Original-Forschungsarbeit

Rumis Vorstellungen vom Lebenssinn: Eine Lektüre der Majāles-e Sabʿa als Weisheitspädagogik in der Erwachsenenbildung

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Zusammenfassung:

Dieser Artikel untersucht die pädagogische Bedeutung von Rumis *Majāles-e Sabʿa* (*Sieben Predigten*) als einen religiösen Rahmen für Sinnstiftung in der Erwachsenenbildung. Die Studie positioniert Religion als ein Sinndeutungssystem und hebt das bislang wenig genutzte pädagogische Potenzial von Weisheitsliteratur hervor, insbesondere im Hinblick auf existenzielle Orientierung bei muslimischen Erwachsenen in diasporischen Kontexten. Unter Anwendung des viergliedrigen Sinnmodells von Baumeister und Vohs – bestehend aus Zweck, Werten, Wirksamkeit und Selbstwert – bietet der Artikel eine hermeneutisch-phänomenologische Analyse von Rumis erster Predigt, um seine Vorstellungen vom Sinn des Lebens zu verstehen. Durch eine Textanalyse von flehentlichen Monologen, moralischen Gleichnissen und theologischen Reflexionen untersucht die Studie, wie Rumi ein theozentrisches Modell existenzieller Transformation konstruiert, das auf Sehnsucht, Reue und göttlicher Barmherzigkeit basiert. *Zweck* wird als eschatologische und teleologische Ausrichtung auf die Rückkehr zu Gott verstanden; *Werte* werden durch Reue, Demut und moralische Aufrichtigkeit geprägt; *Wirksamkeit* wird als spirituelle Handlungsmacht durch Erinnerung und Vertrauen neu definiert; und *Selbstwert* wird durch Aufrichtigkeit und göttliche Anerkennung geformt, anstatt durch bloß meritokratische oder moralistische Rahmen. Methodisch integriert der Artikel Grounded Theory und hermeneutische Phänomenologie, um eine kontextuelle, vielschichtige Lesart von Rumis homiletischer Rede anzubieten und diese als performativen Ort der Sinnstiftung und nicht als statischen Text zu betrachten. In seinen pädagogischen Implikationen schlägt die Studie vor, Rumis Predigten als eine „Weisheitspädagogik" zu verstehen, die auf Rumis Denken zurückgreift, um Identitätsbildung, moralische Resilienz und existenzielle Alphabetisierung bei muslimischen Erwachsenen zu fördern. Es wird argumentiert, dass Rumis Modell einen kraftvollen Bildungsrahmen für den Umgang mit pluralen, desorientierenden modernen Lebenswelten bietet und zugleich kritische Fragen zur Normativität und Inklusivität solcher Pädagogiken aufwirft.

Schlüsselwörter: Rumi, Lebenssinn, Weisheitspädagogik, religiöse Erwachsenenbildung, hermeneutische Phänomenologie

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مقاله پژوهشی

مفهوم‌سازی‌های معنا در زندگی نزد مولوی: خوانشی از مجالس سبعه در جهت پداگوژی حکمت در آموزش بزرگسالان

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چکیده:

این مقاله به بررسی اهمیت پداگوژیکی مجالس سبعه مولوی به‌مثابه چارچوبی دینی برای معناسازی در زندگی، برای کاربست در آموزش بزرگسالان، می‌پردازد. پژوهش حاضر دین را به‌مثابه یک نظام معنایی در نظر می‌گیرد و بر ظرفیت کمترشناخته‌شده پداگوژیکیِ ادبیات حکمت‌محور برای ارتقای جهت‌گیری‌های وجودی به‌ویژه در میان مسلمانان بزرگسال در بافت‌های دیاسپوریک تأکید دارد. با بهره‌گیری از الگوی چهاروجهی معنا که توسط باومایستر و وُوهس مطرح شده است و شامل هدف، ارزش‌ها، کارآمدی و خودارزشمندی می‌شود، این مقاله بر آن است تا تحلیلی هرمنوتیکی پدیدارشناختی از مجلس اول از مجموعه مجالس سبعه ارائه دهد؛ تا برداشت مولوی را از معنا در زندگی واکاوی کند. از خلال تحلیل متنیِ تک‌گویی‌های مناجاتی، تمثیل‌های اخلاقی، و تأملات کلامی مولوی، این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که او چگونه یک الگوی خدامحورانه را از دگرگونی‌های وجودی ترسیم می‌کند که بر شوق، توبه، و رحمت الهی استوار است. در این خوانش، «هدف» به‌منزله جهت‌گیری معادشناختی و غایت‌شناختی به سوی بازگشت به خدا تعریف می‌شود؛ «ارزش‌ها» در چارچوب توبه، فروتنی، و اخلاص اخلاقی بازشناسی می‌گردند؛ «کارآمدی» به شکل عاملیت معنوی از راه ذکر و توکل بازتعریف می‌شود؛ و «خودارزشمندی» بر مبنای اخلاص و معرفت و شناخت الهی شکل می‌گیرد، نه صرفاً در چارچوب‌های ارزش‌مدارانه یا اخلاق‌محورانه. از حیث روش‌شناسی، مقاله با تلفیق نظریه داده‌بنیاد و پدیدارشناسی هرمنوتیکی، خوانشی چندلایه و بافتاری را از گفتمان در خطاب‌های مولوی ارائه می‌دهد؛ و آن را نه به‌مثابه یک متن ایستا، بلکه به شکل یک کنش معناساز می‌نگرد. در سطح کاربست پداگوژیکی، این مقاله نشان می‌دهد که مجالس سبعه را می‌توان به‌عنوان نوعی «پداگوژی حکمت» مورد توجه قرار داد؛ نوعی پداگوژی که از میراث فکری مولوی برای تقویت شکل‌گیری هویت، تاب‌آوری اخلاقی، و آگاهی یا سواد وجودی در میان مسلمانان بزرگسال بهره می‌گیرد. چنین استدلال می‌شود که الگوی پداگوژیکی مستخرج از اندیشه و کلام مولوی می‌تواند چارچوبی توانمند و نوآورانه را برای مواجهه آموزشی با جهان‌های متکثر و ناپایدار معاصر فراهم آورد، و هم‌زمان، پرسش‌هایی مهم را درباره هنجارمندی و شمول‌گرایی در چنین الگوهای پداگوژیکی برانگیزد.

