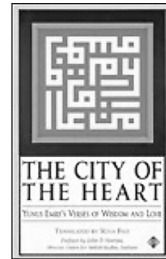


# The City of the Heart: Yūnus Emre's Verses of Wisdom and Love

*Translated by Süha Faiz, Preface by John D. Norton*

*Shaftesbury, Dorset, UK: Element Books, £8.99*

*Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos*



“The Beloved is made manifest in colours multitudinous—  
But one is His accent which a hundred thousand hearts with joy has filled.”

—*Yūnus Emre*

**Y**ūnus Emre (1238-1320) was a Turkish poet and Sufi mystic who had a great deal of influence on Turkish literature that continues into the present day. His sublime verses expound on the transcendent love that pervades the unity of existence, a hallmark of Islamic spirituality, and his message expresses the universal and timeless wisdom found across all the world's religions. Each of his poems is filled with esoteric knowledge. Those who do not understand their transcendent symbolism can nonetheless appreciate and benefit from reading them, while the cognoscenti will be able to access their deeper meaning. Yūnus Emre was both universal in his outlook and deeply steeped in the tradition of Islam, holding the Holy Qur'ān to be the foundation of his – and all – knowledge. Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), a leading expert on Islamic literature and mysticism, emphasizes this point, stating “In the

case of Yūnus Emre, one cannot possibly deny the orthodox Islamic foundation of all his thought, although some modern Turkish interpreters are inclined to forget the Islamic roots of his poetry. The Qur'ān is for him the basis of all wisdom".<sup>1</sup>

Yūnus's mystical verses are reminiscent of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207-1273) or as he is known within the world of Islamic spirituality, Rūmī or simply Mawlānā (also Mevlana), "our Master". It is possible that these two illustrious figures met and it has been pointed out that Yūnus was familiar with Rūmī's work. Some suggest that the following couplet is a reference to such a meeting:

Since when our master, Sovereign Lord, bestowed his loving grace on us,  
That look of beauty has become for us the mirror of our hearts.

Although there is no historical evidence that Yūnus was Rūmī's disciple, he affirms that Taptūk was his spiritual guide (*Shaykh*):

And in those lands to which we came, bearing in our hearts delight,  
We spread abroad to all the message of Taptūk, praise be to God.

We were a servant in the hearth and doorway of Taptūk's abode;  
Poor Yūnus, then raw flesh, has now been made true food, praise be to God.

And he refers to his guide as his Beloved, for example, in the phrase, "Taptūk image of the Friend." Yūnus did not found a Sufi Order, and in one of his verses he counsels himself to "Found not a dervish home, O Yūnus, thinking that more ears will hear".

Sūha Faiz a Turk himself and from Cyprus, speaks to his intention behind the present translation of Yūnus Emre's work, "My endeavour in making this translation has been to produce an English text which departs as little as possible from the sense, spirit, and structure of the original Turkish; to achieve the practically impossible aim of enabling English readers to feel that they are hearing the original author speaking to them across the years."

A key hallmark of Yūnus's writings is its universality, an "esoteric

---

<sup>1</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Yūnus Emre," in *Yūnus Emre and His Mystical Poetry*, ed. Talāt Said Halman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 65.

ecumenicism”<sup>2</sup> that transcends sectarian boundaries and echoes the Qur’ānic verse “neither of the East nor of the West” (24:5). The poems point to the idea of one Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) which is clothed in myriad forms:

A breath—and it, within the mosque, in reverent prayer prostrates itself;  
A breath—and, Bible pages reading, it becomes a cloistered monk.

He provides numerous allusions to the esoteric or inner dimensions of religion in his work, which itself extends beyond the exoteric forms of religion. Yūnus writes,

Not in Mecca is our trust, nor yet in mosque or formal prayer;  
In Truth, in silent Truth, we pray unceasing to that Truth alone.

