

*Beyond Dogma: Rumi's Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories*. New York: Oxford University 2012. Hardcover, 214 pages, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-19-536923-6. US \$49.95.

*Review and rebuttal by Ibrahim Gamard*

The author is a scholar at Rutgers University who has made excellent and very readable English translations (in rhymed couplets and iambic pentameters) of Mawlana Rumi's *Mathnawi* (Books One and Two; Book Three is to be published soon).

Although the book purports to be a study of Rumi's views about Sufi sainthood (*walāya*), the main thrust is to gather support for the author's own extreme Sufi views; as a result, the book has a polemical and subversive tone. Mojaddedi makes radical interpretations of Rumi's teaching that saints (*awliyā*) may receive divine wisdom from God, as do Prophets. Over and over again, he asserts that Rumi saw little or no difference between the saints and the Prophets. He claims that the saints, or Friends of God, can receive the same divine communication as the Prophets.

While he admits that there is a lack of "support from Rumi's corpus of writings for the interpretation that he believed in the continuation of Prophethood in all its aspects, one can nonetheless find plenty of corroboration for his belief in the continuity of divine communication of the highest kind, even chronologically after Muhammad's Qur'an, and this appears to be the key characteristic of Prophethood from his perspective." (p. 73) In other words, he does not directly claim that Rumi believed that saints may receive every aspect of Prophethood (*nubuwwat*), such as a new revelation of scripture containing rulings and commands (*aḥkām*) or a new set of religious laws (*sharī'ah*) after the Islamic Shariah. Nevertheless, he tries to undermine the Islamic belief in the end of prophecy:<sup>1</sup>

As Johanan Friedman has shown through his extensive research into the relevant early Islamic sources, the belief that "Seal of the Prophets" (*Khātim* [or *Khātam*] *al-nabiyīn*) means that Muhammad was the final Prophet took as long as three centuries to become widely established in all its dimensions. . . . Nonetheless, it had indeed become widely established already long before Rumi's time, so for the present purposes what is important to understand are the factors behind such a theory of finality, which seems ostensibly to be going against the grain of so many aspects of the Qur'anic worldview, and in particular the mystical emphasis on continual communication between God and humanity. . . . At the same time, one cannot help but agree with Friedman that this closure of Prophethood contrasts jarringly with the emphasis in the Qur'an on Prophethood being a virtually indispensable cyclic process, a message that qualifies it as arguably the most universalist of the holy scriptures of the Abrahamic religions. (pp. 43, 45)

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<sup>1</sup> Johanan Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

In the early centuries of Sufism, some Sufis claimed that the Sufi saints could be higher in their attainments of divine knowledge and spiritual stations than the Prophets. As Mojaddedi explains well in his book, a number of early Sufi manuals (written by Kharrāz d. 286/899, Ḥakīm Tirmidhī d. ca. 300/910, Sarraḥ d. 378/988, Kalābādhī d. 380s/990s, Qushayrī d. 465/1072, and Hujwīrī d. 467/1075) sought to deny, with varying success, that saints could be superior to Prophets because of their mystical attainments.

As a result, during the centuries since, Sufis have generally accepted that a Prophet (*nabī*, *rasūl*) may receive “revelation” (*waḥy*) while a saint or friend (of God) (*walī*) may receive a lesser kind: “inspiration” (*ilhām*). Similarly, a Prophet may manifest “miracles” (*mu‘jizāt*), while a saint may manifest a lesser kind: “wonders” (*karāmāt*). Based on his view that Rumi “teaches that there is no substantial distinction between the Prophets and Friends of God” (p. 165), Mojaddedi rejects the long-established Sufi view that the Prophets have a higher rank than the saints. As a result, he adopts the term “divine communication” in preference to “revelation” and “inspiration” (p. 185). Then after blurring the distinction, he asserts that, in Rumi’s view, “mystics who are not classified as Prophets nonetheless also receive direct communication from Him. For fully fledged Friends of God, including himself of course, Rumi considers this to be the very same kind of divine communication that Prophets receive, no less than God’s speech (*kalām Allāh*).” (pp. 160-61) He complains about the “theological sealing” (p. 44), the “theory of finality” of Prophethood (p. 43), and “the weight of the dogma in Islam that Muhammad is the last of the Prophets and can never be surpassed.” (p. 42) He blames the juridico-theological scholars for developing this dogma:

The unsurpassability of Muhammad’s Prophethood together with divine communication of the Qur’an’s exclusive category served as basic ingredients in the process of making immutable his law (*sharī‘a*), as interpreted by religious scholars. The eventual theological sealing would have both relegated the legal opinions of Muhammad’s successors to a subordinate level of authority and at the same time eliminated the possibility of a subsequent individual abrogating his shariah by means of further divine communication (*waḥy*).” (pp. 44-45)

Mojaddedi refers to “Rumi’s frequent pairing of Prophets and God’s Friends without making any distinctions.” (p. 33) However, sometimes Rumi does this for the sake of poetic praise and rhyme, as in the following example: “He spat on ‘Alī’s face (*dar rūy-i ‘alī*), the pride of every Prophet and every saint (*har nabī-y-u har walī*).” (*Mathnawī* I:3723) At other times the pairing may appear to indicate “equality” of Prophet and saint; however, Rumi’s very use of two categories of spiritual people does indicate a distinction, as in the following: “Every Prophet and every saint has a path, but it brings (one) to God; all (these paths) are one.” (*Math.* I:3086)

Mojaddedi is also critical of Rumi scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel,<sup>2</sup> “where she asserts that Prophets exclusively represent for Rumi the highest point of spiritual development” (p. 40), and Franklin Lewis<sup>3</sup> for asserting: “The power of the Friends of God are of an order just below those of the Prophets.” (p. 41)

He mentions Rumi’s famous treatment of the Qur’anic story which recounts the meeting between Moses and Khidr (during which Moses questions the latter for apparently unlawful conduct), a story that Mojaddedi interprets as supporting the superiority of a Friend of God over a Prophet: “The general teaching of the story with regard to acts outside of the law is that individuals very close to God, such as Khidr, who is usually classified by Sufis as a Friend of God, act on the basis of direct communication rather than follow any legal formulations, even if that means contravening them.” (p. 94) However, Rumi does not state that Khidr was superior in rank to Moses (who, after all, is regarded in Islam as the one who spoke directly to God [kalīm Allāh]). Rather, he says: “His conduct appeared inappropriate to Moses because he did not have his (spiritual) state (*ḥāl*).” (*Math. II: 3263*) This is consistent with the Tradition (*ḥadīth*) that Moses met Khidr after God revealed to him that there was someone more knowledgeable than he. Rumi also mentions how the actions of the Prophet Muhammad were sometimes incomprehensible to people of ordinary intellect: “The spirit of revelation (*rūḥ-i waḥy*) is more hidden than the intellect because it is of the Unperceived (realm); it is from that side. The intellect of Muhammad was not hidden from anyone, (yet) his spirit of revelation was not comprehended by every soul. Since it is glorious and sublime, the spirit of revelation also has appropriate (effects that) the intellect cannot discover.” (*Math. II:3258-60*)

His interpretation of Rumi’s famous story of Moses and the Shepherd (*Math. II:1763*) is that Moses (who upbraids the shepherd for his child-like prayer) is inferior to the shepherd (who attained a lofty state of mystical absorption by the end of the story). And he views Rumi as emphasizing in the story more than just tolerance (for how people worship), but “proceeding in his commentary from a message of tolerance to an affirmation of the position of those close to God, beyond all dogma and laws.” (p. 159) He also advocates “a more inclusive definition of Islam, which embraces all movements that took inspiration from the Qur’an and Muhammad’s example, each according to its own interpretations...” (p. 167)

There have been some Sufis who used the words “inspiration” (*ilhām*) and “revelation” (*waḥy*) interchangeably. And there have been Sufis such as Rumi (and earlier Sufis mentioned by Mojaddedi) who insisted that *waḥy*, like the Mercy (*raḥmah*) of Allah, can never end; that is possible for a saint to receive certain kinds of *waḥy* because the Qur’an does not limit *waḥy* to Prophets, but mentions that the adoptive mother of Moses and the bee also received *waḥy*.

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 408.