واژگان کلیدی: معنا در زندگی، پداگوژی حکمت، آموزش دینی بزرگسالان، پدیدارشناسی هرمنوتیکی.

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Rumi's Conceptions of Meaning in Life: Reading the Seven Sermons (Majāles-e Sabʿa) Toward Wisdom Pedagogy in Adult Education

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Abstract

This article explores the pedagogical significance of Rumi's Majāles-e Sabʿa (Seven Sermons) as a religious framework for meaning-making in adult education. The study positions religion as a meaning system and highlights the underutilized pedagogical potential of wisdom literature in promoting existential orientation, especially among Muslim adults in diasporic contexts. Utilizing Baumeister and Vohs's four-fold framework of meaning, including purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth, the article offers a hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis of Rumi's First Sermon to understand his notions of meaning in life. Through a textual analysis of supplicatory monologues, moral parables, and theological reflections, the study examines how Rumi constructs a theocentric model of existential transformation grounded in longing, repentance, and divine mercy. Purpose is rendered as an eschatological and teleological orientation toward the return to God; values are framed through repentance, humility, and moral sincerity; efficacy is redefined as spiritual agency through remembrance and trust; and self-worth is shaped by sincerity and divine recognition rather than merely meritocratic or moralistic frameworks. Methodologically, the article integrates grounded theory and hermeneutical phenomenology to offer a contextual, layered reading of Rumi's homiletic discourse, viewing it as a performative site of meaning rather than a static text. In its pedagogical implications, the study proposes to approach Rumi's Sermons as a "wisdom pedagogy" that draws on Rumi's thought to support identity formation, moral resilience, and existential literacy among Muslim adult learners. It is argued that Rumi's model offers a powerful educational framework for dealing with plural, disorienting modern lifeworlds, while also raising critical questions about normativity and inclusivity in such pedagogies.

Keywords: Meaning in Life, Wisdom Pedagogy, Adult Religious Education, Hermeneutical Phenomenology.

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Introduction: Religion as a Resource for Meaning in Life

A substantial body of academic scholarship has turned to the theme of religion's entanglements with "meaning in life" as an essential dimension of human flourishing. Across a range of disciplinary perspectives, including most prominently those of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and theology, there is a significant recognition that religion functions not merely as a set of doctrines or rituals, but as a comprehensive meaning system through which individuals and communities interpret the deepest dimensions of human existence. Studies from various disciplines converge to highlight how religion contributes to a sense of meaning in life. Psychological research shows that individuals engaged in religious practices often report greater psychological well-being, indicating a strong link between religiosity and a sense of life's meaning (Crego et al., 2020). Sociologically, meaningful social relationships – often cultivated within religious communities – provide essential support for existential exploration and identity development (Krause, 2021). Accordingly, the social dimensions of religious practice can enhance feelings of belonging and purpose, further contributing to psychological health. Meanwhile, philosophical and theological frameworks, such as those proposed by Metz (2013), examine both supernaturalist and naturalist accounts of meaning, offering deeper theoretical insight into life's significance. Religion offers a structured approach to understanding life's complexities, allowing individuals to delve into existential questions (Hales et al., 2020). These holistic insights on the systematic dynamics of religion and meaning resonate with classical theories in *Religionswissenschaft*. For instance, Ninian Smart's typology of religion identifies seven interrelated dimensions, i.e. doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, social, and material, that together shape religious worldviews and experiences (Smart, 1996). Similarly, Clifford Geertz conceptualizes religion as a cultural system that provides a symbolic framework for interpreting human actions and experiences within a broader cosmic order (Geertz, 1966).

Building on these foundational insights, the existing scholarly literature has further elaborated how religion functions not only as a multidimensional cultural system, but also as a lived structure of meaning that informs personal identity, ethical orientation, and existential purpose. Religion functions as a powerful architecture for organizing human experience, integrating beliefs, goals, values, and emotions into a coherent framework that allows

individuals and communities to navigate existential realities. Far from being a mere collection of doctrines or rituals, it offers a dynamic system that interprets life's suffering, moral conflicts, aspirations, and ultimate ends (Park, 2005; Baumeister, 1991, pp. 15–16; Emmons, 1999, p. 74). What gives religion a distinctive potency is its capacity to sacralize meaning – linking the profane experience to transcendent reference points, anchoring hope, surrender, forbearance, and purpose in the face of loss, injustice, or uncertainty (Pargament et al., 2005, p. 676; Silberman, 2005, p. 644). Especially in moments of personal or collective crisis, this sacred orientation provides stability, resilience, and a sense of narrative continuity. In this way, religious systems do not simply provide content for meaning-making but shape the very structure of how meaning is perceived, pursued, and embodied (Park, 2010, p. 260).

This interpretive depth is not abstract; it is enacted and expressed through symbolic media such as language, liturgy, and ritual. According to Charles Taylor's hermeneutic insights, religion is a mode of self-interpretation that draws on expressive resources to make sense of one's being-in-the-world (Taylor, 1980, pp. 282–283). These expressions are not ancillary to belief – they are constitutive of it. They form the "background frameworks" through which meaning is apprehended, even within ostensibly secular worldviews (ibid, pp. 284–285). The act of participating in sacred stories, rituals, or shared practices does more than affirm communal identity; it enables individuals to encounter and articulate their deepest moral and existential orientations. As Park observes, meaning is often enacted as much as it is reflected upon, making religion a performative space in which meaning is lived, embodied, and transmitted (Park, 2005, pp. 295–296). Thus, religion is not simply a reflection of meaning, but a generative matrix for making sense of human life.

