

THREE FAKE RUMI VERSES

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There are three prominent fake Rumi verses which purport to show that Jalaluddin Rumi cared little about differences between religions. These were worded by Westerners who were neither scholars nor Muslim converts and who viewed themselves as followers of “Universal Sufism,” a Western Sufi movement that teaches that anyone can be a Sufi, regardless of his or her religious or non-religious background and without any requirement to adhere to any particular religion. (However, there is little indication that Rumi believed this, as even a preliminary study of his authentic verses accurately translated will show.)

(1) “Not Christian, or Jew or Muslim, nor Hindu, Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion or cultural system.” (*The Essential Rumi* by Coleman Barks, 1993, p. 32; interpretive version, based on Nicholson’s transl. below.)

(1a) “What is to be done, O Moslems? for I do not recognise myself. I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem” (*Selected Poems from the Dîvâni Shamsi Tabrîz* by R. A. Nicholson, 1898, p. 125; translation, based on the Persian text below.)

(1b) che tadbîr ay musalmânân, ke man khûd-râ namîdân-am
na tarsâ na yahûd-am man, na gabr-am na musalmân-am

COMMENTS: These verses are not by Rumi, as proven by the fact that these are not found in the earliest Persian manuscripts of Rumi’s *Dîvân*, such as in the critical edition in ten volumes by Furûzânfar. For this reason, when A. J. Arberry re-translated the poems in Nicholson’s *Selected Poems* (in his *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (1968, 1979, 2009), he did not include the poem that contains these verses. Nicholson admitted: “The original text does not appear in any of the editions or MSS. used by me” (p. 281). Nicholson must have personally believed at the time that this poem was authentic, even though he had no manuscript authority. However, this poem is clearly a kind of forgery that pretends to be one of Rumi’s ghazals, which often end with a reference to Shams of Tabriz, as shown by the last verse (as transl. by Nicholson): “O Shamsi Tabriz, I am so drunken in this world,/ That except of drunkenness and revelry I have no tale to tell” (p. 127) [alâ ay shams-e tabrîzî chunîn mast-am dar in ‘âlam/ ke juz mastî-vu qalâshî nabâshad hîch dastân-am].

(2) “I go into the Muslim mosque and the Jewish synagogue and the Christian church and I see

one altar.” (*The Essential Rumi* by Coleman Barks, 1993, p. 346; interpretive version, based on Hastie’s transl. below.)

(2a) “See how well my turban fitteth, yet the Parsee girdle binds me; Cord and wallet I bear light:
Be not far, O be not far!/ True Parsee and true Brahman, a Christian, yet a Mussulman; Thee I
trust, Supreme by Right: Be not far, O be not far!/ In all Mosques, Pagodas, Churches I do find
one shrine alone...” (*The Festival of Spring from the Dīvān of Jelāleddīn* by William Hastie,
1903, p. 3; rhymed translation, based on the German text below.)

(2b) “Feuerdiener und Brahman, Christ und Muselman bin ich/ Du bist meine Zuversicht, sei
nicht fern, o sei nicht fern!/ In Pagoden, in Moscheen, und in Kirchen, mein Altar...” (Ghazal
version created by Friedrich Rückert, *Ghaselen*, 1819).

COMMENTS: These verses are not by Rumi, as proven by the fact that there are no equivalents found in the earliest Persian manuscripts of Rumi’s *Dīvān*, such as in the critical edition in ten volumes by Furūzānfar. These verses were, in fact, originally composed in German by Friedrich Rückert (d. 1866), who was a Persian scholar who published two books of “Rumi ghazals.” However, Rückert’s primary goal was to replicate the classical Persian ghazal structure, meter, and rhyme in German. However, he found that it was not possible to use translations of Rumi’s authentic ghazals and reproduce the ghazal structure in German at the same time. So Rückert fabricated the content, creating Oriental-sounding and Rumi-esque verses that had no equivalents in Persian.