Rumi believed that the *Mathnawi* originated from *wahy*:

It is not (unreliable like) astrology, geomancy, or dreams; (it is) the revelation of God (*wahy-i haqq*), and God knows best what is right. As an explanation, the Sufis call it the inspiration of the heart (*wahy-i del*) as a way of concealing it from the common people. Take it to be the inspiration of the heart, for that is the place for seeing Him. How can there be any mistake when the heart is aware of Him? O (true) believer, you have been seeing by the light of God; you have become safe from mistakes and blunders. (*Math. IV:1852-55*)

Here, Rumi states that the *Mathnawi* is Divinely inspired. Then, to avoid being condemned by narrower minds as claiming to have an inspiration equal to the Qur'an, he suggests that it is better to conceal this by using the Sufi term, the "inspiration of the heart." One of Mojaddedi's major contentions (p. 87) has to do with a story in Aflākī's biography (completed eighty years after Rumi's death) in which some religious scholars asked his son, "Why do they call the *Mathnawi* the Qur'an?" When he told his father that he answered them that it was a commentary (*tafsīr*) on the Qur'an, Rumi is said to have replied angrily, "Why is it not (the Qur'an)?" (*Manāqib al-‘arīfīn*, chapt. 3:204) In any case, he was not quoted as saying explicitly, "The *Mathnawi* is the Qur'an." And when he said (in the beginning of the *Mathnawi*) that it is the "revealer of the Qur'an" (*kashshāf al-qur'ān*), that means a revealer of the deep levels of meaning of the Qur'an, not just a commentary containing explanations about the Qur'an. In other words, he believed that *Mathnawi* was a kind of revelation (*wahy*) that revealed the profound meanings of the revelation (*wahy*) of Qur'an.

Most Sufis have believed that saints cannot receive revelation (*wahy*); however, some have said they can, but that it would be wise to be discrete about this view, in order to avoid misunderstandings with externalists. There is no real disagreement between Sufis and the general Muslim community (*ummah*), because Sufis (such as Rumi and the *Mawlawī*, or *Mevlevi*, order that has continued his teachings) have never claimed Prophethood (*nubbuwah*) for anyone after the Prophet Muhammad, as some sects that took inspiration from Islam have—in contradiction of the Qur'an (33:40): "but (he is) the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (*khātam al-nabiyyin*).

Rumi also said:

I am the servant of the Qur'an as long as I have life.  
I am the dust on the path of Muhammad, the Chosen one.  
If anyone quotes anything except this from my sayings,  
I am quit of him and outraged by these words.  
(*Dīvān-i kabīr*, quatrain no. 1173)

It is for this reasons (that) he has been the Seal (of the Prophets), that, in regard to his great generosity, there never was (any one) like him and there never will be. (*Math.* VI:171)

Now you should know that Muhammad is the leader and guide. As long as you don't come to Muhammad first, you won't reach us. (*Fīhi mā fīhi*, Discourse 63)

Be among the community (of believers) who are blessed by (Divine) mercy. Don't abandon the way of conduct of Muhammad, but be governed by it. (*sunnat-i aḥmad ma-hil, maḥkūm bāsh*) (*Math.* VI:483)

He mentions Rumi's story about the man who claimed to be a Prophet after Muhammad. He insinuates that Rumi's sympathetic treatment of the character shows support for the idea that there can be genuine Prophets after Muhammad. He concludes: "Rumi unambiguously asserts that Friends of God can receive the same level of divine communication as Prophets, and argues specifically that *The Masnavi* is from the same source as the Qur'an." (p. 73) However, Mojaddedi's rhymed translation ("And though the Prophet's *wahy* is not a treasure// It's not less than a bee's by any measure") obscures an important admission made by the character: "(Even if) I assume that this Prophetic revelation (of mine) is not a treasure [of divine wisdom], even so, it is not less than the inspiration of the heart (*wahy-i del*) of the bee." (*Math.* 5:1228) Also, he failed to mention that the character also claimed to be "more excellent than all of the Prophets." (5:1119) Therefore, it can be argued that the character was not seriously claiming to be a Prophet, but was a Sufi who deliberately made exaggerated and provocative claims in order to get attention for his God-given wisdom; in the story, he quickly received an audience with the king, who was willing to listen to him.