Empirical studies increasingly validate a significant interplay between religious meaning and psychological well-being. On this basis, meaning in life mediates the relationship between religiousness and psychological adjustment, highlighting its critical role in overall well-being. Meta-analyses confirm that religiosity and spirituality are positively associated with life satisfaction, peace, and resilience, particularly during adversity (Yaden et al., 2022, pp. 4150–4152; Park & Van Tongeren, 2023, p. 83; Peres et al., 2017, p. 1843). The role of meaning as a mediator helps explain these correlations: meaning enables people to place their suffering within a moral and often

eschatological framework, thus mitigating despair and reinforcing a sense of direction (Ivtzan et al., 2011, pp. 917–918; Park & Folkman, 1997, p. 115; Lucchetti et al., 2019, pp. x–xi). More than a cognitive schema, meaning encompasses affective and motivational layers that foster coherence, belonging, and existential clarity. Gavin Flood highlights how religious traditions function at both bio-sociological and civilizational levels, situating individuals within broader narratives of healing, hope, and transformation (Flood, 2019, pp. 2–3, 366). Even in pluralistic or secular societies, religious schemas offer a compelling matrix for meaning, capable of bridging personal vulnerability and communal continuity. An integrative model of religious meaning, therefore, must account for the complex interplay of psychological constructs, theological visions, and symbolic expression that coalesce in religious life (Park, 2010, pp. 259–261; Taylor, 1980, pp. 285–287; Paloutzian & Park, 2005, pp. 11–13).

Study Design: Meaning in Life in the Case of Rumi's Seven Sermons

Building on such an interdisciplinary literature that approaches religion as a foundational matrix for meaning-making and existential orientation, this study argues that one such highly relevant resource to contemporary reflections on meaning in life would be the "wisdom literature" (Grossmann and Kung, 2019, p. 346) that encompasses also the intellectual and spiritual heritage of various religious traditions. This study aims to explore how Rumi's *Majāles-e Sabʿa* (The Seven Sermons), as a work of wisdom literature embedded in a religious worldview, offers a theological and existential framework for meaning in life that can enrich contemporary discourse on wisdom pedagogy and adult education. We can proceed from the premise that enduring non-canonical texts composed by or attributed to religious sages embedded in various worldview traditions offer more than historical insight, in that they continue to serve as living sources of ethical, intellectual, and spiritual wisdom. According to Baltes and Kunzmann (2004), wisdom represents an integrated body of knowledge deeply connected to understanding life's meaning and guiding conduct, where the application of such wisdom harmonizes intellect and virtue in addressing life's challenges. This perspective highlights how religious conceptions of meaning as especially reflected in and intricately intertwined with wisdom literature can help shape a holistic approach to wise living. Studying these

"cultural products" and the "meaning systems" (Grossmann and Kung, 2019, p. 346) they promote will enable scholars to gain insight into how societies have developed, the evolution of their values and norms, and the conditions that promote cultural transformation, including diversification and globalization. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how Rumi's Sermons offer a framework for meaning in life that can enrich contemporary discourse on wisdom pedagogy and adult education. This can complement empirical research, especially those offered through social and psychological approaches to religious meaning, by engaging hermeneutically with wisdom traditions in religion, treating them as dynamic reservoirs of meaning capable of informing existential and intellectual inquiry today. Finally, the present article is particularly concerned with the implications of this hermeneutics of meaning for wisdom pedagogy in adult education (Yang, 2011).

The present case study for such a wisdom literature draws on the thirteenth-century scholar and mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, hereafter referred to as Rumi – one of the greatest Muslim sages of all time, whose works continue to resonate across cultures and disciplines. While Rumi is popularly known for his ecstatic poetry and universal vision of love, this study focuses specifically on his prose writings, especially the relatively understudied *The Seven Sermons*. Delivered to his disciples and recorded by his students, these sermons offer a unique window into Rumi's practical theology and can be approached as containing his core theological teachings on the inner structure of meaning. Unlike his poetic masterpieces – the *Mathnawī* and the *Dīvān-e Shams* – often interpreted through literary or mystical lenses, the *Majāles* presents a didactic and homiletic mode that lends itself to theological, pedagogical, and existential interpretation. In these sermons, theology, ethics, and practical psychology are inseparably intertwined, guiding listeners through narrative, prayer, metaphor, and interpretive transformation. It is a key work for understanding Rumi's thought and offers accessible sermons in plain Persian prose aimed at a general audience. These seven sermons are concise, orally crafted, and thematically focused on core spiritual concerns. A number of central theological as well as moral themes have already been identified: moral decay and salvation, liberation from sin, the power of faith, self-sacrifice, the value of knowledge, the danger of heedlessness, and the importance of reason (Sobhani, 1986).

Recent scholarship has explored Rumi's contributions to today's educational theory, religious pedagogy, and value formation. Muizzuddin et al. (2024) examine Rumi's articulation of religious moderation for contemporary Islamic education; Mohammadi et al. (2022) engage his educational insights alongside critical theorists; Kamane et al. (2023) compare Rumi's rational educational ideas with those of John Dewey; Abd Rahim (2016) emphasizes the integrative and reflective nature of Rumi's pedagogy; and Akbari (2024) highlights Rumi's storytelling as a strategy for promoting conviviality and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, Isik and Akbari (2024) argue for revisiting classical Islamic sources, including the spiritual literature of Rumi, to enrich contemporary education and existential meaning-making. Despite such growing interest in Rumi's educational, psychological, and intercultural insights, a notable gap remains in treating his works as part of a wisdom tradition capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning in life. It sounds fair to say that existing scholarship often emphasizes Rumi's mystical poetics or ethical teachings, but rarely frames his prose as a resource for wisdom pedagogy, especially with its educational potentials within the context of adult learning and character cultivation. This study seeks to fill that gap by approaching the *Seven Sermons* as a potent resource for existential hermeneutics and spiritual-intellectual pedagogy.

