

TRACES OF HZ. MAWLÂNÂ JALÂL AL-DÎN RÛMÎ IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

In Europe the message of Hz. Mawlânâ has engraved traces in the academic world as well as in the hearts of a large amount of individuals. When analyzing this, the differences of perception between the Orient and the Occident have to be considered. Western people with no Islamic background view and understand the message with the rational mind being the dominant factor, and they demand from religious values that they are in harmony with European ethical values. Since the message of Hz. Mawlânâ is imbedded in Islam, its discussion easily leads to general ethical and religious subjects such as the question if traditional Islamic values can live with the European concept of democracy, the notion of citizenship and the idea of secularization. Such arguments are also brought up within the Mavlaviyah Tariqah. It is suggested to intensify the exchange and collaboration between occidental and oriental universities in order to intensify a peaceful and fruitful dialogue between the Orient and the Occident as a contribution for peace in this world.

Key Words: Academic expression, citizenship, cultural influences, democracy, emotional expression, Enlightenment, esoteric values, Europe, historical influences, Islam in Europe, Mavlavi ritual in Europe, Mavlavi Tariqah, Orient versus Occident, secularization, Semâ in Europe, Shariah versus Tawhid, Sufism in Europe, Tariqah Mavlaviyah in Europe, Whirling Dervishes, Women in Mavlavi Tariqah.

MEVLÂNÂ CELÂLEDDÎN-İ RÛMÎ'NİN AVRUPADAKİ İZLERİ

ÖZET

Hz. Mevlânâ'nın mesajı Avrupanın akademik dünyasında olduğu kadar çok sayıda bireyin de kalplerinde derin izler bırakmıştır. Fakat, bu konuyu incelerken, Doğu ve Batı arasındaki algı farklılıkları göz önüne alınmalıdır. İslam konusunda arka plan bilgisinden yoksun Batılı insanlar bu mesajı akılcı bir zihinle inceler ve anlarlar ve dini değerlerin Avrupanın etik

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değerleri ile uyum içersinde olmasını isterler. Mevlâna'nın mesajı İslama dayalı olduğu için, onunla ilgili tartışmalar kolayca geleneksel İslami değerlerin Avrupanın demokrasi kavramı, vatandaşlık düşüncesi ve laiklik fikri ile bir arada olup olamayacağı gibi genel etik ve dini konulara yol açmaktadır. Bu tür tartışmalar Mevlevî tarikatı içerisinde de gündeme getirilmektedir. Dünya barışına katkı sağlamak üzere, Doğu ve Batı arasında barışçıl ve verimli bir diyalog ortamını oluşturmak için batı ve doğu üniversiteleri arasında değişim ve işbirliğinin yoğunlaştırılması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akademik ifade, kültürel etkiler, duygusal ifade, Aydınlanma, ezoterik değerler, Avrupa, Tarihi etkiler, Avrupada İslam, Avrupada Mevlevî ritüelleri, Mevlevî Tarikatı, Doğu karşısında Batı, laikleşme, Avrupada Semâ, Şeriat ve Tevhid, Avrupada Sufilik, Avrupada Mevlevî Tarikatı, Semâzen Dervişler, Mevlevî tarikatında kadınlar.

There are two types of traces of Hz. Mawlânâ in Europe. One is the academic work produced by elder scholars such as Reynold A. Nicholson, Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch, Annemarie Schimmel and Johann Christoph Bürgel, but unfortunately very few known academic works from younger scholars of European universities are to be found. The other trace – prominent but difficult to measure and evaluate – is the substance of what remains in the hearts of individuals that have been in touch with the message of Hz. Mawlânâ.

The academic traces are characterized by a scientific or philosophical approach with a high degree of objectivity and a choice of expression that is easy to be communicated on an international level, such as in this conference. In contrast to this the expression of a touched heart is subjective and often emotional, is expressed in a metaphorical language and is influenced by patterns originating from education and personal experience. In both cases the expression will be guided by the cultural and social setting of the concerned person. Since culturally and socially there are remarkable differences between Orient and Occident, these differences reflect in the way of expression – be it scientific or emotional.

