



MEVLEVI
Australia

Sheb-i Arus 2006

Held at Prahran Town Hall on 17 December 2006

Sheikh Abdul Aziz's Speech

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim

In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

Friends, lovers of God, seekers on the path to Truth, this is the Sheb-i Arus, the Wedding Night, the Wedding with Eternity. We commemorate with reverence and devotion the Friend of God, Hazreti Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi, may Allah make holy his spiritual secret.

Hazreti Mevlana was the revered saint whose teaching and spiritual energy inspired the Sufi tradition which became the Mevlevi Order, one of the most famous mystical traditions of the Sufi Path. He passed from this world 733 years ago, and his joyous return to his Lord has been commemorated with love and reverence ever since.

Hazreti Mevlana was one of the world's great mystics and he was a devout follower of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Hazreti Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Their message is essentially a universal one, calling all people to the Unity of the Divine. We welcome you in the spirit of Mevlana when he said,

*"Come, come, whoever you are,
An unbeliever, a fire-worshipper, come.
Our door is not the door of despair.
Even if you have broken your vows a thousand times
Come, come again."*

Mevlana's message is always one of hope, of encouragement towards the Divine. Whilst Mevlana and his tradition of the Mevlevi Order of Sufis is within the Islamic faith, his teaching and that of the Sufis is the message of the Holy Prophet, that there is only the Divine Unity.

All paths, all journeying of human souls lead to the inconceivable Oneness. We are merely drops in the Ocean of the Unity of God. As recorded in the hadith, the sayings of the Holy Prophet, there are as many paths to God as there are human breaths.

When Hazreti Mevlana passed from this world of sorrows, people of all faiths in the city of Konya where he lived gathered to honour him and mourn his passing - Jews and Christians, Turks, Romans, and Arabs were among them all reciting from their holy books and wishing to join the funeral procession. When they were asked why they were joining the funeral of an eminent Muslim teacher, they said, "If you Muslims hold him to be the Muhammad of his age, we esteem him as the Moses, the David, the Jesus of our time and we are his disciples, his followers." So the Muslims allowed them to join the funeral procession, with all the people showing their love and respect for this light of the faith, this guide of humanity, this ecstatic knower and servant of the Divine.

Truly the power of the great saints is to bring people together in the meeting-place of their hearts, where the spirit transcends the boundaries of religious practice and belief.

One day, some Israelites abused Jesus when he was walking through their part of the town. But he answered by saying prayers for them. Someone said to him: "You prayed for these men, but did you not feel angry with them?" He replied: "I could spend only of what I had in my purse". Mevlana has the same quality.



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Why do we celebrate the passing of Mevlana as a Wedding Night, a Sheb-i Arus? We do not say he died; the realised human being does not die, he lives in eternity. Mevlana himself tells us "our death is our wedding with eternity".

He says, *"When Lovers die in their journey,
The spirit's king runs out to meet them.
When they die at the feet of that moon,
they all light up like the Sun".*

he says, *As you lower me into my tomb, do not say "Farewell".
For the tomb veils from us the union of paradise."*

Also, *"To you my death seems like a setting, but really it is dawn."*

For the Sufis, the mystics of Islam, the physical death of the body is the joyous release of the soul to return to its Lord. When such a great saint as Mevlana departs from this life, he is reunited with the Divine realms in a wedding celebration. The bride of his soul meets with the Beloved and there is no more pain of separation, no longer the cries of longing. So the Sheb-i Arus is a time for rejoicing and for remembering God's holy servant with love in our hearts and the remembrance of God, zikr Allah, ever-present in our hearts and minds.

In Mevlana's life, two aspects in particular stand out and form part of his great legacy of teaching. One is the whirling, the sacred dancing, and the other is the inspired poetry.

The thousands of lines of his poetry tell of the longing of the human being's innermost self to know God, to connect with the Divine Unity, and Mevlana speaks of all the difficulties and potential of the human condition. Mevlana calls us and teaches us and, with the beauty of his language and ideas, inspires us.

In the poetry he also tells of the mystery of the whirling. From his ecstatic experience, we derive the ancient, sacred ceremony of Sema, the ritual of the Mevlevi whirling dervishes, the '*tariqa*' or Sufi mystical tradition which comes from Mevlana and his spiritual successors.

In this ceremony, the dervishes remember Allah Almighty in their hearts, their minds, and their bodies. In Sema the dervishes are at prayer and at the centre of the Sema is the mystery of Being and the ecstasy of the Lover joining the Beloved. The semazen, the one who whirls in the Sema, is centred on the remembrance of God, and he or she turns around and around that centre in which there is only God. It is the Kaaba of the heart, the place of inner pilgrimage, the secret place within.

The whole world is turning and circling endlessly around the Divine centre calling out in love and remembrance. In the Sema the dervishes and all who join with them in their hearts during the ceremony are embraced by the beauty and peace of the Divine Presence. Waves of bliss are there for those who are prepared to feel, and to open their innermost beings, to the experience.

The ceremony of Sema comes from the direct example of Mevlana. It began after Mevlana had lost from his life his close spiritual companion, Hazreti Shamsuddin of Tabriz, the powerful, solitary Sufi Master, may Allah be pleased with him. He came so briefly into Mevlana's life, and yet he lit the fire of mystical love in Mevlana's heart.

Mevlana was walking one day in the marketplace in Konya, where he lived, when he heard the hammering of the goldbeaters at work in the marketplace. These were the apprentices of the Sufi Sheikh Salahuddin Zerkub (the Gold-beater) and, in that rhythmic sound, the Master heard the Remembrance of God, the recitation of the heart calling for its beloved, "Allah, Allah, Allah..." As he heard this, Mevlana suddenly stopped, outstretched his arms and began to whirl in an ecstasy of Love.

