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Music

[00:01:18]

Hi everyone. This is Fatemeh Keshavarz and this is Radio Rumi. Once again, I am delighted to be speaking to you about the poetry of Jalal Al-Din Rumi, the 13th century poet and mystic whose voice still is very much alive and very much with us. And if the publication, or the rate of the publication of his work is any indication, he is making a difference in our lives today. So, I am absolutely delighted to be contributing to bringing his voice to you.

[00:02:06]

Let me remind you again. This is a program from University of Maryland, to be more specific, from Roshan Institute for Persian Studies within the University of Maryland. And as Rumi is a great voice within Persian literature, we have taken it upon ourselves to bring it to you, as far as we can, and in any shape or form we can.

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If you want to talk to me, express an opinion, ask a question, suggest a theme for one of the future episodes of Radio Rumi, please write to radiator@umd.edu. Again, radiator (as one word) @umd.edu.

And I should tell you that I am now sitting in my office, in my house in Capitol Hill, and so there is a very lively city life is going on outside my window which involves passersby, sometimes a car. I am hoping no sirens! So I hope you bear with me, as I made this decision not making this a formal program in a studio, where everything is polished and perfectly prepared, but rather spontaneous and related to our daily life, the way we live; the sounds that we hear; hoping that it won't be too disruptive.

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OK, more or less, I've been able to dedicate each episode of this Radio Rumi to one theme, sometimes two episodes to one theme, in order to be able to focus the discussion. Because he has said so much, he has written so much - 27,000 verses only comprise the book that is known as the 'Masnavi', or his speculative work in mysticism. And of course, his lyrical verses are even more numerous and reaching over 35,000 verses. So, there is plenty. It's almost like diving into an ocean. You can come up with anything that would be a topic you like to follow.

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And so today, I want to talk about a topic that is very familiar to all of us, namely anxiety, restlessness, and a sense that life is pulling us in all directions. Now, let me tell you at the outset: I am no psychologist and I am not claiming that Rumi is going to deal with serious issues of psychological consequence. But, it has been an experience in my own life and those around me that reading his words and listening to his wisdom has done a lot in helping us to calm down, to take a careful look at life, our lives and other people's lives and learn to deal with things, learn to seek

more meaning, more depth – and I can even say more, definitely more, satisfaction as well, with the life that we live.

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We all know that, in this life we are living, success and achievement are often things that are the finest. We are expected to make success after success. There is almost no room for asking of “Who am I?”; “Who does this success belong to?”; “Where am I going in my life?”. And even more importantly, “how fulfilling, how fulfilling is this life that I am living?”. There are a lot of us who are tempted to think that these are only modern issues and maybe these issues are heightened or exacerbated by modern life, but I can assure you that they have been, to a large extent, also issues during Rumi’s life. Indeed, you may be surprised to know that Rumi spent a lot of time talking about this restlessness, this condition of being pulled in all kinds of directions.

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Now again, we think it is, it is a modern thing that we play many different roles in our lives. We are fathers, mothers, and you know, sisters, do our jobs and play various roles at work, and with regards to neighbors and friends and the media that we are dealing with, the politics around us and all the rest. But believe it or not, Rumi also has a very similar concern for the people of his time. In his Masnavi, he writes:

جان همه روز از لگدکوب خیال
از زیان و سود و از خوف زوال
نه صفا می ماندش نی لطف و فر
نه بسوی آسمان راه سفر

[00:08:31]

Which means, in a very general, unpolished translation that:

Our soul, our being, our ‘jaan’ (jaan is a word for our inner being, the force of life in us), so our ‘jaan’ is every day trampled underfoot by our thoughts, by ‘khiaal’ – various images that come and go, you know, fears and hesitations, and worries about success, failure and acceptance and all the rest.

