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# A Little Indicates Much: Structure and Meaning in the Prefaces to Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, Books I–III<sup>1</sup>

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For over seven centuries, readers of Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī's *Mathnawī* have been struck by his marvellous preface, written in Arabic, where he begins with the remarkable claim: 'This is the book of the *Mathnawī*, which is the roots of the roots of the roots of religion.' The language he uses actually claims its position of constituting the 'Principles of Jurisprudence' (*uṣūl al-dīn*), but in an exaggerated form. He goes on to make other remarkable pronouncements about the character of this extraordinary poem, which he frequently and without reservation compares to the Qur'ān itself.

Rūmī did in fact write prose prefaces to each of the six books of the *Mathnawī*. It is striking that most commentators have not really attempted to relate these introductions to the text that follows. The tendency of most commentators has been to consider these prefaces as extraneous to the poetry, which has typically been discussed on a line-by-line basis. The justification for this exclusion of the prefaces from consideration would seem to be that several of them (in Books I, III, and IV) are in Arabic, and all six are prose; thus they could be technically separated from the Persian poems that follow. Yet it is striking to consider the extent to which these prefaces also relate to the introductory sections of each of the six books of this epic of mysticism, each of which contains an opening dialogue between Rūmī and his chief disciple in later times, Ḥusām al-Dīn Chalabī. In this article, I would like to propose that Rūmī uses these prefaces to set up

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally delivered as a lecture at the conference on 'Wondrous Words: the Poetic Mastery of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī', sponsored by the Iran Heritage Foundation, British Museum, Great Russell Street, London (Sept. 13–15, 2007).

his primary goal as a teacher of Sufism: that is, he wants to clarify the way in which language functions as a way of bringing about the understanding of a reality that is much larger than any concept. At the same time, he uses the dialogue form to highlight the shortcomings of language and the longing of spiritual aspirants who seek a way to overcome those limitations. Each of these six prefaces plays with variations on this theme of the adequacy of language and the transcendence of divine reality. The point I wish to make here is that Rūmī is a very deliberate author whose introductory gestures are extremely important for understanding the purpose of his symbolic declarations.

In the preface to Book I, the first theme that Rūmī introduces is the extraordinary significance of the *Mathnawī* itself. It reveals the secrets of union and certainty, and it is 'the greatest understanding (*fiqh*) of God, and the most luminous law (*sharʿ*) of God', again invoking the language of the religious law. Rūmī compares the *Mathnawī* to the divine light described in the famous Light Verse of the Qurʾān (XXIV: 35) and to the gardens and fountains of paradise. His variations on Qurʾānic verses are characteristically infused with a Sufi vocabulary referring to spiritual stations and the wonders performed by the saints. Thus he invokes Q XXV: 24, 'The companions of paradise are the best that day in their abode and the finest in repose', with these similar words: 'Among the companions of stations (*maqāmāt*) and wonders (*karāmāt*), it is the best in its station and the finest in repose.' Rūmī also compares the *Mathnawī* to the river Nile, which nourishes the patient ones but is a sorrow for Pharaoh and the infidels. He then explicitly compares it to the Qurʾān, citing Q II: 26, 'He misleads many by it, and guides many by it'. Note that, in its Qurʾānic context, this verse describes the similitudes that God uses, which the unbelievers question, so the *Mathnawī* takes on a scriptural role of high stature. Then follow several other allusions to the *Mathnawī* as the 'revealer of the Qurʾān' and as the book that only the pure may touch (see Q LVI: 79), a 'revelation' (*tanzīl*) from God. The *Mathnawī* is watched over by God. Rūmī maintains that it has other names given to it by God, but 'we have reduced it to this little amount, for a little indicates much, the mouthful indicates the lake, and the handful indicates the great storehouse'. This is how Rūmī introduces the *Mathnawī*.

Next, Rūmī proceeds to introduce himself by name, stating that he laboured on this poem to produce rarities and expressions for ascetics and devotees, 'brief in constructions but great in meanings'. Again, the

emphasis is on the brevity of the text and its enormous significance. But he shifts quickly to introduce the person who demanded the writing of the *Mathnawī*, Ḥusām al-Dīn Chalabī. With hyperbole that approaches parody, he describes Ḥusām al-Dīn in the most eloquent of terms as the pinnacle of spirituality, the Abū Yazīd and Junayd of his day, and a man of noble lineage. Most importantly, he is described to be like a star that shines and becomes a refuge for the divine and spiritual ones possessing insight, who are undoubtedly the elite mystics. This universe of Sufis may be presumed to be the principal audience for the *Mathnawī*.