In this rather understudied context to analyze Rumi's conceptions of meaning in life in a way that can contribute to wisdom pedagogy for adult education, I employ the four-part framework developed by Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs (2002), identifying four fundamental "needs for meaning": purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth. These components, drawn from empirical psychological research, serve as organizing lenses to explore Rumi's articulation of a meaningful life. Each need is treated as a heuristic for reading the text: How does Rumi present life's purpose? What values structure his moral imagination? How does he address efficacy, agency, or spiritual responsibility? How does he cultivate a sense of self-worth rooted not in ego but in the soul's divine origin and potential? This framework is used dialogically rather than imposed mechanistically; with the aim to allow for exploration of its cross-cultural resonance and theological adaptability. It can be expected that Rumi's discourse, shaped by Qur'anic exegesis, Prophetic tradition, and Sufi metaphysics, provides an alternate but overlapping grammar of meaning, rooted not merely in individual self-determination but

in ontological orientation toward God, prophetic legacy, community, and eschatological return.

Methodologically, this study employs a two-phase qualitative design that integrates grounded theory with hermeneutical phenomenology to analyze Rumi's understandings of meaning in life within the broader framework of adult learning and wisdom pedagogy. This study focuses exclusively on the First Sermon of Rumi's *Majāles-e Sabʿa* as a strategic point of entry into his theology of meaning in life. The decision to limit the textual scope to the first *majles* is both methodological and hermeneutical: the First Sermon seems to function as a programmatic discourse, laying the existential, theological, and spiritual groundwork for the rest of the collection. The first phase of the study adopts grounded theory to conduct inductive, line-by-line coding of the sermon, identifying recurring themes aligned with Baumeister and Vohs's (2002) four needs for meaning. Through constant comparison and theoretical sampling, emergent conceptual categories are refined to articulate how Rumi constructs a wisdom-based approach to meaning. In the second phase, inspired by van Manen's (2016) emphasis on the lived experience of meaning, hermeneutical phenomenology is employed to interpret these categories within their existential and spiritual depth. Drawing on Annells (2006), the combination of these methodologies is justified by their shared commitment to interpretive inquiry and their complementary strengths: grounded theory allows the emergence of conceptual insights from data, while hermeneutical phenomenology facilitates deeper existential and theological interpretation. Throughout, the study is framed by an interpretivist epistemology that treats meaning as historically, relationally, and contextually produced rather than as a fixed ontological given. Rumi's sermon is approached as a performative religious text that embodies pedagogical and theological intentionality – examined through thematic hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and intertextual engagement with Islamic mystical literature. The study also draws on scholarship in the psychology of religion, adult education, and meaning-centered learning to situate Rumi's wisdom pedagogy within contemporary discourses. Ultimately, the methodological framework is designed to illuminate how classical Sufi teachings can inform meaning-making processes in adult religious education today, particularly in multicultural and diasporic contexts where the construction of resilient, reflexive faith identities is an urgent pedagogical and existential task.

Findings: Rumi's Conceptions of Purpose, Values, Efficacy, and Self-Worth

As explained earlier, in the limited scope of the present article, analyzing one single sermon in depth can allow for a more layered and context-sensitive reading of Rumi's conception of meaning, rather than a thin overview of all seven discourses. The First Sermon opens with a rich tripartite structure that reveals Rumi's profound worldview through spiritual invocation, storytelling, and linguistic reflection. The sermon begins with a deeply affective supplicatory monologue (*munājāt*), in which Rumi pleads for divine mercy, guidance, and existential healing, i.e. a performative invocation that already teaches through its form. This is followed by a vivid parable (*ḥekāyat*) centered on moral and theological insight with a peculiar discursive subtlety. It illustrates themes of human failure, divine justice, and the transformative potential of repentance. The sermon concludes with a powerful meditation on the phrase *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*, where Rumi delves into the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of naming God and the liminal experience of beginnings. For Rumi, naming God is not mere invocation but a desperate and devoted act of *panāh*, i.e. a soul's flight from the abyss of selfhood into the sole sanctuary of divine mercy, where utterance becomes refuge and remembrance becomes salvation. These three parts form a coherent spiritual pedagogy that moves from heartfelt invocation to narrative moral instruction and culminates in religious-linguistic contemplation.

The analytical framework developed by Baumeister and Vohs (2002, pp. 610-611) identifies four fundamental psychological "needs for meaning": purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth. These needs function as motivational structures through which individuals make sense of their lives. *Purpose* refers to the human tendency to view present circumstances in light of future-directed goals or states of anticipated fulfillment, such as spiritual salvation or inner peace. *Values* offer a moral compass by which individuals evaluate what is right or wrong, grounding their actions in justifiable ethical principles and mitigating feelings of guilt or moral disorientation. *Efficacy* concerns the individual's sense of agency, i.e. the belief that one's actions matter and can influence outcomes, thereby reinforcing the coherence between intention and consequence. Finally, *self-worth* encompasses the individual's need to feel worthy, lovable, or significant, either through personal integrity or social belonging. According to Baumeister and Vohs, a life that satisfies all four needs is more likely to be experienced as meaningful,

while a deficiency in one or more dimensions can lead to existential dissatisfaction. This fourfold framework serves here as a lens to structure and present the rich array of themes embedded in Rumi's First Sermon.

Building on the above-mentioned framework, I have developed the following table to categorize the key themes extractable from the First Sermon:[1]

Purpose	Values	Efficacy	Self-Worth
purification	justice	spiritual power of divine invocation	a sinner's despair and hope
unification	accountability	defeat of tyrants through small creatures	divine acceptance despite sin
revival	mystical love	prophetic action as effective example	God's call to the overwhelmed
repentance	self-transcendence	return and choice	Noah's grief as compassion
return	sincerity	prayer and supplication as acts	affirmation of tearful seeking
migration	integrity	moral vigilance against inner foes	dignity through alignment with God
resurrection	true friendship	transformative language use	true nobility through self-annihilation
devotion	inner purity	self-awareness of sin	healing the spiritually blind
letting go of self	surrender	overcoming shame through divine grace	love as sign of soul's worthiness
the Divine	God-centeredness		sincere longing as proof of divine care

Using the four-part psychological framework proposed by Baumeister and Vohs, comprising purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth, this study interpreted Rumi's discourse as a dynamic matrix of existential meaning. The findings reveal a deeply theocentric and relational worldview, in which human life is understood as a sacred journey toward God, guided not merely