از زیان و سود و از خوف زوال

For the fear of loss and hope for gain, and fear of death, خوف زوال, fear of not being here anymore, fear that this is all there is and it’s going to come to an end someday soon and what is going to be left of us? And he continues to say that because we are so trampled under feet by these thoughts, this ‘Jaan’, this inner soul has no freshness to it anymore. It doesn’t have any sense of itself, of life, of being alive, of its subtleties. Neither, neither does it find a way to travel to the sky.

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Now, I love this last verse; this, this finding a way to travel to the sky which ironically these days could, kind of, put us off and make us think: Oh, my God, he is

talking about skies, he is talking about this, this superstitious thing about, you know, God and all the rest. Of course, he believes in God and there is no question about that. But when he talks about finding the way to travel upwards, it's always in the direction of freeing oneself. In fact, in another verse he says that I am a bird from on high, and I sometimes come down; so you can hold on to me; and I can pull you out ... I can pull you out, skywards, heavenwards", whatever is the word you like to use.

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And that is a journey towards liberation and we'll talk about that liberation more. I will, in fact, dedicate quite a bit of time to that. That is, in one word, kind of a liberation from oneself, but there will be more to it. So, let me just talk about it when we get there.

So, back to that push and pull, that being trampled under feet by our thoughts and our fears and our hopes every day. So he tells us that, in dealing with this, in fact, we replicate that restlessness; we replicate that unpredictable, changing environment in which we are living.

این شکل که من دارم ای خواجه که را مانم
یک لحظه پری شکلم یک لحظه پری خوانم
در آتش مشتاقی هم جمع و هم شمع
هم دودم و هم نورم هم جمع و پریشانم

[00:12:19]

So, he starts by saying (and we have talked about this before, actually in other episodes – so he is asking this question a lot).

This shape that I have, oh my friend, who do I look like, who am I?
Some days I look like a fairy; and other days, I look like these magicians who could control fairies.

Sometimes I am in the fire of longing.

در آتش مشتاقی هم جمع و هم شمع

I am together, like a crowd around the glowing candle.
Sometimes, I am the candle itself.

هم دودم و هم نورم هم جمع و پریشانم

But isn't it interesting that I am both light and smoke? That I am together, but also dispersed? This condition that I have internalized from the outside world, that is constantly changing around me, leaves, in other words, no rest for me, no ability to look at myself, to even see who I am.

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ای خواجه چه مرغم من؟

Then he asks the real question:

چه مرغم من؟ - Oh my friend, tell me - ای خواجه

ای خواجه چه مرغم من نی کبکم و نی بازم
نی خوبم و نی زشتم نی اینم و نی آنم

Oh my friend, what kind of a bird am I? Tell me.

Another partridge, another hawk?

In other words, another one that gets haunted, or sometimes I am the one that gets haunted? And sometimes I am the hawk, the one that is the bird of prey and is haunting others.

نی خوبم و نی زشتم نی اینم و نی آنم

And ultimately, what this means is that I am neither, I am neither, because I never stay in any of those states of being.

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And of course, he recognizes the source of all this restlessness. Again, not only in a cultural sense, and in the way that our way of life, our way of being, teaches us to be; but even the environment around us, the bigger environment around us, the nature around us, the seasons for example. So, he says look at the seasons, look at the four seasons.

عالم چهار فصل است فصلی خلاف فصلی
با جنگ چار دشمن هرگز قرار ماند

So, the world is like the four seasons; each season different even the opposite of the other seasons. One cold, one hot, one damp, one dry. So, with this war that is going in the nature around us, why do we even expect to be in total rest?

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So, so far, he is actually recognizing the condition that we are in, and that's what he always does. He never, kind of, jumps into giving you a lesson about what's the solution about something: go ahead and do this; go ahead and do that; I know what you need to do. No, he first tries to look at things carefully. Who are we? What is our condition? And in my opinion, he does this very deliberately. He is teaching us a lesson in pedagogy, pedagogy of life. If you want to know what to do, you should stop and look, instead of letting yourself to be pulled. You have to stop and look. And then he uses a large number of examples. Here's now, after four seasons, he is now looking at us as artists, painters:

[00:17:26]

صورتگر نقاشم هر لحظه بتی سازم

So, I am the painter, the one who loves to draw portraits. And every instant, I draw; I paint some beautiful face which I worship. He uses the word "bot" (بت); he

uses the idol that was worshipped in old days. So, I paint these paintings and paint these images and fall in love with them, worship them. And then I am:

نفسی آتش سوزان نفسی سیل گریزان

Again:

ز چه اصلم ز چه فصلم به چه بازار خرندم

So again it's about "Who am I"?

