ibn 'Arabi often highlights the intimate correlation between *ḥaqq* and God's creative activity. He likes to quote the verse, “Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation, then guided” (20:50). He interprets this to mean that the created nature given by God to each thing is its *ḥaqq*—that is, its reality, truth, appropriateness, and worthiness. In other words, everything has been created exactly as it should and must be. Moreover, God calls upon his servants to recognize the *ḥaqq* of things. Here Ibn 'Arabi quotes a well-known *ḥadīth*. In a typical version, it reads as follows:

Your soul [*nafs*] has a *ḥaqq* against you, your Lord has a *ḥaqq* against you, your guest has a *ḥaqq* against you, and your spouse has a *ḥaqq* against you; so give to each that has a *ḥaqq* its *ḥaqq*.

In Ibn 'Arabi's reading, the command “give to each that has a *ḥaqq* its *ḥaqq*” is universal. It is not limited to the specific instances mentioned in the various versions of this *ḥadīth*. The Koran tells us repeatedly that God created all things with *ḥaqq*. Hence, all things have *ḥaqq*s against us, conditional upon our coming into some sort of relationship with them.

In speaking about the *ḥaqq* of things Ibn 'Arabi and others have in mind their objective truth and actual reality, but they also want to highlight the proper human response to that truth and reality. If we look at persons or things in terms of the role that God has given them in creation, each of them has a *ḥaqq*, a “right,” an inherent claim on truth and reality and an appropriate role to play in the economy of the universe. But, if we look at ourselves vis-à-vis those things, we see that they have *ḥaqq*s “upon us” (*alaynā*), which is to say that we have responsibilities toward them. God, who is the Truth and Reality that establishes all things, demands that we respond to each thing appropriately and rightly.

The Koran often uses the word *ḥaqq* as the opposite of *bāṭil*, which can be translated as unreal, false, null, vain, and inappropriate, unworthy. Just as God has created all things in accordance with *ḥaqq*, so also, “We have not created heaven, earth, and what is between the two as *bāṭil*” (38:27). In other words, nothing in God's creation is unreal and false, nothing is unworthy and inappropriate. All things are just as they must be, according to God's standards of wisdom and justice.

Of course, there is one partial exception to the rule of universal appropriateness, and that is human beings. Although God has created human beings as they are, with all their faults and inadequacies, he has also given them free-will and responsibility, and he calls upon them to overcome their shortcomings. Inasmuch as they do not follow his call freely, they are not living up to their Lord's *ḥaqq* upon them. One of the several verses that refers to this point is 22:18: “Do you not see how to God prostrate themselves all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and *many* of mankind?”

In other words, all things in the universe acknowledge God as *ḥaqq* and accept the responsibility of being what they are. By their very situation in the cosmos, they recognize God's truth and reality and give him what is due to him. Only human beings, because of their peculiar situation, are able to refuse to give God, people, and things their *ḥaqq*s.

In order to give everything its *ḥaqq*, people must discern the *ḥaqq*. They must not imagine that anything, in itself, is unreal, false, vain, and inappropriate. No creature is in fact *bāṭil*. It is human beings who see things wrongly and fail to discern their *ḥaqq*. The Koran tells us, “Do not garb the *ḥaqq* with the *bāṭil*, and do not conceal the *ḥaqq* knowingly” (2:42). In this way of looking at things, the difficulties, inanities, and falsities that people face in the natural world, society, and themselves go back to their inability to see things as they are. The teachings of Rumi and many other Sufis focus on overcoming this failure to discern the *ḥaqq*, which all too often derives from a wilful and conscious refusal to acknowledge God's unity and its consequences.

Rumi's teachings—as he often tells us—confirm the messages of the prophets, who address people in the measure of their understanding. “We have never sent a messenger except in the tongue of his people, so that he may explain to

them" (Koran 14:4). By and large people are created in such a way that, at the beginning at least, they fail to see the *ḥaqq* of things and are not able to tell the difference between *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil*. The prophets provide discernment between true and false, right and wrong, *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil*. Everything in creation has a *ḥaqq*, but even Muhammad used to ask God to show him things as they are. The Koran itself tells him (and, by extension, everyone) to pray, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (20:114). It would be absurd to think that this means that people should ask God to increase their knowledge of physics, engineering, and sociology. What is at issue is knowledge of the way things really are and of the proper ways of responding to our own existential situation.

God sent the prophets, then, to provide discernment between *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil* and to show how to act in conformity with the *ḥaqq*. As the Koran puts it, "God desires to realize the *ḥaqq* [*yuhiqqa'l-ḥaqq*] with His words" (8:7). The passage continues by saying that realizing the *ḥaqq* goes hand in hand with "nullifying the *bāṭil*" (*yubṭila'l- bāṭil*, 8:8). In other words, people must recognize that they understand things wrongly, and they also must strive to acquire a correct vision of the way things are.