Differences have to be understood on both sides. Considering that the cultural flow is much stronger from the Occident to the Orient than vice versa, it is only obvious that oriental people find it easier to acquire an understanding of western mentality than vice versa. Westerners who thoroughly understand oriental values and mentalities are scarce. This fact is of particular relevance when spiritual requirements and work become in-

volved, such as those practised in the Mavlavi Tariqah. In Europe we are confronted with these differences, for in the Mavlavi Tariqahs of Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, both, western and oriental persons come together to learn and deepen a common understanding of Hz. Mawlânâ's teachings.

We must see the historical context in which Europe has developed. In the Middle Age the Christian church was the dominant force of spiritual thought and work. But in the 17th and 18th century the Christian church lost much of its power, and it had to give way to values of the Enlightenment, which include the notion of citizenship, the concept of democracy, the idea of secularization and the acceptance of reason as the only and last authority for the determination of methods, truth and errors. In today's Europe ethical values take a higher rank than religion, and yet we all know that the highly esteemed reign of law in western democracies was not able to eliminate the abuse of power, dictatorship and injustice; the living of ethical values is not more in the western societies compared to tribal or theocratic societies. But we must see and consider the point of view from which "educated" Europeans attempt to view and understand spiritual values, with the rational mind being the dominant factor. Yes, there is acceptance of irrational esoteric and religious values in Europe, but these have to be in harmony with accepted ethical values.

To merge traditional Islam with democratic ideas is difficult and probably not possible without compromises on one or both sides. This is today subject of controversial discussions and political debates, and we experience this controversy also within the Mavlavi Tariqah. Some of my friends and colleagues in Turkey argue that the Shariah is first to be considered and to be observed, and then in addition we may seek for Tawhid (experience of unity in God). On the opposite, I, as a European, tend to say that the yearning for Tawhid is the first condition for any spiritual progress, and that Islam is one possible way offered by God to reach Tawhid. Being responsible for the Mavlavi Tariqah in Switzerland I do not want it to be seen as an imported Islamic sect but rather as a place where any sincere seeker may discover an acceptable context for his or her spiritual growth. It is indeed first of all the atmosphere and Barakah (divine power of grace) that he or she experiences within the Ummah (gathering of believers) of the Mavlavi Tariqah which attract non-Muslim Europeans. They are touched by the beauty and tolerance of Hz. Mawlânâ's message and the ethical values they find in it. To first require from newcomers the strict

observation of traditional Islamic dogmatic rules is not helpful, considering the Islamic requirements' incompatibility with European values such as the spatial separation of men and women and the restrictions for women in their dressing codes, public appearance and other rights. Rather there is a necessity for rational explanations about the difference between Koranic requisites and cultural influences, and there is a necessity to question issues of the Sunnah and Shariah and to accept a debate about it. Unfortunately such debate on an academic level is still very little if not even suppressed. In my view Turkish universities with their experience of all aspects between orthodoxy and liberalism could play a prominent role in such international debates.

All religions started in a specific cultural environment and adapted through history to social and cultural changes. From a European point of view this issue needs more clarification. What parts of Islamic behaviour is to be respected under the constitutional guarantee for free religious expression, and what parts are to be seen as of cultural origin? Are the dressing codes, the circumcision or arranged marriages – to name some of the hot issues – part of religion or part of culture? Such questions are difficult to address because they provoke strong emotions in the camp of traditionalists. Personally, I categorically refuse to import oriental culture into Switzerland, my home country. The observation of the Sunnah should not be at the detriment of a visible respect for our Swiss brothers and sisters. I do not support the creation of Islamic parallelism, and it is not my duty to spread Islam in its conservative form, as some of my friends and colleagues in Turkey would like to see. In our Mavlavi Tariqah we come together to learn to live Islam for the good of our personal relation with our Lord (Rabb il alamin), and this includes the living of an exemplary social life and the testifying of full respect for others, independent of their religion and their willingness to accept our way.