Sometimes, like a flowing flood; and at other times, like fire that burns everything around it.

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Ok, now after that, he begins to address how to handle this; how to look at it; and now how to deal with it. And there is one concept, at the heart of all the solutions that he is always presenting to us, and that is YOU (تو, تو). That is addressing at the beloved – you, my beloved.

And it's very interesting that this beloved is not only spiritual in any way, although sometimes it's purely spiritual; at other times it is a very simple, loving human being. So, and here's that siren I was afraid will come into this episode of Radio Rumi. I'm sure you can hear it a little bit in the background, but let's leave it behind and go back to the concept of the "beloved". Maybe, even the siren tells us that we have to stop and think about the one who is the real savior. Alright, the beloved, the beloved is the one we go in the direction of; and it actually is very often a process.

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It's not just the one moment you see this beloved; you fall in love; the problem is solved; it's all changing; you're done; you're liberated; you are not restless any more. But:

صورتگر نقاشم هر لحظه بتی سازم
وانگه همه بت ها را در پیش تو اندازم

So, I am a painter, a painter; I build a beautiful portrait which I worship any moment.

Then I see your face and I begin to burn them.

Maybe not really just throw what you have created in the fire, but not to worship it anymore; not to let it own you; rather, be the owner of it.

صد نقش بر انگیزم با روح درآمیزم
چون نقش تو را بینم در آتشش اندازم

And actually, you can apply this verse, which I am going to just translate, to a very bliss, worldly love. Somebody you see and are attracted to and feel tremendously dedicated to and in love with.

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So, here's what the verse means:

صد نقش بر انگیزم

I create hundred images.

با روح درآمیزم

I mix them with my own soul (It's like they are the core of my being).

چون نقش تو را بینم در آتشش اندازم

Then I meet you and I am ready to let go of all those images.

Why, why? Because you bring with you a sense of joy – which sometimes is expressed in Rumi's poetry as "Masti" (مستی), a kind of drunkenness – but it's really "Joy". Very often, he talks about this. So:

تو ساقی خماری یا دشمن هشیاری
یا آنکه کنی ویران هر خانه که می سازم

Now, this is very interesting because you're going to ask me, when I translate this verse for you, how is this going to end our restlessness and bring comfort to us?

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Here's how it goes:

You are the wine who serves the wine, the cup bearer, the "Saaghi" (ساقی).

یا دشمن هشیاری

The enemy of the one who is not intoxicated.

In other words, as far as Rumi is concerned, this life is not worth living if we are not able to be enchanted. If we are not able to feel that joy, that drunkenness, whatever word you have for it. That core human experience, which we often experience first by falling in love with another human being, that lifts you up, out of your corner, wherever you are, whatever you are caught in.

تو ساقی خماری یا دشمن هشیاری

You are the cup bearer who brings wine,
You are the enemy of the one who is not intoxicated, who is sober.

یا آن که کنی ویران هر خانه که می سازم

The one that tears down every house that I build.

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And this is, in my opinion, one of those real Rumi's moments. The beginning of rest, the ability to let the house that you have built to be torn down, the ability to let go. The ability to see that, no matter how great it is; how much you love it; it's only a stage in your life. And you need to be able to let go of it, so it does not own you. So that you own it and you do things with it, rather than it controls your life. So, that is why that beloved - that You (with Capital Y - that "tow" - تو) is the cup bearer that serves wine; that tears down the house that you built , just so it does not become a prison for you.