Rectifying one's vision entails seeing things as transparent to the signs and activities of God. People must see the *noumena* that lie beyond the phenomena. They should strive to cross over from the outward to the inward, from the form to the meaning, from the surface to the interior, from the material object to the reality. This demands acknowledging that everything commonly perceived as *bāṭil* can only be understood properly when its *ḥaqq* is discerned. The very fact that we often recognize falsehood and wrongness proves that the *ḥaqq* is always there. As Rumi puts it,

Nothing *bāṭil* appears without the *ḥaqq*—
 the fool takes the counterfeit because of the scent of gold.
 If there were no genuine currency in the world
 who would be able to use the counterfeit? . . .
 So, don't say that all these traps are *bāṭil*—
bāṭil is the heart's trap because of the scent of *ḥaqq*. (II 2928-29, 33)

It perhaps needs to be pointed out that seeing things as they are is by no means the same as seeing all things as one. Sufis who aim at realization recognize that the vision of the oneness of all things can be a dangerous state of intoxication—even if it is better than the sobriety that fails to recognize that "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Qur'an 2:115). Those Sufis and theologians who criticized the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, "the unity of being," were doing so because they understood it to signify a drunken vision that "All is He" (*hama ūst*) without the necessary discernment between *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil*. As Ibn 'Arabi often points out, one must see God's face in all things, but one must also know that every face of God is unique. God discloses his face in things with infinite diversity. It is foolhardy and dangerous to confuse the wrathful face of God with the merciful face, the misleading face with the guiding face. Each of the infinite disclosures of God's face has a *ḥaqq*, and each demands a unique response from those who encounter it.

Rumi frequently speaks the language of intoxication, but he also reminds us that this is not a mind-numbing intoxication that negates the real differences among things. It is in fact a liberating vision of the true situation of things, and it only appears as intoxication when compared with the "sobriety" of worldly people, a sobriety that we nowadays often call "common sense" or "objectivity." The sober are stuck in their "partial intellects" (*'aql juzwī*) and unable to see with the light of God. In contrast, the drunk "are mounted like kings on the intellect of intellect" (III 2527).

In the traditional Islamic view as voiced by Rumi, the prophets and the saints saw God's face in all things, but they always differentiated between *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil*, right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate. They knew that everything has a *ḥaqq* and manifests the Absolute *ḥaqq*, but they also knew that most people are overcome by *bāṭil* and cannot see the *ḥaqq* of things. Their own role was to instruct people to perceive and act correctly. They saw discernment as an utter necessity for progress on the path to God. As Rumi writes,

He who says that all is *ḥaqq* is a fool,
 and he who says that all is *bāṭil* is a wretch. (II 2942)

In sum, for the Sufi tradition, *taḥqīq* or realization was the process of discerning between true and the false, real and unreal, worthy and unworthy. It demanded understanding the actual situation of things and giving everything exactly what is due to it in keeping with God's wisdom, compassion, and justice. It required differentiating between *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil* and overcoming the *bāṭil*. It necessitated seeing creation just as it is—as the absolute *ḥaqq* has created it, with everything in its proper and worthy place. It meant acting in the appropriate manner toward God, people, and things. It

demanded recognizing the rights of all and fulfilling one's responsibilities toward God and others.

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Rumi uses the words *taḥqīq* (and its derivative *muḥaqqiq*) only a few dozen times. When he does, he employs it as the opposite of *taqlīd*, a word that he uses much more commonly. Simply put, *taqlīd* is to receive knowledge by hearsay. It is not to know the truth of something for oneself, but rather to accept something as true because someone says it is. It is to believe what one hears from teachers, parents, friends, experts, authorities, books, and so on. It is to take one's knowledge from others and not from the source of knowledge, which is the intelligence within us, the light of God.

Taqlīd is not necessarily a bad thing. In the juridical sense, as the opposite of *ijtihād*, it is necessary and beneficial. In the intellectual sense, it is a preparatory step for *taḥqīq*. One accepts knowledge of things from God and the prophets on the basis of hearsay. However, a sound intelligence that has heard from the prophets that "There is no god but God" knows intuitively and with certainty that this is the truth of things. Here the tradition often speaks of *fiṭrah*, the innate human capacity to discern the *ḥaqq*. But, as long as knowledge stays on the level of rote learning, as long as the *fiṭrah* does not awaken, one cannot see the *ḥaqq*.