In keeping with Islam as an affirmation of earlier revealed Truth, Yūnus’s universality embraces, for instance, all the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*):

The Jewish Torah and the Christian Book, the Psalms and the Koran,  
The message which they each proclaim, we found in all that truly is.<sup>3</sup>

The Beloved can be found anywhere, and is all that truly exists: “For where you want Him, there, we found, is God—in all that truly is.” For him, allegiance to the Beloved is beyond mere outward religious affiliation; it is to the esoteric Reality, the inner dimension of faith:

Religion, faith, for me is He: were I without Him in this world  
No idol would I worship, nor the Cross—to no faith would I hold.

<sup>2</sup> See Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1985)

<sup>3</sup> These verses are reminiscent of Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī: “My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, / And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka’ba and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran. / I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take, that is my religion and my faith.” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, quoted in *The Tarjumān al-Asbwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson [London, UK: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911], p. 67); “I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr [Parsi], nor Moslem. I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea. ... I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one; One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call. *He is the first, He is the last, He is the outward, He is the inward...*” (Rūmī, “Poem - XXXL,” quoted in *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1889], pp. 125, 127).

The Beloved is all that exists, embracing all forms, Yūnus profoundly affirms: “I am both Ka’āba and idolatry”. The universal spirit of the poems did not in any way compromise the observance of Yūnus’s faith in Islam, rather it illuminated the universal core of the Islamic tradition itself:

Mohammad understood the Truth, within himself the Truth perceived;  
Truth is prepared, in every place, to show Itself to eyes that see.

A *ḥadīth* of the Prophet states, “The Qur’ān possesses an external appearance and a hidden depth, an exoteric meaning and an esoteric meaning. This esoteric meaning in turn conceals an esoteric meaning (this depth possesses a depth, after the image of the celestial Spheres which are enclosed within each other). So it goes on for seven esoteric meanings (seven depths of hidden depth).”<sup>4</sup> Remarking on the relation between intellection and revelation, Yūnus observes, “If you Truth’s Being seek, It is in Knowledge—and in the Koran.” For only through revelation can the transcendent be known: “Since it was Heaven which sent us the Koran, God in the World partook”.

How one views and understands Reality is the basis for defining one’s madness or sanity. For the spiritual traveler, madness itself is not a psychological confusion (though to the uninitiated it may appear so) but a profound sanity. As Yūnus observes, “Mad every moment—if one instant sane!” It is a ‘madness’ characterized by intoxication with the Beloved, by spiritual drunkenness. Yūnus writes:

My madness is the drunkenness of Love—all lovers know my state,  
I came my dual nature to transfigure, and to merge with One.

This drunkenness is unlike any form of intoxication known to the human condition. He adds, “I drank that brimming cup—such drunkenness my soul had never known.” Again,

Take no heed that I be drunk, or say not that you think me mad;  
Such drunkenness is of Eternity—I tasted it and came.

God-intoxication may seem madness, and Yūnus thus refers to “Those who are by Love made mad”. When the seeker is touched by the Beloved,

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Henry Corbin, “Spiritual exegesis of the Qur’ān,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London, UK: Kegan Paul International, 1993), p. 7.

he cannot imagine a return to his former state, as Yūnus confirms: “now sobriety I cannot find.”

He makes references to the canonical law of Islam (*Sbarī'ah*) and the spiritual path (*Ṭarīqah*) being not at odds with each other, but being both necessary for the seeker and traveler alike to reach the station of divine Reality (*Ḥaqīqa*). He weds the Divine Law and the Spiritual Path in the following lines,

The Law as combless honey is—the Path as butter well refined;  
But why, for Friendship's sake, may these two not in sweetness be combined?

He adds a precautionary note:

Our comrades say to us: 'Abandon not the rule;'  
But rule is made for those who follow faithfully.

Yūnus addresses seekers who may be tempted to place themselves above the Divine Law. The Qur'ānic injunction cautions against self-deceptiveness and hypocritical behavior by those who “say what they do not do” (26:226). Yūnus speaks of those who “Falsely ... bow in prayer”, reminding them of the virtues and responsibilities of sincerity: “he who knows the Truth can never speak a word untrue” and “Be never false to anyone.” He underlines that ethical and moral principles are the very heart of Islam and its mystical dimension.