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. This study is based on the Persian edition of Rumi's *Majāles-e Sabʿa* edited by Tofigh 1 Sobhani (1986), which serves as the primary source for all textual references. All translations from Arabic and Persian texts are my own; in the case of Qur'anic passages, I consulted multiple existing English translations and rendered them in a form adapted to the context and interpretive aims of this study.

by law or doctrine but by love, remembrance, and inner transformation. Rumi's conception of meaning is not abstract or speculative; it is intensely practical and pedagogical. The human being is portrayed as a spiritual traveler, at once fragile and exalted, capable of falling into despair but with the possibility of rising again through repentance. Far from endorsing a static or purely hierarchical and moralistic model, Rumi offers a profoundly transformative vision of life: one rooted in the divine call to remembrance, the soul's yearning to return to its divine source, and the intimate possibilities of renewal even in the aftermath of profound failure. In this vision, meaning in life is not something to be achieved or possessed; it is something to be unfolded, reawakened, and continually received in a relationship with the Divine. What follows is a thematic overview of how Rumi articulates this vision across the four core dimensions of meaning in life: purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth.

1. Purpose

Majles-e Avval addresses the need for meaning as "purpose", which centers on how present actions draw meaning from their connection to future goals or fulfillments. Rumi's approach is to weave present human experiences into a larger eschatological and spiritual trajectory. This need is expressed throughout the sermon in two major forms. First, in terms of objective goals, Rumi presents the soul's path as a teleological movement toward divine mercy, purification, unity (*Tawḥīd*), and God as the final destination. This emphasizes in a more theological tone that earthly struggle, all the human successes and failures, and the repentance from sin are not ends in themselves but steps toward a divinely promised state and status. Similarly, motifs like reviving meaning through Sunnah and God-centered beginning for all acts highlight how good human conduct for Rumi gains its weight from alignment with a future-oriented sacred order. Second, Rumi introduces his notion of subjective fulfillments, i.e. experiences of personal satisfaction and well-being that are derived from activities or achievements deemed valuable by an individual's own perspective. Such subjective experience of fulfillment for Rumi would encompass intimations of spiritual satisfaction and wholeness – embodied for instance through the allegory of the lonely drop that signifies the soul's migration to the Divine, and letting go of self for eternal significance, where the yearning for union with the Divine is both a longing and an anticipated completion. In this context, the

narratives that characterize the devotion to the Divine Name by Noah and other and the story of Prophet Muhammad's martyred uncle Ḥamza who embraced death on the battlefield as a path to true life, collectively signify their surrender to the sacred Truth beyond mundane appearances. These narratives underscore that life acquires meaning not merely through doctrinal obedience but through existential orientation toward ultimate reunion and transcendence. Altogether, these themes demonstrate how Rumi mobilizes both goal-oriented striving and fulfillment-based longing to respond to the human need for purpose.

For Rumi, the soul's ultimate goal is not worldly accomplishment but *rujūʿ ilā Allāh*, a return to God, anchored in longing, repentance, remembrance, and moral transformation. The opening *munājāt* sets the theological tone: "Let the wine of divine unity be tasted by the souls of those who long for You"[2] asserting that longing itself is a marker of the soul's orientation toward its source. This yearning is further framed as a response to divine mercy: "O King and Sovereign, extinguish the fires of our greed with the water of Your mercy,"[3] implying that worldly desire distracts the soul from its telos. The central metaphor of the sermon, i.e. the lone drop striving toward the sea, expresses this purpose with clarity: "A lone drop, left behind, rolls forward without help from flood or companion, out of yearning for the sea."[4] Even in weakness, the soul is animated by divine attraction, not by self-sufficiency. This yearning is further emphasized in an intertextual reference to the divine trust (*amānah*) from the Qur'an (33: 72) when Rumi echoes: "We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains …"[5] and the soul responds: "I am weak, frail, helpless … but when the echo of Your grace – *We have dignified the children of Adam* – reached my soul's ear, I was no longer weak, nor frail."[6] Here, Rumi is again making an intertextual reference to the Qur'an (17: 70) to highlight that the very awareness of divine calling reshapes the soul's purpose from fragile retreat to bold movement. The soul's journey is initiated by grace and animated by remembrance. Moreover, in the parable

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2 .جان مشتاقان را شراب وحدت بچشان

3 .ملکا و پادشاها، آتش‌های حرص ما را به آب رحمت خویش بنشان

4 .قطرۀ تنها مانده... از شوق دریا، بار بی مدد سیل و یار، غلطان شود

5 .انا عرضنا الامانة على السموات و الارض و الجبال

6 .ضعیفم، نحیفم، بیچاره‌ام ... اما چون آثار عنایت کَرَمنا بنی آدم به گوش جانم رسید، نه ضعیفم، نه نحیفم

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of the butcher and the vulture,[7] the theme of purpose is expressed through the metaphor of moral accountability and return. The butcher, after realizing that his spiritual "ledger" includes a debt to a carrion bird (i.e., a being outside moral accounting), is thrown into existential confusion. His apprentice asks: "Master! I wrote down what you had over the bird. But what shall I write of what the bird has over you?"[8] signaling that every deed carries eternal implications. This rhetorical question captures Rumi's critique of purpose divorced from a divine orientation. Even worldly trade becomes meaningless if not conducted with moral awareness. Finally, in his exposition of *Bismillāh*, i.e. In the Name of God, Rumi declares: "Every act whose beginning is not with Your blessed Name remains incomplete and fruitless"[9] highlighting that only actions grounded in divine invocation are connected to their true end. In Rumi's theistic view of meaning, naming God as an act of *panāh* reflects a profound sense of purpose. This act of invocation reflects a purposeful reorientation of the self toward its divine origin that embodies the soul's existential telos: to seek, find, and dwell in the presence of the One. Rumi teaches that divine prophets, unlike tyrants like Pharaoh and Nimrod, act not to glorify themselves, but as Rumi writes, "They were concerned only with bringing the people into the service of this Name."[10] Thus, even greatness becomes meaningful only when it serves a transcendent aim. Purpose in life, Rumi insists, is not to build legacies but to sanctify one's life by aligning every intention with divine presence. Therefore, Rumi envisions human purpose not as a project of self-realization or worldly success, but as an unfolding return to the Divine, i.e. a return enacted through longing, repentance, remembrance, and moral awareness.