The claims made in the preface for the religious authority of the *Mathnawī* are thus matched by a description of its efficacy with the briefest of hints, combined with a dedication of the text to the ideal listener, an advanced Sufi. The opening verses of the Persian text provide an elaboration of these basic principles announced in the preface, constructed around a dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn. In all of the subsequent books (II–VI), the dialogue is a clearly demarcated section that opens the book prior to the first story. In Book I, perhaps because of the intensity of the beginning effort, the dialogue not only comprises the opening, the song of the reed or *nay-nāmah* (I: 1–18), but also recurs as an interruption of the first story. The beginning of the *Mathnawī* is in some respects a break with the style of the Persian Sufi *Mathnawī*, as Dick Davis has pointed out.<sup>2</sup> While the epics of Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār begin with powerful doctrinal statements about the omnipotence and creativity of God, Rūmī begins instead with his own human voice, which merges into the persona of the humble reed that begins speaking in I: 2.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this brief and famously eloquent passage, Rūmī seeks an audience capable of understanding a message that cannot possibly fit into words, stressing the need for a light (I: 7) to illumine the listener. He inescapably turns to his memory of Shams-i Tabrīz, who was the perfect listener, and whom he calls 'you the incomparably pure' (I: 16).

After the conclusion of the reed section, a dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn begins, as Rūmī urges him to throw off worldly bonds. He coins a

2 Dick Davis, 'Narrative and doctrine in the first story of Rūmī's *Mathnawī*', in *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, ed. G. R. Hawting, J. A. Mojaddedi, and A. Samely (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), pp. 93–104, citing p. 96.

3 Muḥammad Isti'lāmī agrees that the reed is Rūmī's voice; see his edition of the *Mathnawī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zawwār 1371 A.Hsh./1992), I: 124.

classic phrase for the inability of language to render spiritual reality, when he warns against putting an ocean into a flask (I: 20). At this point he invokes love as the only remedy for this situation, but the problem of receiving revelation remains as difficult as ever. It is just like the overpowering experience that Moses received when God manifested Himself to the mountain, which was destroyed as Moses fell into a faint. Rūmī closely models these lines (I: 25–26) on this Qur’ānic story (Q VII: 143). His conclusion is that there is no communication without a true companion (I: 28).

Then follows the first story of the *Mathnawī*, a tale of a mysterious sickness caused by love. We should not linger here, except to observe that there is an extraordinary interpolation on the nature of love in the middle of the story (I: 109–44), which takes the form once again of a dialogue. Rūmī starts this digression by repeating his complaint that he cannot explain love (I: 112), remarking that when he starts to write down its explanation, his pen breaks (I: 114). Suddenly he starts to rhapsodize about the sun, the proof that demonstrates itself. Although he begins by using the Persian word for sun (*āftāb*), he imperceptibly shifts to the Arabic term (*shams*), a move that had to be seen as a profound signal in Rūmī’s circle;<sup>4</sup> indeed, so powerful is the sun that, when it comes, the moon splits (a reference to the apocalyptic sign in Q LIV: 1). And Rūmī specifies that this is the unique and eternal sun within. But a few verses later (I: 123), he cannot hold back from naming Shams al-Dīn, whose secret must be explained (*sharḥ*, compare I: 3). Now there is an interruption: Ḥusām al-Dīn, addressed only as ‘my soul’ (*jān*, I: 125) plucks Rūmī’s skirt and begs to hear the story of Shams. The mood changes drastically; Rūmī switches into Arabic, saying: ‘Don’t bother me! I am in annihilation! My understandings fail, and “I cannot count Your praise!”’ (1:128). The formality and the grandeur of this response are astonishing. Although Rūmī has been hinting strongly that Shams is the missing figure needed for a real conversation, once Ḥusām asks directly about him, Rūmī is plunged into a mood of desperation and longing. Words are inadequate to express this longing, so Rūmī recites the famous Hadith of the Prophet, when he said to God, ‘I cannot count Your praise; You are as You have praised Yourself.’ The fact that Shams al-Dīn and not God is the subject of Rūmī’s adoration is typical of his state. The shift into Arabic