Examples of some beginning verses (as transl. by Hastie): “I saw how Sunward soaring,
an eagle cleaved the air;/ And how in shadow sitting, there coo’d a Turtle pair.” “Awake! ‘Tis
day! Rise up O Youthful Mussulman!/ Pack quickly thy Goods and Baggage, and catch the
Caravan.” “The Pilgrims hail the Kaaba’s sacred Ground,/ When they at last the holy Fane have
found.”

In his fidelity to replicating the traditional ghazal form, in which the name of the poet is included in the final verse, Rückert used the name “Jelaleddin” -- whereas Rumi famously diverged from the traditional form by placing the name of “Shams of Tabriz” at the end of his ghazals. Here is an example: “...All their Caste Distinctions blending, where eternal Peace is Queen./ There among the Saints, the purest of all Zones, is he now found:/ Hail! All hail his memory holy: Maulānā Jelāl-ed-dīn!” [Schmelzen Kastenunterschied in deinen ew'gen Harmonien;/ Wo ist unter allen Heil'gen aller Zonen (Heil sei dir,/ Heilig mir sein Angedenken!) *Mewlana Dschelaleddin!*]

Barks’ version was quoted by Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO in a speech on the occasion of the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the birth of Mawlana

Jalaluddin Balkhi-Rumi at UNESCO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland (September 6, 2007):
“His notion of ‘unity in diversity’ is perhaps best expressed in his famous quote: ‘I go into the Muslim mosque and the Jewish synagogue and the Christian church and I see one altar.’”

(3) “Come, come, whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving, it doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, come, even if you have broken your vow a thousand times, come—come yet again, come!” (*The Last Barrier* by Reshad Feild, 1976, epigraph; interpretive version, based on a Turkish translation below.)

(3a) Gel, gel, ne olursan ol gene gel; ister kâfir, ister mecusi, ister puta tapan ol gene gel.
Bizim dergâhımız ümitsizlik dergâhı değildir; yüz kere tövbeni bozmuş olsan da gene gel.
(Turkish translation, based on the original Persian text below.)

(3b) bâz ā, bâz ā her ānche hast-ī bâz ā/ gar kâfiro-u gabr-u but-parast-ī bâz ā
īn dargah-e mā dargah-e naumīdī nīst/ Sad bār agar tauba-shikast-ī bâz ā
(Original Persian text of a quatrain (rubā’ī) believed by scholars to have been composed by Abu Sa’īd ibn Abi ‘l-Khayr, d. 1048.)

(3c) “Come back, come back, no matter what you think you are. An idol worshipper? A non-believer? Come back. This gate, no one leaves helpless. If you have broken your vows ten thousand times, come back.” (*Nobody, Son of Nobody: Poems of Shaikh Abu Saeed Abil-Kheir* by Vrage Abramian, 2001, p. 4; translation of the above text.)

COMMENTS: This quatrain was not composed by Rumi, as proven by the fact that it is not found in the earliest Persian manuscripts of Rumi’s *Dīvān*, such as in the critical edition in ten volumes by Furūzānfar. The Mevlevi scholar and translator of Rumi’s works into Turkish, Sefik Can (d. 2005) explained the origin of the misunderstanding: “This quatrain does not belong to Mevlana, and this is already known by everyone. The library official at the dergah, the Mevlevi dervish lodge [= in Konya, Turkey], the late Necati Bey, had seen this quatrain written in old calligraphy on a sheet. Without searching for its origin, he spread the rumour everywhere that it was a Mevlana quatrain. Whereas, this quatrain is introduced as belonging to someone else in an anthology called ‘Harabat,’ that was prepared by Ziya Pasha.” (“Last Interview with Mevlevi Sheikh Sefik Can,” by Nuriye Akman of the Zaman daily newspaper, first published in English translation on zaman.com on 1/31/05.)

Feild’s version was added to the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Hymn 188, “Come, Come, Whoever You Are.”