2. Values

Rumi's Sermon One offers a richly layered ethical framework that anchors the soul's journey in enduring spiritual principles. Rumi's structure for meaning as such is rooted in a constellation of lived values that guide not

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7. According to Rumi's narration, a butcher gives meat on credit, keeping record of each debtor. One day, a vulture swoops down and steals a piece of meat. The butcher tells his scribe, "Write that we have four ounces due from the carrion-eater." Later, from a subtle but piercing hint from his scribe, the butcher realizes the absurdity of this calculation and investigations. Overwhelmed by this moral confusion, he despairs.

8.استاد! آنچه تراست پیش مرغ نوشتم ... آنچه مرغ را پیش توست، چند نویسم؟

9.هر کاری که آغاز آن به نام مبارک تو نبود، آن کار ناقص و ابتر بماند

10.در بند آن بودند تا خلق را به خدمت این نام کشند

only ethical choices but the existential trajectory of the seeker's return to God. Central among these is hope in divine mercy, which Rumi presents not as sentimental optimism but as an ontological antidote to despair. The sermon constructs a landscape of values that not only distinguish right from wrong but also shape the inward motivations behind outward conduct. Justice and accountability are foregrounded through Rumi's critique of the moral collapse and spiritual devaluation of the ummah arose from negligence, pride, and indulgence in sin, which obscure her inner light and nullify the value of her deeds. In addition, the parable of the butcher and the vulture demonstrates how every seemingly trivial human act is exposed as a matter of cosmic debt. The text's emphasis on mystical love and self-transcendence, where longing and surrender replace egoistic striving, repositions virtue not as mere conformity to religious law but as an alignment with divine intimacy. Recurrent calls for sincerity and integrity situate moral worth in intentions rather than appearances, contrasting prophetic humility with tyrannical pride of Pharaoh and Nimrod. Rumi also celebrates true friendship as a spiritually anchored loyalty that outlasts opportunistic alliances, and he elevates inner purity and surrender as prerequisites for genuine God-centered living. Together, these themes construct a moral architecture in which ethical action is not reactive but ontologically grounded in divine proximity. In this way, Rumi offers more than moral instruction; he proposes an existential reorientation that enables the soul to live rightly by seeing rightly.

In this First Sermon, Rumi's notion of meaning as value in life emerges as a dynamic ethical system rooted in the transformative mercy of God. The sermon's opening with a prayer for the extinguishing of greed not only links moral purification to divine grace, but also highlights the value based on the Qur'anic imperative (39: 53) that hope in God's mercy is upheld even amid despair: "Do not despair of the mercy of Allah."[11] This shapes two layers of intertextuality where a tradition from the Prophet is also cited by Rumi that underscores the value of adhering to the Prophetic path amidst corruption.[12] The tale of the butcher and the vulture illustrates moral accountability and divine justice, dramatizing the ethical tension between action and

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11. لاتقنطوا من رحمة الله

12. الّا من تمسّک بسنّتی عند فساد امّتی

consequence, and culminating in the assurance that repentance reopens access to grace. Rumi emphasizes humility as a primary value through the symbolic story of Solomon and the crooked crown. One day, Solomon notices that his royal crown sits crooked on his head. He tries repeatedly to straighten it, but it won't align. Suddenly he hears the crown speaking: "O Solomon, you straighten yourself."[13] Realizing the crown's wisdom, Solomon falls into prostration and prays through the Qur'anic supplication: "*Our Lord! We have wronged.*"[14] At that moment, the crown straightens on its own. Rumi uses this tale to teach that inner rectification precedes outward harmony; when the soul aligns with truth, the world responds in kind. In the allegory of the lone droplet yearning for the ocean, Rumi extols perseverance and sincere striving: "One is like a thousand, if the matter is earnest"[15] showing that divine reward corresponds not to quantity but to intention and effort. Here, Rumi describes how torrents of water made of a hundred thousand drops[16] can cross deserts and valleys through collective force. But then he tells of a single drop left behind by its companions[17] that traverses the same difficult path alone, with no helpers, no equipment, and no support, only relying upon the Almighty God.[18] In another imagery, Rumi warns against the deceptive entanglements of worldly beauty and status as humans "saw the golden chain and became proud."[19] This portrays true value as the untainted radiance of the soul, purified through love and fidelity to God. In yet another important anecdote, Rumi recounts the deeply moving story of Waḥshī, the killer of Ḥamza, the Prophet's beloved uncle, as a profound illustration of hope and repentance. After committing the grave act, Waḥshī falls into utter despair, believing that his sin has placed him beyond divine forgiveness. He laments: "Even if God accepts the repentance of accursed Iblīs (Satan) and all

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13. ای سلیمان! تو راست شو

14. The passage used here ربّنا ظلمنا reads more completely as رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَآ أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْخَـٰسِرِينَ "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be losers" (7: 23).

15. واحدٌ کالألف ان امرٌ عَنی

16. سیلها که صدهزار قطره بودند

17. یک قطره از یاران مانده

18. توکّل کرده بر جبار پروردگار

19. سلسلهٔ زرّین بدید و غرّه گشت which more completely reads as "She {i.e. the cast away drop that symbolizes the human self} saw the golden chain and became proud; and thus remained trapped in a dark hole, far from the open plain."

his progeny, surely He will not accept mine."[20] Rumi stages this as a moment of spiritual paralysis when guilt transforms into hopelessness and distances the soul from mercy. Yet just then, the divine voice resounds with compassion: "O My servants! O you whose harvests are burned—do not despair of My infinite mercy!"[21] This narrative dramatizes the Qur'anic promise *"Do not despair of the mercy of God"* as an ethical imperative, not merely a theological claim. In Rumi's theology, hope (*rajā'*) becomes the very ground of repentance (*tawbah*), which he defines not as self-loathing, but as transformation and reorientation toward the Real. The sincerity of Wahshī's anguish becomes its own plea, turning guilt into a cry for grace. The soul's yearning is itself a proof of life: "Hear the dawn-sighs of the path-burned lovers."[22] In this way, Rumi reframes repentance as a value of vitality rather than failure, a sacred movement through sorrow toward divine nearness. The lesson is clear: no sin, however great, can rival the ocean of mercy; for it is the burning of remorse that opens the gate of return. Such values as hope, repentance, humility, sincerity, and spiritual vigilance tend to coalesce into a vision of ethical life that is animated by divine presence and the continual return to the divine source of meaning.