From this beginning, Mevlana and his followers expressed their joy in worship of the Unity of God through the music and song of the mystical whirling dance. This is the Sema, a celebration of the human soul's participation in the dance of creation and ascent to the Divine.



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Over the course of more than 700 years, this ceremony has been practised as a ritual of deep meditative prayer and inner meaning. The Sema represents the individual's journey of spiritual return and it is richly symbolic. The dervishes wear distinctive traditional dress which derives from Mevlana's time and which has symbolic associations with death of the self and the progress of the spirit towards the Divine.

The ceremony begins with the Naat, a recitation in praise of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. This is followed by a short drumbeat which symbolises the Creative Force of the Divine, expressed in the Holy Qur'an as "*Kun Fayakuun*" "Be and it is!" There is then a taksim, a solo traditionally played on the reed flute, the ney. This symbolises the soul separated from its Divine origin and mourning its loss, and yearning for reunion with its beloved. Mevlana's great poetic work, the Mathnawi, begins with the famous lines which refer to the flute in this way. He says:

*"Listen, listen to the reed forlorn
Ever since 'twas torn,
From its rushy bed, a strain
Of impassioned love and pain."*

The next part of the Sema is called the **Devr-i Veled**, the *Sultan Veled Walk*, named after Mevlana's son, one of the spiritual successors of Mevlana. In it the dervishes bow to each other at the '*post*', the red sheepskin throne of the Sheikh. When the dervishes bow they are acknowledging in each other that spiritual breath of the Divine which has been breathed into each one of us. The Sufis say that each one of us is a drop in the Ocean of His unity and that drop is seeking to merge once again into the Ocean. This is a journey of expanding consciousness infused with ecstatic knowing and the peace of spiritual certainty.

After the Devr-i Veled, there follows a short recitation of **Zikr Allah**, traditional Sufi Remembrance of God, in which we chant "Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim" "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful", "La ilaha il Allah" "There is no God but only Allah" and finally simply "Allah" the Name of Majesty.

After the Zikr Allah, the Remembrance of God, the dervishes stand and remove their black *khirqas* (their cloaks), symbolising the dark grave of the self.

The central part of the ceremony now commences. This consists of the **four selams**, the greetings of Peace. In the sunna or Way of the Holy Prophet s.a.w.s. we are taught that the people of Islam should greet each other when they meet, and say, 'Assalaamu aleikum' "Peace be with you".

The selams of the Sema represent various stages in the journey of spiritual knowing which the individual travels in his own consciousness. The dervishes turn around their own hearts, and circle around like the planets; the semazenbashi is like the moon, and the Sheikh on his red sheepskin is the Shams, the Sun, like the realised human being, Shamsuddin of Tabriz.

The semazen have their arms outstretched, holding the right palm open to the heavens and the left pointing to the earth. By this, we mean "We receive from God, and we give to man. We hold nothing for ourselves." In our hearts there is only Allah, and we turn around Him.

The first selam represents the recognition of the Majesty of the Creator, the second, existence in His unity, the third, the rapture of ecstasy which the spirit experiences in surrender, and the fourth selam, in which the Sheikh joins the circle of the semazens, is symbolic of peace in the heart which comes from subsistence in the Divine Unity. This peacefulness of the completed spiritual journey continues in the taksim (instrumental solo) played on the kanun, and this completes the selams.

The ceremony ends with a **recitation** from the Holy Qur'an, tonight from Sura Rahman, the Beneficent, in which there is the repeated line "*Which is it of the favours of your Lord that you deny?*" and then a prayer by the Sheikh, the Gulbenk, the Rose Prayer.



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Finally, the Sheikh and the dervishes exchange greetings, and all call out the sacred word "**Hu**" signifying God. In the words of our spiritual guide, the Naqshbandi Sufi master, **Hadrat Grandsheikh Abdullah Sirr Dan al Jamal**,

"We turn because our bodies turn but our minds become absolutely still in the stillness that is *Hu*, where we find peace in our Lord and refuge from the madness of the world of the ego. In this eternal peace we respond to the forces governing the Universe and merge in our hearts with them. When we can do this we relate to Him whose commands direct them. In this way we turn for Him, and as we turn we experience an ecstasy of knowing - a knowledge of the heart."

Mevlana said:

*"You are the secret of God's secret
You are the mirror of divine beauty.
Everything in the universe is within you."*

Tonight, we celebrate with the Sema and not only do we remember the example of Hazreti Mevlana's spiritual example and that of his Master, Hazreti Muhammad, s.a.w.s, but we remember how our own lives are, above all else, a spiritual journey and when the fateful hour of our own physical death arrives, then what spiritual light, what '*nur*', will we bring to that moment, for surely, as the holy Qur'an tells us "*Unto Him shall we return*".

The dervishes of Mevlevi Order of Australia remember with gratitude our guide, Hadrat Sheikh Abdullah Sirr Dan al Jamal, may the blessings of God be with him, for without his teaching we would not be celebrating this evening together. We wish to thank the Naqshbandi dervishes of Hadrat Sheikh Abdullah, as well as all our Turkish friends, for their support and collaboration.

We pray that all of us here tonight benefit from the barakat, the spiritual blessing, of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and the Awliya, the Friends of God, of Hazreti Mevlana and Hazreti Shams, and of our guide, Hadrat Sheikh Abdullah Sirr Dan al Jamal, peace be with them all, on this special night of remembrance - remembrance of Mevlana, and, above all else, remembrance of God.

Assalaamu aleikum - Peace be with you.