

NAXOS
AudioBooks

POETRY



Jalaloddin
Rumi

The Spiritual Verses

Masnavi-ye Ma'navi
Book 1

New translation by
Alan Williams

Read by
Anton Lesser

NA446612D

1	Naynāme – The Song of the Reed	5:28
	Music: <i>Masnavi in Bayāt-e Tork</i> (Nay solo)	
2	The King and the Slave Girl	7:08
	Music: <i>Entezār</i> ‘Longing’ (Tanbour and Daf)	
3	With open arms he clasped him to his bosom...	6:32
4	He said. ‘My Lord, evacuate the house...’	5:59
5	Now when that man of foreign parts arrived...	6:34
	Music: <i>Bāztāb</i> ‘Reflection’ (Tanbour solo)	
6	The Greengrocer and the Parrot	5:59
7	Between the worlds fresh lakes and salty seas...	3:20
8	Music: <i>Rahā’i</i> ‘Freedom’ (Tanbour and Daf)	0:40
9	The Jewish King Who Killed Christians	6:09
10	There are a hundred thousand baits and traps...	4:04
11	The Caliph said to Layli, ‘Are you that one...’	6:13
12	The Christian congregation was in conflict...	5:07
13	He had no scent of Jesus’ purity...	5:47
14	That vizier hit upon another trick...	3:41
15	The crowd were saying, ‘Loophole-finding sage...’	7:14

16	That vizier shouted out from his retreat...	6:05
17	One of those leaders of the church stepped forward...	5:53
	Music: <i>Tanha'i</i> 'Solitude' (Tanbour solo)	
18	The Lion, The Hare and the Hunted Animals	5:51
19	In unison they shouted out to him...	7:13
20	These words go on for ever — quiet please...	5:54
21	The hare made much delay in going forth...	5:26
22	The lion on fire with anger and in frenzy...	6:04
23	Now when he neared the well the lion saw...	6:19
24	The lion saw himself inside the well...	6:52
25	Prelude to the Merchant and the Parrot	3:43
	Music: <i>Raqs-e mast</i> 'Dance of the intoxicated' (Tanbour and Daf)	
26	The Merchant and the Parrot	7:24
27	The merchant finished all his merchandising...	4:58
28	That bird heard what had happened to that parrot...	7:26
29	With a hundred loving looks I sought His heart...	6:33
30	It's dawn, O dawn and refuge of the dawn...	5:17
31	Music: <i>Showq-e vasl</i> 'Joy of union with the Beloved' (Tanbour and Daf)	1:07

32	All this we've said, yet it is preparation...	4:26
33	The Old Harpist	6:16
	Music: <i>Masnavi in Esfahan</i> (Nay solo)	
34	Go back and hear the plight of the musician...	8:06
35	Music: <i>Samā'</i> 'Ecstasy' (Tanbour and Daf)	1:13
36	The Caliph and the Poor Bedouin	6:16
37	The night has passed, and morning's come, Tamar...	4:16
38	'Wife, are you woman or a man of woe...?'	6:17
39	Now when the wife saw him so bold and tough...	6:34
40	A man of candid heart would hope to find...	8:21
41	'A sun has shone upon us,' said the wife.	4:15
42	The husband said, 'Oh yes, seal up the pitcher...'	6:09
43	He now produced the pitcher full of water...	4:42
44	The caliph saw and heard about his plight...	8:03
45	Music: <i>Tolu'</i> 'Dawn' (Tanbour and Daf)	1:25
46	The Qazvini and the Tattooist	4:06
47	Music: <i>Showq</i> 'Joy' (Tanbour and Daf)	0:36
48	The Wolf and the Fox Attend the Lion on a Hunt	5:23