4 Isti’lāmī’s comment (I: 206) on *Mathnawī*, I: 123.

is also an example of what Paul Nwyia referred to as the 'Qur'ānization of the heart', in which the register of scriptural language is resorted to for the most intense experiences. Rūmī is first evasive, saying he can't speak now, but perhaps later. Then Ḥusām al-Dīn responds on the same level of intensity, saying (in Arabic) that he is hungry and needs feeding (I: 132). Rūmī fends him off with teasing, telling him to be a true Sufi and not worry about time. But finally Rūmī states the real point of this opening to the mystical epic: the Beloved's secrets cannot be told directly, so the solution is to tell them in the form of stories about other people.

One more objection follows. In a quite outrageous fashion, the unsatisfied Ḥusām al-Dīn says that he wants the story naked, since 'I don't sleep with my lover in a shirt' (I: 138). Recalling explicitly the image of Moses and the mountain, Rūmī warns that speaking so nakedly would mean self-destruction; this sun will consume the world if it is unveiled, so nothing more will be said of Shams al-Dīn – instead, talk will turn to other stories, endlessly (I: 143). Throughout these opening lines of verse, Rūmī returns adroitly to the main themes he announced in the prose preface: the revelatory power of the *Mathnawī*, the inadequacy of words, and the need for the perfect listener (which raised and then removed Shams from discussion). The interrupted dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn is interwoven with the first story of the *Mathnawī*, to demonstrate that only through the cloak of such narratives can revelation shine through.

The later books of the *Mathnawī* employ a similar pattern, announcing important themes in the prose preface, and then developing them further in the poetic dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn. For reasons of space, I will confine the following remarks to Books II and III. Book II begins with a preface in Persian, in contrast to the Arabic preface to Book I, commenting on the delay in the production of this volume. This delay was evidently caused by the fact that Ḥusām al-Dīn's wife had died, plunging him into a profound sorrow for nearly two years. Rūmī does not address this circumstance in the preface directly, but speaks instead about the impossibility of revealing the totality of the divine wisdom to an individual human; knowledge of the benefits of that wisdom would overwhelm the individual, leading to paralysis and inaction. It is for this reason that God uses the perfume of that infinite wisdom to guide humans, like the nose-ring guides the camel. The principle that Rūmī seeks to apply is the proper proportion of divine

wisdom that may be revealed, much like the proper proportion of water that is mixed with earth to make bricks. This principle of balance and proportion applies to everyone except one who has transcended the world of creation. Rūmī then pauses to entertain a question: what is love? He answers that love is limitless when it concerns God's love, although paradoxically there is no real proportion or reciprocity between human and divine love. The tension between the principle of balance and the incommensurability of the divine and the human creates a space in which Rūmī can address the nature of the symbolic language used in the *Mathnawī*.

The poetry of Book II opens with a reference to the two-year delay in its composition, treating it as a period of gestation, necessary 'so that blood becomes milk' (II. 1). Rūmī then launches his narrative in a fluid dialogical form, almost one third of which in this opening section (II: 1–110) is directly in conversation with Ḥusām al-Dīn. This all concerns the spiritual rebirth (II: 2) that produces the milk of Rūmī's teaching.

In the first section (II: 3–9), Rūmī describes Ḥusām al-Dīn, the Radiance of Truth (*diyā' al-ḥaqq*), as making a spiritual ascension (his seclusion after his wife's death), but his return has released the poetry of the *Mathnawī*. So significant is this moment that Rūmī tells us the date (662/1263–1264). The return of the falcon opens the gate of spiritual knowledge. Then follows (II: 10–18) a discourse on the obstacles to that door, in the form of desire and lust – these are infernal in character, in fact the reverse of the spiritual process of rebirth, so that through their action 'your milk becomes blood' (II: 13). The condition of desire is synonymous with the fall of Adam, who lost much to satisfy his lust.