3. Efficacy

Rumi's vision of efficacy in *Majles-e Avval* centers on the believer's spiritual agency in a world where divine sovereignty and human action are intertwined. Efficacy here is not conceived as power in a worldly or mechanistic sense, but rather as the capacity of the soul to act meaningfully through her alignment with the Divine, especially in moments of crisis, temptation, or despair. Rumi affirms that even small, seemingly powerless beings, like a single drop of water or a lone seeker, can enact profound spiritual movement if they trust in divine support. Invocation and remembrance, prayer, and repentance are shown to possess a real transformative force. Prophetic tradition, moral vigilance, and religious language itself become tools for shaping the self in alignment with transcendent reality. Ultimately, Rumi weaves together the themes of return and divine grace, showing that recognizing one's sin, feeling shame, and

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20. اگر ابلیس لعین را با همه ذریتش توبه قبول است، مرا باری قبول نخواهد شد
21. ای بندگان من! ای بندگان سوخته خرمن من!... نومید مشوید از رحمت بی‌نهایت
22. آه سحرگاه سوختگانِ راه را به سمع قبول و عاطفت استماع کن

calling on God are not signs of weakness, but channels through which one regains existential efficacy and reenters the moral and spiritual order. Therefore, if we draw on Rumi to interpret meaning as embodied in the human experience of efficacy, it can be said that meaning is not found necessarily in material mastery or physical control, but in the soul's capacity to act, however humbly, through alignment with the Divine, such that prayer, repentance, and even failure become sites of agency where human fragility is transfigured into transformative participation in the sacred.

This layered notion of spiritual efficacy can emerges vividly in the following examples leveraged from sermon. In the *munājāt*, Rumi opens with a plea for transformation through divine invocation to "extinguish the fires of our greed with the water of Your mercy," which in turn highlights the performative power of supplication. In Rumi's view, the act of invocation, though arising from a place of human weakness, is itself an endorsement of human agency as a purposeful surrender that activates divine response. Likewise, the parable of the drop portrays a fragile and resourceless being "without companion and without helper, placing trust in the Compeller, the Lord and Sustainer" [23] that nevertheless traverses deserts out of yearning, demonstrating how trust in the Divine transforms vulnerability into motion and helplessness into purposeful striving. In another example of Rumi's vision for meaning as efficacy, the Prophet's example becomes a living model of empowered action amid moral collapse. The expression, "except for those who cling to the Sunnah during the corruption of my community," [24] is not mere preservation but an efficacious form of resistance; an active, resilient stance where fidelity to divine guidance becomes a transformative force against disorder and despair. Similarly, the rhetorical question posed by the apprentice in the butcher's tale underscores a moment of moral self-awareness, where even absurd actions are exposed to spiritual accounting. In Rumi's framework of meaning as efficacy, this question illustrates how awareness of divine judgment activates ethical agency, transforming trivial acts into spiritually consequential decisions.

Moreover, in a striking narrative, Rumi recounts how Prophet Muhammad's utterance of *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* ("In the Name of

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23 .بی‌یار و بی‌پیشکار، توکل کرده بر جبار پروردگار
24 .الا من تمسک بسنتی عند فساد امتی

God, the Compassionate, the Merciful") unleashes divine efficacy: first when stones in the infidel Abu Jahl's hand proclaim the *shahada* i.e. Testimony of Faith; and later when, upon the Prophet's invocation of the Name and the spreading of his fingers, the moon miraculously splits in two. These events are framed not as displays of arbitrary power or of magic but as responses to spiritual provocation and moral testing, illustrating how divine agency flows through the Prophet's embodied faith and verbal invocation. In Rumi's notion of efficacy, the *basmala* becomes more than a formulaic phrase and reflects his spiritual language as a locus of divine force. It is a conduit of sacred power, activating transformation in nature, disclosing truth, and prompting sincere belief, while simultaneously exposing the limits of obstinate disbelief and the self-destructive misuse of human agency, as embodied by Abu Jahl's repeated denials. Still, in the story of Wahshī, Rumi shows how shame can be overcome through divine grace, transforming a murderer into a redeemed servant through the healing voice of the Qur'an, "Do not despair of the mercy of God." Here, efficacy lies not in denying one's brokenness but in answering the divine call to return: an act of inner agency wherein despair gives way to hope, and guilt becomes the very ground of transformation. Rumi thus redefines spiritual power as the capacity to respond to grace, even from the lowest depths of moral failure.

4. Self-Worth

Rumi's vision of self-worth affirms that human significance is not earned through perfection or status, but discovered through vulnerability, longing, and divine recognition. In his theology of meaning, self-worth is not self-generated; it arises through being seen, heard, and received by the Divine even at the point of despair. The sinner's cry, the seeker's tears, and the broken spirit are not dismissed as signs of failure but elevated as signs of sincerity. Rumi reframes weakness not as a deficiency to be corrected, but as a sacred threshold through which divine compassion enters. When one aligns with God through repentance, prayer, or surrender, dignity is restored, not through egoic affirmation, but through the grace of being claimed and loved by the Source. The worth of the self, in this paradigm, is neither conditional nor competitive; it is relational, unfolding in the dialogical encounter between the soul and the Divine.