49	The headstrong lion ripped the wolf's head off...	5:58
50	Music: <i>Ettehād</i> 'Union' (Tanbour and Daf)	1:06
51	A Fellow Who Knocked at a Friend's Door	5:44
52	Music: <i>Amvāj</i> 'Waves' (Tanbour and Daf)	0:48
53	The Deaf Man and his Sick Neighbour	4:59
54	The Greek and Chinese Painters	5:02
	Music: <i>Ābshār</i> 'Waterfall' (Tanbour and Daf)	
55	Music: <i>Masnavi in Shoor Beshnow in nay</i> 'Listen to this reed' (Nay solo)	1:29

Total time: 4:44:07

Nay (Persian reed flute) Shahoo Andalibi
Tanbour (Persian lute) Arash Moradi
Daf (Persian frame-drum) Fariborz Kiani

Jalaloddin Rumi

The Spiritual Verses

Masnavi-ye Ma'navi Book 1

The Sufi poet **Jalaloddin Rumi** was born in 1207 in a small town near Balkh in present-day Afghanistan. His family had to flee the advancing Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan who by 1220 had devastated Balkh and Samarqand, the cities of Rumi's childhood. Rumi's family settled eventually in Konya, in central Anatolia (now in modern Turkey), in a province that was still known as 'Rum' (Rome/Byzantium) as it had only recently been conquered by the Muslim Seljuqs. Rumi is now claimed by several nations as *their own* poet – Afghanistan (because he was born in that region), Iran (because he wrote in Persian) where he is known as Mowlana Balkhi ('Our Master of Balkh'), and Turkey (because he spent most of his life in Konya, Turkey) where he is known as Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi. Nowadays, as UNESCO designates 2007

the Year of Rumi in his 800th anniversary year, he is also claimed by the world and is known as Rumi.

Rumi's father Bahaoddin Valad was a learned religious scholar and Sufi (a follower of the spiritual path of Islam), and Rumi himself was educated to a high level in Aleppo and Damascus. There he was taught by the foremost scholars and Sufis of the time, including, it is said, the great mystical philosopher and visionary Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. Rumi succeeded his father at a *madrase* (college) in Konya but continued to undergo a lifelong spiritual education under a series of teachers. The most intense period of Rumi's life began in 1244 when he met Shamsoddin of Tabriz, a deeply learned scholar and wandering mystical adept of the highest attainment. Shamsoddin was in his sixties when he arrived in Konya:

Rumi spent a great deal of time with him for four years until Shamsoddin disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived in Rumi's life. Shamsoddin had recognized early on that Rumi was destined to exceed his own spiritual attainment on the Sufi path. Rumi had already become famous for his composition of a large body of thousands of lines of sublime lyric poetry which is collectively known as the *Divan of Shams of Tabriz*, by which Rumi pays his teacher the ultimate compliment of surrendering his very own name. In addition to his *Masnavi*, Rumi also wrote several prose works, of talks, letters and sermons. It is to the *Masnavi*, however, that we turn for an outpouring of Rumi's most mature and sustained mystical teaching.

The ***Masnavi-ye Ma'navi 'The Spiritual Verses'*** is the longest and most celebrated mystical poem in Persian. Written in the 1260s, the *Masnavi* has had more influence in Islamic culture than any other work except the *Qur'an*, indeed it was dubbed 'the *Qur'an* in the Persian tongue' by the 15th century poet

Jami. It is written in six books totalling some 26,000 couplets, of which the first book (of 4,018 couplets) is featured in abridgement in this recording. The *Masnavi* is a work of enormous proportions and spiritual dimensions, but its purpose is ineffably singular: to enable the reader and listener to progress to the ultimate goal of union with God. For Rumi and the particular Sufi tradition to which he belonged, God is known primarily through, indeed God *is*, the source and quintessence of love. The human heart must be opened to perceive this ultimate and all-powerful love with the 'eye of the heart'. What blinds this inner eye is the self (Persian and Arabic *nafs*) that keeps us locked in the prison of our sensual nature and restricts growth to our full potential as human beings. Rumi's *Masnavi* engages directly with every new reader and listener to coax them to think and feel beyond the sensual world of appearance: the stated goal is that in the mirror of the heart, we come to reflect the beauty and perfections of God in the world.