To avoid the catastrophic failure of Adam, Rūmī stresses the need to find good counsel (II: 19–27). He reiterates the point (II: 20, 26) that intellects guard each other against evil speech and action while illuminating the path; equally, carnal souls (II: 21, 27) together produce idleness and darken the way. This is not merely general advice, but a connection to sainthood; the key symbol of the sun appears alongside the friend (*yār*), who is the friend of God (II: 22–25).

What should be the relationship with that friend? Rūmī explores this theme (II: 28–34) with direct address, presumably to Ḥusām al-Dīn. That friend, he informs him, is not outside, but is your very own eye, and it must be kept pure. Rūmī here invokes the image of the mirror, quoting the Prophetic dictum that 'the believer is the mirror of the believer', an image that will return as a powerful depiction of this

pivotal mystical relationship. While being with a friend is like spring, bad companionship is like the fading autumn, and is best avoided entirely (II: 35–41). When a tyrant like the Emperor Decian is present, one should emulate the Seven Sleepers (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*) and retreat from the world; nightingales cannot thrive without the sun.

As in Book I, the mere mention of the sun is enough to trigger a chain of associations and reveries that implicitly invoke Shams-i Tabrīz. This sun (II: 42–47) is also connected to Ḥusām al-Dīn, who is, at a somewhat lower level, the radiance of the sun. Rūmī here seems to shift between addressing Shams and the transcendental sun of which Shams is an image, yet he swiftly turns to Ḥusām al-Dīn to urge him to seek that sun, like Alexander. Pausing briefly once again to excoriate the vile attractions of the senses (II: 48–51), Rūmī turns irresistibly to make an encomium to the sun (II: 52–55), all addressed in the second person. This is a passionate exclamation, highly reminiscent of the lyrics consecrated to Shams in the *Dīwān-i Kabīr*. He concludes, ‘you are neither this nor that in your essence, you who go beyond fancies, more than more!’ (II: 55).

Rūmī then drops the dialogical style for an extended passage (II: 56–84) in which he meditates on the nature of the similarity (*tashbīḥ*) between God and humanity, criticizing the Muʿtazilī doctrine for its reliance on the senses. This leads to reflections on the nature of vision, culminating in the vision of the self, and the attraction of like for like. But Rūmī shifts from the discursive mode back to urgent dialogue when he deals with the way one seeks that ideal likeness (II: 84–89). He commands his interlocutor to open the eye of the heart, since it is always seeking ‘that incomparable radiance’ (II: 87).

Rūmī interrupts the dialogue in order to question himself repeatedly (II: 90–100) as to whether he is indeed worthy of the beauty that attracts him. This in turn means asking what the real mirror is for, which turns out to be the reflection of the heart in the face of the Friend. He tells his heart to seek that universal mirror, and the consequent spiritual rebirth (II: 98). And who is that one whom he seeks? ‘You are the universal mirror I saw eternally; I saw my own image in your eye’ (II: 100). Finally, the Beloved replies (II: 103–10), confirming the reality of the vision and the futility of the lover seeking himself in the eyes of any others. The introductory dialogue of Book II is now over. To illustrate the point further, Rūmī will have to turn to ‘stories of other people’.

The preface to Book III returns again to Arabic for its expression. It begins with an invocation of God's multiple forms of wisdom (*hikam*), by which He rescues knowledge from ignorance, justice from injustice, existence from hypocrisy, and forbearance from stupidity. These divine forms of wisdom bring faraway understandings near and make the difficult easy. This cosmic role has been explained by prophets, who announce the esoteric secrets of God. Rūmī remarks that God's turning of the luminous and compassionate pearly heaven, which rules the smoky heaven of this world, is like the commanding role of the intellect over the forms of earth and the inner and outer senses. The turning of the spiritual heaven commands all other existence, from the luminous stars to earth and water.

From this all-encompassing effect of divine wisdom, Rūmī turns to the question of the human capacity for knowledge. Every human type strives according to proper ability – the reciter of the Qur'ān according to his wisdom, the ascetic according to his struggle, the jurist according to his opinion, the giver according to his capacity, and even the one who receives by the excellence that he recognizes.

Between divine wisdom and human ability there is obviously a gap, which does not invalidate the effect of seeking. Rūmī says that one who lacks water in the desert does not by seeking it lose the knowledge of the content of the seas, but rather strives for the water of life before preoccupation with worldly things cuts him off from it, or before illness and need hold him back, or mental objectives interfere with the sought object towards which he hastens.