It should be obvious that the goal of learning is not simply to gather information. Rather, it is to understand things correctly and to act appropriately. To do so one must understand all things relative to the Absolute *ḥaqq*, the Infinite Reality that has created them. In other words, the message encapsulated in the concept of *taḥqīq* is that nothing can be understood truly, rightly, and properly if it is not understood in relation to God, and no activity can be correctly performed if one does not perceive the *ḥaqq* of the situation. Explaining how it is possible to achieve such *taḥqīq* is precisely what the *Mathnawī* is all about.

Knowing and doing by way of imitation is the common lot of mankind. One cannot escape from imitation except by harnessing it to proper ends, that is, by imitating the prophets and saints, who have been shown the way to the Real. If one does this correctly and sincerely, one may be shown the way to realization—which, in any case, has many degrees. What is certain is that true knowledge cannot be achieved without the help of a true teacher. Like other Sufis, Rumi insists upon the necessity of guides on the path to the Real. In one passage, he refers to the guides as "companions." He says,

*You must receive so much influence from good companions
that you draw water from the ocean that is not influenced.
Know that the first influence to fall upon you is taqlīd.
When it becomes continuous, it turns into taḥqīq.
Until you reach taḥqīq, don't break off from the companions—
don't break off from the shell until the drop becomes a pearl! (V 566-68)*

Realization in the full sense of the word is the knowledge and practice achieved by the prophets and the great saints. Imitation is the share of the rest of us, who think and act like children. As Rumi says,

How can children on the path have the thoughts of Men?
How can their imaginings be compared with true *taḥqīq*?
Children think of nurses and milk,
raisins and walnuts, crying and weeping.
Imitators are like sick children,
even if they offer subtle arguments and proofs. (V 1287-89)

Realization, then, is to know things as they really are and to act appropriately. Knowing things as they are is achieved by the innate capacity of the human spirit, a capacity that the tradition calls *'aql*, "intellect" or "intelligence." Imitators speak of things they have heard about, but realizers speak of things that they know firsthand. Imitators seek for knowledge from outside, but realizers find it bubbling up in their own hearts. When Rumi criticizes second-hand knowledge, he is telling us that everyone should try to find the seeing heart.

*You have eyes, look with your own eyes.
Don't look with the eyes of an uninformed fool.
You have ears, listen with your own ears.
Why be in pawn to the ears of blockheads?*

*Make vision [nazar] your practice, without taqlid—
think in accordance with your own intellect. (VI 3342-44)*

It might be asked why I am ignoring the primary role that Rumi accords to love. First, there is no need to remind anyone of love's importance in Rumi's teachings. And second, too many interpreters have taken advantage of its importance to belittle the role that Rumi gives to discernment and intelligence. For him, love and realized knowledge go hand in hand. One cannot love God without knowing the *ḥaqq* of things, and one cannot see things as they are without loving God. It is the fire of love that transmutes imitative knowledge into realized knowledge. Love, as Rumi says, "burns away everything except the everlasting Beloved" (V 588). Love allows one to see the face of the Absolute *ḥaqq* in every relative *ḥaqq*.

Love makes the wine of *taḥqīq* boil—
love is the hidden *saki* of the truly sincere. (III 4742)

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It is curious that most people who talk about *taqlid* nowadays do so only in the context of the transmitted sciences. Hence, they talk as if the issue were simply blind imitation of the religious teachers of the past. They focus on jurisprudence and the Sharī'ah, as if all the failings of Islamic societies can be solved by adjusting the law to fit the modern world. Rumi, in contrast, had no objections to the received Sharī'ah, even if he did not have any great respect for the ordinary run of 'ulama.

However this may be, Rumi was not talking about the "branches of the religion" (*furū'al-dīn*)—the commands and prohibitions that pertain to ritual and society and that are addressed in questions of *ijtihād*. Rather, as Rumi tells us right at the beginning of the *Mathnawī*, he was explaining what he calls "the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion" (*usūl usūl al-dīn*)—right faith, right understanding, right intention, right love.

In order to understand things as they are and have correct faith in what one understands, one must grasp the nature of the absolute and infinite *ḥaqq* and discern its ramifications. As pointed out earlier, most of the ramifications of faith in God pertain to the *ghayb*, the invisible realm, which embraces pure intelligence, angelic light, the afterworld, and the unfolding of the soul's potential. Moreover, given that all concepts and ideas have a real mode of existence in the mind, even deception, illusion, and falsehood pertain to the realm of realities, though the light of *ḥaqq* has become thoroughly obscured.