As I have explained in the

Introduction to my full translation of the first book of this great poem,¹ the *Masnavi* is a polyphonic composition, like a stage drama of many voices. Yet it has no framing plot. Its many stories are all a *plot*, i.e. a strategy to hook our imagination and take it somewhere beyond itself. Rumi's stories are taken from countless sources – from scripture, literature and folk tales – but in each he quickly subverts the narrative as he transports the listener to his own purposes. I have described the *Masnavi* as constantly spiralling within a sevenfold register of 'voices'. These are all addressed to you (the listener) and You (God). The shifting of perspectives through the changing of voices is virtually seamless: the effect is that, having lulled us into his stories, Rumi breaks off into ever-intensifying meanings, which we absorb as if by osmosis. The seven principal voices, like the notes of an octave, are as follows

The *authorial* voice is one we hear most clearly in passages such as **The Song of the Reed** and the central discourse (see CD 3 track 6) – this voice

resonates with the authority of the *pir* or Sufi elder and addresses You, God, and you, all of humankind.

The *storyteller* voice begins each of the twelve stories in this recording – it is lively and witty, but soon may modulate into the next voice. It is always interrupted by one of the following voices.

The *analogical* voice seems to distract from the narrative, but in fact Rumi is here grabbing examples out of thin air to illustrate his meaning.

The voice of *speech and dialogue*: these are the voices of the many characters who populate his stories. Most crucially, in this voice, Rumi is easily able to slip into the next voice.

The voice of *moral reflection* is identifiable by its chiding tone and imperative mood. Most often, however it is only a means of transition into the *next* voice, which for Rumi's readers and listeners is the most sought after.

The voice of *spiritual reflection*: this voice is addressed to God on a 'vertical' trajectory of flight from this limited world to absorption in the ecstatic state

beyond. It is as if each couplet is no sooner pronounced than it is expendable and replaced, like an impassioned cry or plea as if the poet is drowning or soaring to express the passion he feels for the divine Beloved. Inevitably this voice falls into silence.

The last principal voice I identify in the cycle I call *hiatus*, for it is a point of *aporia* or impasse, beyond which one cannot speak outwardly. It signals the limit of Rumi's discourse in words and the beginning of the listener's experience of silence. As he says just a few lines after he has begun the *Masnavi*:

*The raw can't grasp the state
of one who's cooked,
so this discussion must be brief –
farewell!*

THIS ABRIDGEMENT

This abbreviated version of the poem is a reduction from over 80,000 to 32,000 words. Twelve stories from the first book have been included, including one of the longest in the whole *Masnavi*, namely, The Caliph and the Bedouin. Some of the

stories that do not appear were excluded because their reference and subject matter would be obscure to an audience unfamiliar with the *Qur'an*. However, in the remaining twelve I have not filleted out the 'difficult passages' from the stories, but tried to allow Rumi's own didactic, polyphonic structure to remain intact.

Notes by Alan Williams

© Spiritual Verses by Rumi translated by Alan Williams

¹ Alan Williams, *Rumi Spiritual Verses, The First Book of the Masnavi-ye Ma'navi*, London and New York: Penguin Classics 2006.



One of this country's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** has worked extensively at the National theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, where, over the years, he has played many of the principal roles, including Romeo, Troilus, Petruchio and Richard III. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen*, and most recently, *Miss Potter*. A familiar voice on radio, he has been involved in countless plays and recordings, and has become particularly associated with his award winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Masnavi-ye Ma'navi Book 1

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Rumi's *Spiritual Verses*, is the greatest mystical poem in Islamic culture and of all time. Rumi tells of our human separation from reality, from love and from truth. He shows how love – neither erotic nor sentimental but divine, by which the universe is held together – enlightens ignorance and dissolves suffering. The first book of the *Masnavi* is the key to the whole work: it moves from simple, amusing tales into realms unimaginable, but wholly familiar to the human heart.

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