Rūmī now characterizes the obstacles that prevent one from attaining this knowledge: desire, seeking one's ease, avoiding the sought object, fearing for oneself, and being concerned with a livelihood. This knowledge can only be attained by those who in positive terms turn to God, imprint their faith upon the world, take great wealth and illumination from the never-failing treasury of wisdom, and are thankful for these divine gifts. In negative terms, they are described as turning to God away from base desires and from the ignorance that magnifies one's meanness and belittles the greatness of others, which marvels at itself for things that God has not in fact permitted it.

This classic and even Platonic attraction to the divine, combined with the rejection of the ego, has to be framed by an abandonment of pride in knowledge. For the wise seek to learn what they do not know,

and to teach what they know, while being kind to those who are slower to understand. Rūmī appropriately quotes the Qur'ān (IV: 94): 'You were like that before, but God was gracious to you.' The ultimate reason for giving up human pretensions to wisdom is the infinite nature of God, which transcends the sayings of heretics, the idolatry of idolaters, the detraction of detractors, the misbegotten fancies of rationalists, and the caprices of the fanciful.

Rūmī closes this preface with thanks and praise to God for the completion of this divine and lordly book of the *Mathnawī*. He ends by quoting three passages from the Qur'ān, which proclaim the protection and preservation of the Qur'ānic revelation itself. One has the unmistakable impression that these allusions to the Qur'ānic miracle, placed alongside praise of the *Mathnawī*, are once again designed to underline the way in which the *Mathnawī* itself functions as a sacred book.

After this formal and majestic preface, in Arabic prose marked by strongly balanced rhyming sequences, Rūmī breaks into the opening lines of Persian verse with a sense of release and ease. He starts by addressing Ḍiyā' al-Ḥaqq Ḥusām al-Dīn, his constant interlocutor and amanuensis, asking him to bring on this third book, like the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet, which is established by three repetitions of an act. In the first half dozen lines, Rūmī shows a teasing impatience to get started, as he tells Ḥusām al-Dīn to stop making excuses, then praises him as one whose strength comes from divine sources, not from the body, and whose light comes from the sun (*shams*), not from a lamp.

In the next section (III: 7–14), Rūmī enumerates the ways in which Ḥusām al-Dīn's strength is angelic and spiritual rather than physical in nature. Because of his glorious character, like Abraham confronted by the tyrant Nimrod, Ḥusām al-Dīn can avoid the fires of disease. Worldly folk are too narrow to grasp his character, and it is therefore up to Ḥusām al-Dīn to give them a 'mouth' (*halq*, literally 'throat') by which to consume the mystical teachings of the *Mathnawī*; this notion of a mouth as the symbol for spiritual perception becomes a major theme throughout this introductory dialogue.

The next couple of lines (III: 15–16) briefly digress on a theme familiar in the preface to Book I (I: 25–26), namely the shattering of Mount Sinai under the full force of divine revelation, to the astonishment of Moses. The Qur'ānic reference (VII: 143) is amplified by an Arabic half

verse, likening the shifting mountain to a dancing camel. This hyperbolic comparison conveys the potential impact of the transcendental knowledge conveyed by the *Mathnawī*.

Rūmī then turns to develop the theme of the mouth, one of several very physical images used in this passage to convey transcendence while preserving the tension between the body and beyond. He initially employs the image of ‘giving a mouth’ to creation (III: 17–25) as a divine work of realization applicable to every limb of the body and to the spirit as well. It is the source of glorification for Ḥusām al-Dīn, though he is cautioned not to reveal its secret to the public. Consumption is the action that transforms one realm of creation into another, from earth to vegetable to animal to human, until the earth finally consumes the expired human body. Rūmī envisions (III: 26–30) a cosmic process of consumption, from the most humble particle on up, so that all the world can be seen as eating or being eaten.

Shifting to a transcendental perspective, Rūmī proceeds to lay out the stark contrast between the scattered transient world and the enduring eternal world, a dichotomy that naturally includes the inhabitants of both realms. The lovers of this world are cut off (Arabic *munqataʿ*) from the source, recalling, though in a negative mode, the restless reed flute that in Book I is cut off (Persian *burīdah*) from the reed-bed. The dwellers of the higher world, in contrast, are eternally collected. Those who have obtained the water of life endure, freed from affliction, and though there may be thousands, they are each one person in reality.