Rumi, as we know, often ridicules the philosophers, but it would be a great mistake to assume that he was making a blanket criticism. His overall worldview is completely in keeping with that of the philosophical tradition. For example, he obviously agrees with the philosophers on the primacy of what they call *al-ḥaqq al-awwal*, "the First *ḥaqq*." He also shares with them the concept of *mabda' wa ma'ād*, "the Origin and the Return," the fact that all of reality emerges from the Absolute *ḥaqq*, descends to the level of the visible world, and then returns to God. His so-called "evolutionary" scheme of human development is found in several earlier philosophers, because it is simply an explanation of the stages that the soul traverses on the path of returning to God.

When Rumi does criticize philosophers, he has in mind those who rejected the necessity of prophecy or who denied the existence of the *ghayb* and accepted as true and real only what they could perceive with their own senses. This is obvious, for example, in his retelling of the story of the moaning pillar. This was a tree stump that the Prophet used as a pulpit. When he changed his pulpit, the pillar began to moan. In explaining the significance of the story, Rumi criticizes those who deny miraculous events. In doing so, he refers to the "speech of all things," a phenomenon reported by many of the Sufis (and mentioned explicitly in Qur'an 41:21). He also alludes to the common Sufi teaching that rational understanding must be complemented by unveiling or vision with the eye of the heart.

The philosopher is a denier in his thoughts and opinions—
tell him to bang his head against the wall.
*The speech of water, the speech of earth, the speech of clay—
the folk of the heart hear them all with their senses.*
*The philosopher who denies the moaning pillar
is a stranger to the senses of the saints.*
*He says that the ray of people's melancholia
brings many fantasies into their minds. . . .*

*When the heart of someone in this world has doubt and twisting
he is a hidden philosopher. (I 3280-81, 85)*

If this is Rumi's definition of a philosopher—"someone whose heart has doubt [*shakk*] and twisting [*pīchīnī*]"—then surely there are few scholars and scientists today who would fail to qualify for the title.

Another passage shows that Rumi includes philosophy in the various clever sciences that people devise in order to investigate this world, manipulate physical objects, and divert themselves from searching for the *ḥaqq* of things.

*Weaving robes embroidered with gold,
finding pearls from the bottom of the sea,
Doing the fine work of geometry and astronomy
and of the sciences of medicine and philosophy—
All these are connected with this world;
none shows the way to the top of the seventh heaven.
All these sciences are for building the stable,
which supports the existence of cows and camels.
In order to preserve the animal for a few days,
these dizzy fools name their sciences "mysteries." (IV 1515-19)*

If Rumi were here today, he would see that the predominant forms of modern knowledge are incredibly obsessed with the sciences and technologies of the stable and madly intoxicated with "mysteries" that are in fact abstruse methods for garmenting the *ḥaqq* with *bāṭil*. The first characteristic of all such knowledge is that it ignores the *ḥaqq* of what is investigated, explained, and utilized. The *ḥaqq* of things can only be determined by placing things in the total context of reality, and this means understanding them as they truly are, not as they are perceived in isolation from their roots in Being, or from their situation in the global context of the Origin and the Return.

It needs to be remembered that achieving *taḥqīq* is by no means simply a cognitive activity. One must see things as they are, but one must also "give to each that has a *ḥaqq* its *ḥaqq* ." All true and real knowledge of reality entails responsibility toward the Creator and his creatures. When the very act of knowing does not make moral and ethical claims upon the knower, this is proof that the knower has failed to grasp the truth of the situation and has garmented the *ḥaqq* with the *bāṭil*.

The fact that "the sciences of the stable" focus on *bāṭil* does not mean that they are false, untrue, unreal, and vain in every respect. It means that they are *bāṭil* in respect of situating things in their total context and in respect of human responsibilities toward God, other creatures, and the soul. In other words, such knowledge is truncated and superficial. It is extremely useful, of course, for getting things done—after all, the empirical validity of such sciences is not at issue. Nonetheless, the sciences and technologies of the stable cannot tell us if the things that get done should get done or if they should rather be left undone. Only by knowing the *ḥaqq* of something—what is rightfully due to it in the total context of the Real—can one answer the question of shoulds and oughts.

In other words, from the standpoint of Rumi and the tradition of *taḥqīq*, modern knowledge is inherently short-sighted. It is innately antagonistic to *taḥqīq*, which means that it is essentially conducive to *taqlīd*. I would go as far as to say that the most striking feature of modern science and learning is precisely that they are explicitly and proudly built upon *taqlīd*. They are cumulative by definition. There are no realizers, because there can be no realizers when the *ḥaqq* of things is not addressed. Modern knowledge depends entirely on information and theories provided by earlier scientists and scholars. It is not considered remotely possible that one can find the true reality of things in the knowing self, as *taḥqīq* demands. For post-modern scholarship, which follows modern thought to its inevitable conclusions, the very suggestion that there may be something worthy of the name *ḥaqq* is absurd.