Mojaddedi also argues that the most authentic account of Rumi's first meeting with Shams-i Tabrīzī is Aflākī's story (*Manāqib*, chapt. 3:11) according to which, after being asked who was greater, Muhammad (who said, "We have not known You as You deserve to be known") or the Sufi Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī (who said, "Glory be to me! How great is my state! I am the King of kings!"),

Rumi immediately dismounted from the mule, screamed due to the awesomeness off that question, and fainted. He remained unconscious for one hour. . . . It is reported that one day Rumi said: "When Shams asked me that question, I saw a small window open on the crown of my head and smoke rise from it to the top of the Heavenly Tablets of the spirits." (Mojaddedi, p. 30)

He asserts that "this question about the Prophet and Bāyazīd has been viewed by his biographers as having so much significance for Rumi that it could not easily be substituted. It was presumably regarded as a vital aspect of his mystical perspective . . ." (p. 30) Although he

believes that this question radically shifted Rumi's views to a mystical perspective (from a theological one), he is not so bold as to assert that Rumi suddenly believed that Bāyazīd had attained a higher spiritual level than the Prophet. Instead, he intimates this by saying: “. . . although he asserts that the divine communication received by Bāyazīd is the same kind in reality as that received by the Prophet. . .” (p. 66). And he adds that Bāyazīd was Rumi's “favorite Sufi hero” (p. 67), “. . . who after all was in his view the very greatest of the past Friends of God. At the same time, however, he did not wish to acclaim anyone as being greater than the Prophet Muhammad.” (pp. 60-61) Mojaddedi does make a slight concession, in this regard: “For Rumi, Muhammad is not only mystically at least the equal of all Friends of God, but he holds a supreme rank representing the upper limit of mystical attainment.” (p. 39)

He admits that Aflākī also has a second version of the story (*Manāqib*, chapt. 4:8). (According to this version, Rumi affirmed that Muhammad is the greater, because Bāyazīd was satisfied by a single gulp (of water) and spoke from feeling satiated; whereas, for Muhammad, there was “tremendous thirst,” “thirst after thirst.”) He argues that the second version (which he implies contains a conventional religious answer to the question) is “probably later in origin” (p. 30). However, he is mistaken because this second version is in accord with an earlier version in Sepahsālār's biography (completed about forty years after Rumi died, and from which Aflākī took material for his book):

Ḥaẓrat-i Khodāwandgār answered, “Although Bāyazīd is one of the perfected saints and knowers among the attained companions of the heart, yet he held himself back when (he was) in the circle of sanctity in the known station and kept himself fixed there. The greatness and perfection of that station became revealed to him concerning the exalted qualities of his (own) station, and he declared the explanation of unification (*ittiḥād*) by these words. And although Ḥaẓrat-i Rasūlullāh—may the peace and blessings of God be upon him—traversed seventy great stations every day, such that the first had no relation to the second, when he reached the first station he expressed gratitude (to God) and he knew that it was an extensive journey. When he reached a second degree and he witnessed that it was a higher and more noble station than (the one before) it, he asked (Divine) forgiveness concerning the first level and his contentment with that station.” (*Zindagī-nāma-yi mawlānā jalāl al-dīn mawlawī*, pp. 127-28)

The earliest account is by Sham-i Tabrīzī in his *Discourses*, as recorded by his disciples:

However, I'm not talking about (Muhammad) Mustafā—(may the) peace (of God) be upon him. . . . But I'm saying (that) he is more superior in regard to those who (came) after him, and (therefore) how can I equate anyone with him? For that which has come to me beyond the acquisition of the knowledge (of religious learning), the intellect, and the toil and exertion (of the mind)—that (has come) with the blessings of following

him (*bi-barakāti mutāba‘atihi*). And the first words I spoke with (Mawlānā) were these: “But as for Abū Yazīd (al-Bistāmī), why didn’t he adhere to following (*mutāba‘at*) (the Prophet’s example) and (why) didn’t (he) say ‘Glory be to You! We have not worshipped You’ (as You deserve to be worshipped)?” Then Mawlānā knew to completion and perfection (the meaning of) those words (of the Prophet). But what was the final outcome of these words? Then his inmost consciousness made him drunk from these (words), because his inmost consciousness was cleansed (and) purified, (and) therefore (the meaning of) it became known to him. And with his drunkenness, I (also) knew the pleasure and delight of those words—for I had been neglectfully unaware of the pleasure and delight of these words. (*Maqālāt-i shams-i tabrīzi*, p. 685)