Yet is not for us to judge who is a *kāfir* (often translated as “unbeliever” or “infidel”) because “None alone save God can tell who Moslem is, who infidel.”

The following couplet is offered for the traveler on the Path to remain unwavering in his or her efforts:

Then let them laugh, and jeer that Truth is not with us;  
We love Truth still—although the heedless see this not.

For Yūnus, nothing is greater than the Divine Love of the Beloved: “Than Love there is no thing to be preferred—It is Its own success.” In the absence of the Divine Love the human being cannot be fully human; a transpersonal grace is needed. “Without Love we are but as beasts”, he writes. To abide in Truth is to foster friendship: “To those who truly

love the Truth the whole world is a brotherhood.”

The following couplet again links Love to its source in the Beloved:

Mankind must lover be, must ever search to find the true Beloved;  
Must burn within the flame of Love—nor burn in any other flame.

Once the heart has been polished by removing the rust or hardness that closes it, it can become aware through metaphysical insight of the Beloved. This insight is encapsulated in the symbol of the “eye of the heart” (*‘ayn al-qalb*). “Open the inward eye, and see the face of Love—and the Beloved.” It is through the “eye of the heart” that the Divine Unity (*Tawhīd*) becomes apparent to the terrestrial eye:

He who cannot see creation through the eye of Unity,  
However great as teacher his repute, he wars against the Truth.

The Divine Unity, expressed as the One (*al-Aḥad*) contains both beginning and end within itself:

That Which is both First and Last—may I be That, and That alone:  
Before and After, That abides; and I—might be All save That One?

The couplet refers to the Qur’ānic verse, “He is the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things.” (57:3) The Outward (*al-Zāhir*) and the Inner (*al-Bāṭin*) are but different attributes of the One: “For when we lovelorn see, the inner self and outer are as one.” A similar idea is found within the Christian tradition: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” (Revelation 22:13)

Yūnus refers to the famous Sufi, Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, who exclaimed “I am the Truth” (*Anā’l-Ḥaqq*), in the following couplet:

The prayer recited in our drunken fellowship is ‘En el Hāk’ [*Anā’l-Ḥaqq*];  
A thousandfold we are as Mansūr was—and no less mad than he!

He upholds that it was the Divine Unity and Truth alone that al-Ḥallāj affirmed: “Mansūr did not dispel the Unity when he cried: ‘En el Hāk’ [*Anā’l-Ḥaqq*]”. In another verse, he directly identifies with this great Sufi: “Mansūr I am—let me but live on lips of men, though slain today.”

The human immanently partakes of the transcendent divine, as the Qur’ān teaches, “We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in their own souls, so that it be clear to them that He is the Real” (41:53). Thus Yūnus recognizes, “A drop I am that to the ocean is as much an ocean too.” He poses an important question: “If you within yourself can find Him not, where is He to be found?” – a rhetorical question with a universal response within all the sapiential traditions: “The kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21); “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (Qur’ān 50:16); “I am seated in the hearts of all.” (Bhagavad-Gītā 15:15)

True identity is not to be found in the empirical ego but in what transcends and integrates it with the Supreme Identity: “To leave behind Duality, O slave, forsake Identity.” Again, Yūnus asserts that the source of human identity is to be found solely in the transpersonal: “Ask not of me—for I am not in ‘me’” because “I have transcended ‘I’; the veil before my eyes is drawn away”. Within the Islamic tradition, the symbol of the veil (*al-ḥijāb*) corresponds to the idea of *māyā* or illusion in Hinduism, but *māyā*, is also Divine Play (*līlā*), which both veils and reveals. Hence, the Divine disclosure is the unveiling of the self’s true identity *in divinis*: “take away the veil, flee from self unto the Self” or “Draw back the veil that hides Your face from me that I may meet Your gaze.”