One of the ironies of the Islamic world today is that the word used for scientific "research" is often *taḥqīq*. For Rumi, this is an utter inversion of language, because modern knowledge is based upon *taqlīd*, and its practitioners are imitators. The empirical knowledge that an individual scientist gains can only be based on the theories and experiments of earlier scientists. He may think he is verifying it and thereby verifying the findings of their predecessors, but his knowledge is built upon an initial misperception of the nature of things, the failure to grasp that phenomena can only be manifestations of the *noumena* that are known and determined by the Absolute *ḥaqq*. There can be no going back to the very origin of knowledge and understanding—which is the intellect or heart that lies at the very root of the soul—because modern-day

researchers seek for knowledge outside themselves. They have no possible access, as researchers, to the realm of the Real. They do not and cannot, as scholars and scientists, know the self that knows.

Taqlīd, then, is the primary characteristic of modern knowledge. Moreover, *taqlīd* has degrees, just as *tahqīq* has degrees. A zoologist's *taqlīd* in his knowledge of fauna is less than that of a student reading a textbook, or an engineer learning from a television documentary. As for information drawn from the Internet, what can be said about "virtual" knowledge that is indistinguishable from illusion?

The point I want to make, then, is that once we look deeply into Rumi's teachings and get beyond the sentimentalities that are too often presented in his name, we will see that he has a rather harsh message for modern man. He is saying that not only the general public, but also the experts, scientists, specialists, and scholars, who are supposed to know what they are talking about, are in fact happily singing the song, *khar biraft u khar biraft u khar biraft*. The donkeys of all of us have been sold, and we are being entertained by the proceeds. We revel in our *taqlīd*, singing songs that we don't understand. We imagine that we know so much more than our benighted ancestors. We no longer grasp the significance of our own embodiment. We live in *bāṭil*. Not only do we fail to see the *ḥaqq* of the world and our own souls, but we even deny that anything at all can have a *ḥaqq*. We are satisfied with the information fed to us by schools, governments, and the media. We accept all our knowledge on the basis of hearsay, faith, and blind imitation. Our only attempt at *tahqīq* is to prefer some sources over other sources (let's say, the *The Guardian* over the tabloids). We are completely unaware that we are *muqallids*—not imitators of the prophets and saints, but of other imitators like ourselves. It is only a matter of time before we wake up and begin to lament, *daw sad la'nat bar in taqlīd bād*—"two hundred curses on that imitation!"

The goal of Rumi's path of realization is to know the *ḥaqq* of one's own selfhood and thereby to know the *ḥaqq* of God, society, and the world. It is to know these with a certainty that bubbles up from the source of all knowledge, the God-given intelligence that lies at the root of the soul.

I conclude with two quotations that suggest the nature of the path of *tahqīq*. The first is from Rumi's *Fīhi mā fīhi*. He is talking about the knowledge of the experts.

The worthy scholars of the time split hairs in the sciences. They have gained utmost knowledge and total comprehension of things that have nothing to do with them. What is important and closer to them than anything else is their own selfhood, but this they do not know. ^[iii]

The second quotation is from the *Maqālāt* or "sayings" of Rumi's companion, Shams i Tabrīzī.

These people study in the *madrāsahs* because, they think, "We'll become teachers, we'll run *madrāsahs*." They say, "You must do good deeds." They talk of such things in these assemblies so that they can gain positions.

Why do you study knowledge for the sake of worldly mouthfuls? This rope is for you to come out of the well, not for you to come out of this well and go into some other well.

You must dedicate yourself to knowing this: Who am I? What substance am I? Why have I come? Where am I going?

From whence is my root? At this moment what am I doing? Toward what have I turned my face? ^[iv]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

^[i] All poetry is cited from Nicholson's edition of the *Mathnawī*, my translation.

^[ii] Rumi employs the terms *ijtihād* and *mujtahid* about thirty times in the *Mathnawī*, but only once in a technical sense (III 3581). He typically uses *ijtihād* as a synonym for *jahd*, *mujāhada*, and *kūshish*—effort and struggle on the path to God—and he does not contrast it with *taqlīd*.

^[iii] *Fīhi mā fīhi*, edited by B. Furūzānfar (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1348/1969), p. 17.

[\[iv\]](#) Shams-i Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, edited by Muhammad 'Alī Muwaḥḥid (Tehran: Khwārazmī, 1369/1990), p. 178.