Shams was often critical of al-Bistāmī, such as in the following remarks:

God never says. . . “Glory be to me!” (In Arabic), “Glory be to me” is an expression of amazement. (But) how could God become amazed by anything? (However), if the servant says, “Glory be to You!” (then) it is correct and good. (*Maqālāt*, pp. 185-86)

It is very significant that Shams placed so much importance on “following,” meaning following the example of the behavior that was modeled by the Prophet Muhammad (called the “Sunnah” of the Prophet). Shams rejected a number of well-known Sufi masters (contemporary and past ones) because they did not follow the example of the Prophet sufficiently (and some apparently felt they were so spiritually advanced that they had little need for it). Based on this understanding, the initial meeting between Shams and Mawlānā can be seen in a new light: Shams was searching for one of the great hidden saints of God, and one of the proofs of such a person would be a humble veneration and love of the Prophet Muhammad combined with a strong commitment to following the Prophet’s pious way of life. This would be in contrast to other Sufis who made claims of receiving extraordinary spiritual favors from God but who had a lack of commitment to following the Prophet’s example.

Like many other authors, Mojaddedi holds what can be called the “old view of Shams” that is based on Aflākī’s depiction of him as a radical Sufi who was strangely dressed, offensive to others, outrageous in his behavior, and perhaps illiterate. This needs to be balanced with the “new view of Shams” that is based on his own words, as recorded by his disciples (including Rumi’s son, Sulṭān Walad): he was very well educated in the Islamic religious sciences in the Arabic language, probably had memorized the Qur’an, and was very devoted to following the example of the Prophet Muhammad’s behavior (*Sunna*). He once said:

In the beginning I didn’t sit with religious scholars; I sat with dervishes. . . . Since I have known what a dervish is and where they are, now I have a greater preference to sit with religious scholars than with

these dervishes. (This is) because religious scholars are bearing a load of hardship (in order to learn something); these others are (just) bragging, “We are dervishes.” (*Maqālāt*, p. 249)

Shams followed the Shāfi‘ī school of Sunnī religious law (*Maqālāt*, p. 182). He once expressed regret when he missed the Friday congregational prayers, as well as when he and Mawlānā were so occupied (presumably in doing spiritual exercises and discussing mystical secrets) that they missed one of the prayers at the mosque and had to make it up. (*Maqālāt*, pp. 742-43)

In contrast, Mojaddedi tries to depict both Rumi and Shams as inclined to disobey the Shariah laws of the “religious clerics.” He expresses his view of “. . . Rumi’s teaching that the friend of God is unconstrained by the Shariah or any other code of behavior, because his relationship with God is closer, and therefore at a higher level.” (p. 105) For example, he cites about Rumi, “. . . reports that he courted controversy with juristic scholars for his devotion to the wine-drinking Shams-i Tabrīzī are consistent with his own teachings on the relevance of the Shariah for the actions of the Friends of God and those aspiring to that rank.” (p. 5) He translated a story from Aflākī (*Manāqib*, chapt. 4:41) in which Rumi was asked by jurists (who sought to tarnish the reputation of Shams) whether wine was allowed or forbidden. Rumi responded: “It depends upon who drinks it, for if a flask of wine is poured into the ocean, that would not be transformed or polluted, and it would be permissible to use its water for ablutions and drinking. . . . The straightforward answer is that, if Shams al-Dīn drinks it, for him everything is permitted, since he has the overwhelming power of the ocean.” (Mojaddedi, p. 91)

This is similar to a story that Rumi told about how someone suspected a Sufi sheikh of drinking wine:

The one (disciple) said to him, “Keep aware of (your) manners! Suspicion such as this toward the great ones is no little (matter). (It is) far from him and far from those (spiritual) qualities of his that his purity should become muddied by a flood. Don’t place such false accusations upon the people of God! This is (merely) your imagination, (so) change the leaf (of paper to the other side). This is not (true, what you are saying), but (even) if it is, O land-bird, the Red Sea has no fear of (being polluted by) a corpse. (The Master) is not less than two (large) jugs or small tank (of water) so that a drop (of filth) is able to take it out of business.” (*Math.* III:3305)

However, Mojaddedi reasoned differently: “The most significant point is that Shams-i Tabrīzī was understood to drink wine—if this were not the case, the whole basis of the above anecdote would be void.” (p. 91) “Regardless of the origins, what this material conveys is Rumi’s teaching that, for a Sufi Friend of God like Shams al-Dīn, wine is permitted despite the legal formulations of scholars. . . . this implies that Rumi regarded the Friend of God as not being subject to the laws and ethical codes of the Islamic religious system.” (p. 92) However, a better



interpretation of this story is that Rumi spoke similarly as in the above quoted story: that if Shams was to drink some wine, that he was so spiritually powerful that it would miraculously not affect him. As Shams said:

Wine always overthrows a man. Inevitably, if you are not (overcome) by ten cups, you will by twelve. And if, by destiny, you can drink a large pitcher (then that will be your limit). . . . However, the fame of this is never (heard) in the world: about a man who overthrows wine; the more he drinks, the more sober (he becomes); the more (he is) drunk, the more sober (he is); he is filled up to the throat, (yet he is) like a sober man, and (one who) makes a world and a universe sober. This is amazing! And what is (also) amazing: don't you see about this person, that he has become drowned from a divine wine, that he has been completely seized (by this) wine, and his whole being has become the wine? (*Maqālāt*, pp. 181-82)

Shams also said:

I would tell (them), “Don't drink wine in front of me!” . . . . I would not be offended by the words they would say (in reply because), for me, even if go sit inside a (vat of) wine, my robe would not depart from (the ritual purity required for) the prayer (*namāz*). (So) what is the loss for me? But it was never for me, since (my) youth; I fled from it. I would see a drunk from a distance (and) I would feel a loathing, (thinking), “He will fall upon me.” (*Maqālāt*, p. 753)

Rumi was certainly very critical of externalist (*zāhirī*) Muslim scholars and clerics, because they did not appreciate the deeper spiritual meaning (*ma'nā*) of the Qur'an and the sayings (*ahādīth*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Like many prominent Sufi masters, he was a religious scholar as well as a mystic. He was born into a family of religious scholars and preachers. His father was a revered religious teacher and authority, as well as a mystic. Rumi was educated to be a religious scholar and jurist (*muftī*). However, although he may have ceased full participation in such activities during the ecstatic years that followed his meeting Shams, this does not necessarily mean that he did not engage in such afterwards during his life. As an example, Aflākī related that even during *samā'* sessions (spontaneous physical movements inspired by the singing of mystical verses and the playing of musical instruments), Rumi sometimes would write a religious legal decision (*fatwā*). (*Manāqib*, chapt. 3:250)

Rumi followed the Ḥanafī school (*madhhab*) of Sunni Islamic law. This means that his daily religious behavior was faithful to the many details of the Ḥanafī tradition of how to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Aflākī (*Manāqib*, chapt. 6:14), Rumi's close disciple, Ḥusām al-dīn Chelebi, who followed the Shāfī'ī school, expressed a wish to change to the Ḥanafī school, because that was the school his Master followed. Rumi told him to continue following his own school but to “travel our mystical teachings (*tarīqa*) and guide men on our

road of love.” This indicates that Rumi and his disciples were following the daily behavior that accorded with the Shariah. If this is seldom referred to in the early biographies of Rumi, this is probably because it was taken for granted.