Now, the ultimate concept of "Rahaa-ee" (رهایی) or freedom in Persian for Rumi is something which he defines as "bee-khodi" (بیخودی). "Khod" (خود) is the self, so literally, "bee-khodi" means to be without oneself, to be free of oneself. And again, I think one has to be very cautious in not interpreting this as "you don't need to be aware"; "you don't need to know what's going on around you"; "you just get your life to a point of living a constantly happy, Epicurean life where you just enjoy things".

Of course, Rumi is not against enjoyment of life. In fact, he is a mystic who very much likes lives that are happy. But nevertheless, this "bee-khodi" is not the kind of freedom from self that brings irresponsibility, or not doing things and letting life just happen to you.

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Rather, it is a feeling that the self should be, you should be able to step back and take a look at the self; see it; see it with all the good and bad things that you see in it. If it's small about something; if it's generous about some other things - just see it. And then stop loving it, or hating it, or judging it. Just be free from it and allow it to be free from your judgement, from your being. It's a kind of recognizing and acknowledging oneself. In a world which does not revolve around that self; a world that is much larger, far more important than this just one self that we have. But at the same time, that self is all that we have. And therefore, the fact that we can help it fall in love; the fact that we can teach it to do something; or not to do something; the fact that we can connect it with the world; let it be free and generous - all of that matters very much.

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Now, I am looking at my watch and the screen of my computer as I am recording this and I can see that we will have to really have a separate session of the Radio Rumi, given only to "bee-khodi", or freedom from the self, so that we can actually do justice to this concept.

But allow me to give you a little taste of it from a Ghazal (poem) which is one of my favorite and it is completely dedicated to this concept.

آن نفسی که باخودی یار چو خار آیدت

وان نفسی که بیخودی یار چه کار آیدت
آن نفسی که باخودی خود تو شکار پشه‌ای
وان نفسی که بیخودی پیل شکار آیدت

Now, before I translate it, I'm going to ask you to forget completely about the spiritual aspects of this, which actually is there – we are going to get to it, but put it fully in the context of your everyday life, say, your workplace. The poem reads:

The moment that you are with yourself, that is, attached to yourself, conscious of yourself, obsessed with yourself, thinking about yourself,

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آن نفسی که باخودی یار چو خار آیدت

even the friend next to you is a hassle to deal with, is a problem because you are so bothered by yourself that you cannot be bothered by anybody else.

وان نفسی که بیخودی یار چه کار آیدت

The moment that you are free from that self, you don't need anything, not even that friend, not even that "year" (یار). But you can be with that person; you can build that relationship; you can do your work; you can enjoy it.

آن نفسی که باخودی خود تو شکار پشه‌ای

The moment that you are sub-conscious, and judging yourself and torturing yourself, a mosquito can bother you, or a being as small as a mosquito, the smallest of beings, the most insignificant being can be a trouble to you.

وان نفسی که بیخودی پیل شکار آیدت

[00:31:14]

But the moment that you are free from that self, that you don't have to put all of your energy into evaluating, judging, presenting, defending yourself, you are so powerful; you can fight an elephant; literally, hunt an elephant - which is an image of absolute powerfulness - because an elephant is the opposite of a mosquito, the largest and most frightening being.

So, with that beautiful poem, let me leave the rest of our conversation on "bee-khodi" for our next episode. And because I want to finish it, with reading that poem one more time ... those few lines to you.

Let me just remind you again that you can talk to me; you can write comments, questions, ask for specific topics that you like to hear about, by writing to me at radiatorumi@umd.edu. Again, radiatorumi is one word and umd is for University of Maryland, so it is radiatorumi@umd.edu.

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And here is that poem again.

آن نفسی که باخودی یار چو خار آیدت
وان نفسی که بیخودی یار چه کار آیدت
آن نفسی که باخودی خود تو شکار پشه‌ای
وان نفسی که بیخودی پیل شکار آیدت

Music [00:33:36]