The dance of separateness and oneness, of duality and unity, is part and parcel of the human condition and cannot be understood in a purely relativistic manner. One must view matters beyond duality. For this perspective, a metaphysical framework is required as Yūnus implies:

Sometimes I long to be at one, in one-ness with that very One;  
Sometimes I would return, become a droplet—yet the ocean too.

Separateness is an illusion for those unable to recognize the veil of duality and unveil its mystery:

If ‘you’ and ‘I’ appear to us, we only know Duality;  
We toiled in each of these estates—and both we have abandoned now.

Yūnus asks a further rhetorical question, “Who gave command to you to make Duality of what is One?” Once we discard our mundane identification with duality, everything becomes metaphysically transparent in the Divine:

Then throw away the ‘We’, the ‘Other’ let us be;  
Who sense the Unity put off Duality.

[B]e *one*: become the secret in the heart,  
In that of which the dervish mystery is part.

Yūnus emphasizes that Divine Unity can be perceived as Real throughout all human experience: “Say not of anything you see that you and It are separate.” The world of forms is transitory and impermanent, and the sole antidote to this is to seek refuge in the Unity of the Beloved:

Not resting in the world of form, passing and illusory,  
Let us hold fast to Unity...

To see the Beloved is a divine grace, the gift of inner knowledge and experience of the Spirit. Yūnus writes, “Accept that you unknowing are, yet from the One who knows receive”; again, “true knowledge is to know your self,” (which affirms the tradition of the Prophet: “He who knoweth himself knoweth his Lord”).

As is the case with all spiritual psychologies that correspond to the world’s religions and their mystical dimensions, the ultimate remedy resides in the Beloved. All other remedies, while perhaps providing some relief or aid, will always fall short. Yūnus writes of the divine allopathy,

All they torn by distress, let them seek here the antidote most sure;  
My pain is saved, my suffering itself is now become my cure.

He goes as far as suggesting that the cure is to be found in the suffering itself, as therein the Beloved dwells: “The poison its own Remedy!” Where can the seeker go to find the medicine that will address the wound of separative existence or egoism?

What grief is this, O God, which finds not any cure?  
And what this hurt, this pain—a wound no eye can see?

The only remedy, he observes, is the Beloved:

No person lives who takes away the burden of another’s soul;  
Who claims to have the strength for this—let him stretch out his hand and see.



May there be any cure for me, when I myself am hurt to Him?  
Afflicted, I may come to You—my cure is no anxiety.

“Can there be anguish greater than a separation from Your Face?” The ultimate cure for the wound of separation is the love of the Beloved:

My thirst will be unquenched—for only Friendship’s draught can satisfy.

Or again,

Once you have loved the One Beloved no more may sorrow seize your heart.

Abundance and wealth are to be found within the heart, not truly in the external world: “Abundance is to all a sign: turn from it to frugality.” Do not seek wealth and riches, Yūnus cautions, but turn to modesty and simplicity:

Neither in destitute nor rich are You; nor palace nor the lowly home;  
But into humble hearts You enter, there make Your abode, my God.

In another couplet he states:

In this our world of dervish-hood our treasury is poverty;  
And naught save that do we desire—not home, not wealth, not property.

In another place, he writes about the denial of worldliness and the pursuit of anything other than the Beloved,

Possessions bring me no delight, nor am I grieved by poverty;  
My consolation is Your Love—You are my need, and You alone.

Reliance on the Beloved can most easily be found and maintained when one is free of other attachments:

Your Love brings death to lovers—plunges them into Your sea of Love;  
Such death transfiguration brings: You are my need, and You alone.

How can one become attached to the Beloved? While prayer is to be practiced or observed five times a day, mystical teachers emphasize the need for continual remembrance of the Beloved in the heart and mind in every waking moment: “Thus people call me Sufi: ceaselessly I ply

my rosary”. Elsewhere, he illustrates,

Love our prayer leads, the heart our congregation;  
The face of Friendship gives direction, ceaseless the prayer.

For the Sufi, form and heart are intertwined:

The fivefold times of prayer become for us as one;  
When they in five divide—who is it may abide?