The resistance against Islam in European feelings would be much less if today's mainstream-Islam had the opportunity to appear more prominently with its essentially universal message, beauty and openness for other religions. It would already be helpful if the holy Koran were translated correctly. The Arabic word "Islam" means surrender unto God. But in most translations the word Islam is left in Arabic, giving the impression to be the proper name of what we see today under the label Islam. A European would love to read, "The only true religion in the sight of God is man's self-surrendering unto Him" (Koran 3:19), and he or she may not

feel at ease reading “The only true religion in the sight of God is Islam”, as it is rendered in most translations. As a matter of fact, for us Europeans it is a real sign of the universality of Islam when we correctly read the last legal injunction that was revealed to our Prophet three months before he passed away, setting a seal on the message of the Koran: “Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me (Islam) shall be your religion.” (Koran 5:3, translation taken from Muhammad Asad)

Yes, there is merit to keep a tradition in its original way as precise as possible. While a ritual is kept alive it accumulates morphologic power from which a follower of a tradition will take advantage when participating in this ritual. But it has to be in balance with what the followers’ mind can accept, and such a balance will be different in Europe compared to Islamic cultures and societies. Through the years I served as teacher within our Mavlavi Tariqah I could observe how the message of Hz. Mawlânâ opens the sight of Non-Muslims for the beauty and universality of Islam, and in the experience of Tawhid their mental viewpoint shifts slowly to the place of a believer. It’s a shift away from the rational control with its attitude of free will to an attitude of devotion for a spiritual path linked to a religious tradition, including the forms and rituals that belong to this tradition.

There are not only Non-Muslims in the European Tariqahs. In Switzerland for instance a third of participants are native Muslims, many of them of Turkish origin. They do not face the hurdles of Non-Muslims as mentioned before; instead they face other difficulties. One of them is the confrontation with the view that Islam is not the only correct religion. For the Muslims in Europe it is a challenge to accept that the Muslims can as much learn from the Christians as the Christians from the Muslims. A further challenge for native Muslims is to be ritually united with Non-Muslims who in their daily life do not strictly observe traditional Islamic rules, and to accept them as truly equal brothers and sisters. And for people with a Turkish origin it is sometimes difficult to separate national folklore from spiritual work, and they may have to be reminded that Hz. Mawlânâ is neither Turkish nor Iranian.

In the last years Semâ has become an object of business and a flourishing cultural export from Turkey. Thanks to the advertising of Whirling Dervishes, Europeans are going to Turkish concerts to which otherwise they would never go. Yes, some grasp a bit of the beauty of Turkish music,

but many are disappointed to have seen mere folklore and little spiritual values. This business with pretended Mavlavi spiritual values is a huge challenge for our Mavlavi Tariqah. Whereas my colleagues in Turkey may have some justification to do Semâ in public because it is part of Turkish culture, we in Europe have no basis that justifies a public show. We do not respond to the many requests for public Semâ; we leave this to Turkish music groups. We consider Semâ as a prayer, and a prayer needs an atmosphere of intimacy. Therefore we do Semâ with personally invited guests only who join us in Dhikr before the Semâ starts. And in such privacy neither Turkish nor other participants with an Islamic culture find it embarrassing if we allow men and women to turn together.

Summing up it may be said that the European Mavlavi Tariqahs are places where the religious dialogue is fruitfully lived, and where Non-Muslims and Muslims essentially come closer together, this thanks to the spiritual yearning of each participant. In Europe it is neither the common religion nor the culture that unites us in the Mavlavi Tariqah, but it is that yearning which Hz. Mawlânâ expresses in the first 18 lines of the Mesnevi and in numerous poems of his Divan that acts as common denominator. As followers of Hz. Mawlânâ we train to leave the rough and fluctuating surface of the sea and learn to dive into the depth of the ocean where the pearls are to be found. In other words: we try to get into the present moment where the past and future collapse into the "Here and Now". This happens with the help of rituals within the Ummah. Especially Dhikr and Semâ attract European searchers, and it is beautiful to observe how Europeans who have left the church for various reasons, find again a taste for religious rituals.

The potential of religious impact of the traces of Hz. Mawlânâ in Europe is tremendous; however in reality it is controversial and limited due to the seemingly negative perception of Islam. Therefore it is of utmost importance that more work is done on an academic level where the international dialogue is easier. I would like to see that European universities increase their interest to invest in projects linked to Hz. Mawlânâ and his message, and to seek for partnership with oriental universities. An intensified exchange and collaboration between occidental and oriental universities would also be a substantial contribution for peace in this world.