At this point, it may be useful to briefly examine what some other Sufis have said about the term revelation. According to Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), only a Prophet may receive revelation (*wahy*), which comes from the emanation of the Universal Intellect (*al-‘aql al-kull*) into the sanctified soul of a Prophet, without need of learning or cogitation. Both Prophets and saints may receive inspiration (*ilhām*), which comes from the illumination of the Universal Intellect to the purified human soul; this is also called knowledge from the divine Presence (*‘ilm min ladunī*), such as the God-given knowledge of Khidr (Qur’an 18:65).<sup>4</sup> According to Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), there are different kinds of revelation (*wahy*) mentioned in the Qur’an, such as that given to the bee (16:68), to the heavens (41:12), to the earth (99:5), and to a Prophet from the descent of an angel. The revelation received by the saints is a kind of unveiling that is different than the kind of revelation received by the Prophets in the form of scriptures. The latter kind of revelation no longer occurs because there is no Prophet after Muhammad. Only the Prophets may receive “Law-giving revelation.”<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, Mojaddedi interprets Rumi in a revisionist manner in order to portray him, as not just dismissive of “juridico-theological Islam” (p. 167), but as supporting an antinomian mysticism, that is, free of the restrictions of religious laws. Mojaddedi appears to advocate (boldly suggested, but cautiously and indirectly worded) the coming of a new revelation after the Prophet Muhammad “beyond all dogma and laws” (p. 159), brought by “a subsequent individual abrogating his shariah by means of further divine communication (*wahy*).” (p. 45)

However, his interpretation is unconvincing. After all, Rumi did not claim that the *Mathnawi* superseded the Qur’an, was equal to the Qur’an, or that it was the words of God spoken directly to humanity (as is the Qur’an). Nor did he advocate ignoring the religious law (*sharī‘ah*) or teach that a Muslim saint, or friend of God, could attain all the aspects of Prophethood and supersede the Prophet Muhammad. In this regard, he surprisingly admits: “There is arguably some justification for assumptions that Rumi’s teachings insisted on deferral to religious laws and dogmas, since it is rare to encounter the open expression of the opposite view among high-profile Sufi authors living after the eleventh-century consolidation of juridico-theological Islam’s authority.” (p. 163)

He hardly mentions Shams-i Tabrīzī, except to depict him as a “wine drinking” transgressor of Islamic law. A careful reading of Shams’ *Discourses*, however, reveals that one of his major teachings was the importance of “following” the example of the Prophet Muhammad’s noble

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur’an in Classical Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 403, note 18.

conduct (*Sunna*).<sup>6</sup> Shams rejected the very type of Sufis that Mojaddedi supports: those who believed that their high level of mystical attainment freed them from the obligation to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad (such as performing the five daily prayers, fasting the month of Ramadan, and performing the Pilgrimage to Mecca).

For many centuries, Sufis have practiced courtesy (*adab*) toward the Prophets by asserting “inspiration” (*ilhām*) and avoiding the assertion of “revelation” (*wahy*), especially after al-Ghazali labored to defend Sufism from accusations of heterodoxy. However, some Sufis, such as Rumi and Ibn al-‘Arabī, did not completely follow this courtesy in their affirmations that they received knowledge directly from God. However, one should be careful not to make radical conclusions from their words about this. One should look to their conduct and the effects of their teachings on the conduct of their followers. In the case of Rumi, there was nothing heterodox and the result was a fairly orthodox Sunni Sufi order that has followed his teachings for over seven centuries. Certainly, his involvement with ecstatic poetry and “musical sessions” (*samā‘*) was controversial—but these had been the practices of Persian poets and dervishes for several centuries before his time.

Sufis have often been misunderstood, and sometimes persecuted, for centuries. Therefore, it is surprising that Mojaddedi would risk attracting greater condemnation against them by claiming that Sufis like Rumi teach that saints are the full equals of Prophets. And more surprising is his radical intimation that a Sufi mystic is capable, perhaps in our day, of receiving a new revelation that abrogates and replaces what he calls “Muhammad’s Qur’an” and the authority of the religious scholars, whose “concerns about divine communication and abiding by the Shariah were more about their own authority as interpreters of the religion than the status of Prophets, whose cycle they had effectively sealed.” (p. 164) It is also unfortunate that, in order to derive support for his own extreme views, he distorts the meanings of the words and teachings of Mawlana Rumi.

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[www.dar-al-masnavi.org](http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org)  
 (Unless otherwise stated,  
 all translations are by I.G.)

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<sup>6</sup> See the selected translations in William Chittick, *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrīzī* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2004), sec. “Following Muhammad,” pp. 68-88.