Returning to the motif of consumption (III: 36–42), Rūmī clarifies that both eater and eaten are more than material creations, possessing as they do an intellectual basis. His example is Moses’ ‘staff of justice’, which in the Qur’ānic story became the serpent that ate the snakes of Pharaoh’s magicians. But Moses’ serpent did not increase in size by this consumption, because its food was not a meal of animal flesh – it was instead the triumph of certainty (*yaqīn*), which consumed every imagination (*har khayālī*). Inner spiritual meanings thus have mouths by which God nourishes them. Once again, Rūmī sees consumption as a constant feature of creation, in anything that is attracted to another substance. The mouth of the soul is emphatically not physical, for its sustenance is glorification (already indicated as the goal for Ḥusām al-Dīn, in III: 19).

The paradoxical use of such a physical image to describe the bodiless impels Rūmī to explain further (III: 43–45) the conditions by

which the temperament can change so radically from its deadly preoccupation with this world. He compares this worldly desire to the pathological condition of one who is perversely drawn to eat earth. But when his temperament changes, the result is plain from his illuminated face.

Rūmī calls upon another metaphor of the body when he introduces the weaning of the infant as an image of spiritual transformation (3.46–49). The wet nurse (*dāyah*), in a symbolism familiar in other Sufi contexts, stands for the spiritual master who gradually weans the disciple from the fascination of the world, leading instead to the solid food of the spiritual life.

As if this imagery of weaning were not enough, Rūmī adds one more layer of bodily symbolism by comparing the reluctant disciple to an embryo still content with the nourishment of the womb (III: 50–61), though its destiny is to move on through birth to sustenance with milk and then solid food. This likewise recalls the symbolism of gestation developed in the preface to Book II. Making this progression to a mouthful of food (*luqmah*) brings one to the level of a sage like Luqman. This is despite the natural refusal of the embryo to listen to the talk of the wonders of the outside world, or to pay heed to critical comments about its dark and narrow present location. Thus the incredulous embryo can become the model of the stubborn infidels who blindly refuse to believe the proclamations of the prophets.

Rūmī's final remarks in his introductory dialogue (III: 62–68) build on the notion of blindness to point out the inability of worldly souls even to conceive images of the spiritual realm. If this world is a darkened well, those within cannot imagine the illumination of the world outside. Eyes and ears are blocked by preconceptions from perceiving the world of reality. Thus the incredulous embryo remains satisfied with its nourishment in the womb, forgoing its birth and new sources of sustenance. So ends the third preface and introductory dialogue, leaving the way clear for the unfolding of further stories.

Turning back to consider the prefaces to Books I–III, it is evident that Rūmī employs them to set up the dynamic interaction that follows in each case in the dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn. The encounter is framed by declarations of the status of the *Mathnawī* as a revelation, which unfolds truths that would shatter the recipient if they were experienced directly. This message must be communicated to the perfect listener, who is explicitly named as Ḥusām al-Dīn. The situation,

then, is an overwhelming and limitless revelation with an ideal audience, who nevertheless must be given hints and guidance, since the full disclosure would destroy him (or the reader). Further elaborations relate to the spiritual sustenance that provides strength, the temptation of pride in one's knowledge, and the perceptual obstacles that block the transformation of the soul's temperament. Rūmī uses imagery of the body with great skill to convey these spiritual meanings.

Similarly, the opening poetic sequences of Books I–III illustrate, in a much more fluid fashion, the basic problematic of mystical expression as outlined in the prefaces. Rūmī constantly returns to the necessity of companionship with the perfect friend, who can hear the explanation of longing, and who can be a mirror for the soul. The dialogue with Ḥusām al-Dīn, by focusing on this ideal relationship, inevitably recalls the memory of Shams-i Tabrīz, compared to whom Ḥusām al-Dīn is a secondary 'radiance'. But the impossibility of rendering this truth of love in words requires as a substitute the endless invention of 'stories about other people' that form the substance of this mystical epic. It is in this sense that, for Rūmī, 'a little indicates much'.

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