

## The Call of the Reed

The first eighteen couplets of the great Masnevi of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi provided the inspiration for the following tribute, which is neither a translation nor interpretation of the Persian original. I am indebted mostly to R.A. Nicholson for his scholarly prose translation but have primarily tried to let the 'sense' of the poem speak for itself, albeit in rhyming English. The 'sound sense' of the original Persian has nevertheless been much in my mind. If Mevlana accepts this little effort I will feel that is justification enough for the exercise.

In the latter part of the verses it seemed to me that Mevlana was making reference to his relationship with his beloved Shams and I have allowed that to come through. I have no idea whether there is any scholarly justification for this, or indeed for any of the sense I have made of the various couplets, nevertheless I found a certain mystical trueness in it which I have tried to convey. This apology should be briefer than the verses – so here they are.

(nb. I have made some slight alterations from the audio version)

Hear a story, in its sounds, of the Ney's  
Need for its home-grounds; it says -

*"My separation a longing need does start,  
In every man and woman's heart.*

*I seek one so emptied by my cry,  
My pain becomes ecstatic sigh.*

*Manifest in each soul's becoming,  
Is the desire for its homecoming.*

*My song in sorrow and in joy, finds  
A response, in all kinds of minds;*

*Each one formed its own view,  
None sought in me what is true.*

*My secret is clearly manifest within,  
But to find it eye and ear cannot begin.*

*The outer senses perceive themselves alone,  
The light within by them cannot be known."*

This *air* of the reed, it is really fire,  
To know this, let self-existence expire.

This fire is love's spirit, in sound;  
Loves passion, in love's wine is found.

A loved one lost – then the heart's veil parted,  
Once the the reed's piercing call it started.

Whoever saw anything like the reed?  
A poison and a cure;  
Whoever saw passion in a lover's need,  
so desperate or pure?

It speaks of the lover's way; heart drenched in blood.  
It speaks of Majnun's way; of intense lover hood.

Only that one *not* by senses bound,  
Could hear its sentences, in its sound.

Those days have long departed,  
Leaving behind the broken hearted.

Well let them go; if *you* remain,  
We will not ever be parted again.

A little must suffice he who, in the sea,  
knows not swimming;  
Or he who, from the table of divinity,  
eats not when fasting.

Rawness knows not ripeness – in this no harm;  
It means therefore I must be brief – as-salaam!