Therefore, the traveler on the Path must first reform him or herself, which entails living according to one’s religion:

If you would change the world in which we live into the world to come,  
In worship pass your days and nights; recline not, cup in hand, at ease.

What one should keep in mind is the world to come. As the revelation states, “in Paradise the believers shall neither fear nor grieve” (Qur’ān 2:62). However, Yūnus warns not to be deceived by thoughts of Paradise: “For Heaven itself is but a trap in which the faithfuls’ souls are snared.” It is the Beloved alone whom one must seek, “Not in this world nor the world to come Love’s substitute is found.”

Everything that is worthy of human pursuit is to be found in the Divine: “All that is needful for the lovers comes to them from the Beloved.” The final experience of union with the Divine is dependent on grace (*baraka*): “To me came grace from Truth itself; as dead restored to life I came.”

Affirming the Qur’ānic nature of Reality comprised in the verses, “Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God.” (2:115), and “Everything is perishing but His face.” (28:88), Yūnus writes, “In everything I see You are”. He continues, “Your Face I saw—my inner and my outer self were dressed in light.” In the Presence of the Beloved, all separateness is obliterated: “The visage of the Friend dispels Duality,” and again, “The lover’s heart, the lover’s eyes, they turn to the Beloved alone”.

The adage “The Sufi is the child of the moment” (*as-sufi ibn al-waqt*) speaks to the Sufi’s emphasis on the eternal *now*. One should live in the Present which transcends time. Yūnus affirms this idea in the statement, “Tomorrow is for me today”. He notes, “Infinity attaining, time itself we have abandoned now.”

Yūnus directs the seeker to the Prophet's saying, often cited by the Sufis, "Die before you die!" He writes, "True life, for those who love, is dying on the Road to the Beloved." The Self is realized through its own annihilation (*fanā'*) and simultaneous subsistence (*baqā'*) in the Supreme Identity. This is affirmed here: "My Self has sloughed off self, all self's possessions to the Friend returned". The integral transfiguration of consciousness, known as *metanoia*, is an integral aspect of this process. Comprising both the psychological and spiritual dimensions, it is described in diverse sapiential traditions, as for instance in the Gospel of John, where Christ says: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3), or, again in the Christian tradition, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) Yūnus frames this integral transfiguration within the context of Divine Love:

Your Love brings death to lovers—plunges them into Your sea of Love;  
Such death transfiguration brings: You are my need, and You alone.

It is through the death of the empirical ego that the Supreme Identity can be attained. This 'death' into spiritual life, is the divine allopathy, as Yūnus affirms: "in naughting self is the sure remedy."

The greatest of all pilgrimages, therefore, is that of the heart: "rather than a hundred *Ka'ābas*, visit *once* the heart of Man." Elsewhere Yūnus observes: "travel thousand times on Hāj—but lodging in a heart is best." He concludes,

Ask then of me to know which is the best—the *Ka'āba*, or the heart;  
I give the heart my choice, for there I know the Truth has made His home.

The inner significance of pilgrimage is thereby disclosed:

The *Ka'āba*, known, is but the threshold of yourself;  
I came not to it in my *outward* journeying.

It is the Heart where the Divine resides: "The heart is God's own throne". This reflects the often-cited *ḥadīth qudsī*: "Heaven and earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me." God, the eternal Spirit, is the criterion of all, as Yūnus confirms, "The Lord alone is everlasting—this the abiding Principle."

Yūnus Emre is an important and much-needed voice in an age of

forgotten Truth. This book is a superb testimony to the universal and timeless wisdom that is found, not only in the Islamic tradition and its inner dimension of Sufism (*Taşawwuf*), but also found in all the wisdom traditions. The book is highly recommended to all interested in Yūnus Emre and in sampling the sublime verse of his Sufi tradition. Through his poetry, the seeker and the traveler alike will find innumerable pointers on the Path to the One. We end with a line from Yūnus: "Those who journey to the Friend, in travelling forget themselves" - echoing the teaching, "Verily we belong to God and verily unto Him we shall return" (Qur'ān 2:152).