

Rumi's Sun: The Teachings of Shams of Tabriz. Translated by Refik Algan and Camille Adams Helminski. Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press 2008. 468 pp.

Reviewed by Mojdeh Bayat and Ali Jamnia

Shams al-Din Tabrizi or Shams-i Tabrizi is an enigmatic and mysterious figure, and Rumi, who in his time had gained widespread respect and fame as an ordinary professor, probably would have remained just so, if it were not for his encounter with this remarkable Sufi master. As a perfect master, Shams brought out the latent perfection within Rumi. Without doubt, the relationship between Rumi and Shams is one of the most extraordinary of spiritual bonds known to history, a bond that is often referred to as the 'divine Love' – a profusion and rapture from the Absolute Beloved which descends upon the heart of the sincere lover.¹ However, this divine love is not often manifested externally in a relationship between two human beings.

The lectures that Shams gave at Sufi gatherings in Konya were first recorded by Sultan Walad, Rumi's son, and others who had been close to both Rumi and Shams. These lectures were later assembled in a collection that was then referred to as his *Maqalat* (Discourses), *Ma'arif* (Gnostic Sayings) or *Asrar* (Mysteries). However, it appears that no one at the time, including Rumi and Sultan Walad, paid too much attention to Shams' lectures or tried to arrange his teachings in logical sequence. As a result, one might say, they were forgotten and very little in the way of factual information about Shams was later collected. In fact, there was so little known about Shams that some scholars went as far as believing he did not even exist.

Fortunately, several decades ago certain handwritten manuscripts that were assumed to have belonged to Shams were discovered in some major Turkish libraries' catalogues. And thus, the first manuscripts of *Maqalat-i Shams-i Tabrizi* (*The Discourses of Shams-i Tabrizi*) became introduced to the wider scholarly community in the 1940s. For this reason, up until the last few decades Shams' character was not much known or understood. It was only in 1972 that Nasir al-Din Sahib al-Zamani, an Iranian scholar, published a study in Persian of Shams'

1 Javad Nurbakhsh, *In the Tavern of Ruin* (New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications 1978), p. 25.

personality and thought as reflected in the *Discourses* entitled 'The Third Script' (*Khatt-i sivvum*).² In addition to the *Maqalat* of Shams, Sahib al-Zamani's work was based on several other treatises and books such as the *Walad-nama* by Sultan Walad, the *Manaqib al-ʿarifin* by Aflaki, and the *Risala dar ahwal-i Mawlana Jalal al-Din* by Sipahsalar, an intimate of Rumi's circle. However, for the most part, Shams continued to remain a mysterious figure, whose family background and personal history were largely unknown. This situation was vastly improved when, in 1990, Muhammad 'Ali Muvahhid, another Iranian scholar, published the *Maqalat-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, his meticulously edited and annotated edition of Shams' *Discourses* in Persian, based on six different manuscripts found in several Turkish museums.³

Finally, in 2004, the American scholar William C. Chittick published an English translation of most of Shams' *Maqalat* entitled: *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*, making use of Muvahhid's critical edition.⁴ In the current book, *Rumi's Sun: The Teachings of Shams of Tabriz*, Refik Algan and Camille Helminski present another English translation of Shams' teachings to the contemporary lovers of Rumi's and Shams' teachings. It should be mentioned that William Chittick in his translation acknowledges his debt to both Refik Algan's and Camille Helminski's work on Shams' *Maqalat* and their initial stimulation of his interest in Shams, confessing (p. xxv) that without their prompting, 'I would certainly not have produced the book [*Me and Rumi*].'

This book consists of 442 pages including a short six-page introduction, a five-page index, as well as a poem from Rumi's *Divan-i Shams* translated by Helminski and Rezwani. A traditional prayer of completion for Mevlevi Dervishes is also included. The authors also indicate that they have omitted repetitious and obscure passages.

One drawback of the Algan–Helminski translation would seem to be its exclusive reliance on a single manuscript of the *Discourses* of Shams as opposed to a translation annotated to variant readings from different manuscripts. Their translation is based on a calligraphed copy in Persian by Ayashli Shakir made of 'an annotated copy of

2 *Khatt-i sivvum: darbara-yi shakhsiyat, sukhanan va andisha-yi Shams-i Tabrizi* (Tehran: 'Ata'i 1351 A.Hsh./1972)

3 Muhammad Muvahhid, ed. *Maqalat-i Shams-i Tabrizi* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Khwarazmi 1369 A.Hsh./1990).

4 Louisville: Fons Vitae 2004.