Rumi's interpretation of self-worth in *Majles-e Avval* is a redemptive vision of the human soul's dignity that begins not with human accomplishment but with divine election, not with worldly honor but with inner alignment to the sacred. In other words, he reframes human self-worth not as something intrinsic to the ego, but as a divinely conferred dignity grounded in cosmic responsibility and grace. The drop – a frail, voiceless, and terrified – gains purpose and strength not by denying its fragility, but by awakening to the echo of divine favor: *"We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains… but man bore it"* (The Qur'an, 33: 72). Meaning, for Rumi, emerges when the soul ceases to measure itself by its own weakness and instead listens to the Divine call of worth and dignity, discovering that true self-worth lies in becoming the site where divine trust, love, and speech unfold. The sermon reads, "I am weak, frail, and destitute – but when the echo of the divine favor, *'We have honored the children of Adam'* (The Qur'an, 17:70), reached the ear of my soul, I was no longer weak, nor frail, nor destitute – I became a redeemer {an agent of solution} for the world.[25] In a noticeable literary expression, Rumi adds, "Grant me a heart, and see the courage within; Call me your fox, and behold, I am your lion."[26] As such, the weak are made strong not by self-assertion but by divine regard and self-transcendence.

But Rumi also unveils the fragility of this worth when misdirected. The example of tyrants like Pharaoh and Nimrod illustrate how self-worth tethered to ego or recognition collapses into disgrace: "They sought good reputation, but became infamous throughout the world. They desired greatness and reverence in people's hearts, but became more despicable and disgraced than flies and gnats."[27] In contrast, true dignity lies in spiritual self-effacement: "If you seek your own name, then let go of your name and take hold of this Name. And if you desire your own dignity, preserve the dignity of this Name – forget your own name and remember this Name."[28] The

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25 .ضعیفم، نحیفم، بیچاره‌ام، اما چون آثار عنایت «کرّمَنا بنی آدم» به گوش جانم رسید، نه ضعیفم، نه نحیفم نه بیچاره‌ام، چارگر جهانم

26 .تو مرا دل ده و دلیری بین - رُوبَه خویش خوان و شیری بین

27 .نیکنامی خواستند، بدنام عالم شدند. در دلها عظمت و حرمت خواستند، از پشه و مگس حقیرتر و ننگین‌تر شدند

28 .اگر نام خود را میخواهید، نام خود را بهلید، این نام را بگیرد و اگر حرمت خود میخواهید، حرمت این نام را نگاه دارید و نام خود را فراموش کنید و این نام را یاد دارید

prophets began every deed by taking refuge in God's Name, enshrining it in their hearts and sacrificing their wealth for its sake; they cared not for public approval, whether praised or blamed, but strove only to guide people into the service and protection of that sacred Name.[29] Their concern was not to preserve their own names among people, but to magnify God's Name, knowing that "whoever sought their own name lost it, but whoever lost their name in this Name found everlasting honor."[30] In a deeply moving episode, Rumi dramatizes the meaning of self-worth not as something earned through merit, reputation, or worldly redemption, but as something received through radical hope in divine mercy. Wahshī, the killer of Ḥamza, sinks into utter despair, believing that no amount of sorrow or repentance could ever restore his worth. Wahshī laments, "Even if I were given the lifespan of Noah… I do not believe that this sin of mine could ever be accepted in repentance."[31] But this voice is met, not with condemnation, but with the tender address of the Divine: "O My servants, you whose harvests are scorched ... do not despair of My infinite mercy."[32] Rumi shows that even such a ruined soul can be touched by the divine promise of forgiveness. The transformation is not moralistic but ontological: divine mercy restores not only Wahshī's status, but his very selfhood: "His disbelief turned entirely into faith."[33] Rumi's metaphors deepen this vision: the soul, though merely a drop, is dignified by its longing for the sea, "It is a longing born of the influence of the endless ocean of grace."[34] And even grief becomes sanctified as a sign of nearness to God, as in Noah's parable he embeds the supplication to the Lord: "Hear the dawn sighs of the path-burnt lovers with the ear of acceptance and compassion."[35] In Rumi's thought, longing, tears, and repentance are not signs of failure but of divine intimacy; they are the soul remembering its true name.

In an allegorical narration, Rumi tells of a light-skinned person from the lands of Rum or Turk who, in childhood, was taken captive and brought to

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29. در بند قبول خلق نبودند که خلق ایشان را بد گویند، یا نیک گویند؛ در بند آن بودند تا خلق را به خدمت این نام کشند و در پناه این نام کشند

30. هرکه نام خود جست، نام خود را گم کرد و هر که نام خود را در این نام گم کرد، نیکنامی یافت تا ابد

31. اگر مرا عمر نوح باشد… گمان ندارم که این گناه من هرگز توبه پذیرد

32. ای بندگان سوخته خرمن من… نومید مشوید از رحمت بی‌نهایت

33. کفرش همه ایمان شد

34. شوقی است از تأثیر عنایت دریای بی‌پایان

35. آه سحرگاه سوختگانِ راه را به سمع قبول و عاطفت استماع کن

the land of the dark-skinned Zangis (Africans). There, to avoid being shunned, he smeared his face with blackness to blend in. Yet whenever he saw a mirror, he noticed a patch of white beneath the black and remembered his true origin. Rumi uses this as a metaphor for the soul: though exiled in the land of the ego and worldly pleasures, and stained with the colors of desire, it still belongs to the realm of divine light – and must not forget its true self. To forget one's worth is to smear one's face[36] for worldly acceptance; but to remember it is to rediscover the original light that never left. Self-worth, then, is not a possession, but a resonance with the voice that calls even the most scorched back into belonging.

Discussion

In recent decades, adult education has undergone a paradigmatic shift toward more holistic, dialogical, and transformative pedagogies, especially in multicultural and diasporic settings. Within this context, the pursuit of meaning has emerged as a foundational dimension of adult learning (Merriam & Heuer, 1996; Rossiter, 1999). It was premised in the present study that Rumi's *Sermons* offer a compelling wisdom tradition framework that can resonate deeply with contemporary explorations of meaning-making, identity transformation, and spiritual agency in adult education. It was proposed that Rumi's interpretation of meaning in life – narrated through poetic parables, Qur'anic allusions, and affective invocations – can inform a distinctive form of "wisdom pedagogy" grounded in relational selfhood, ethical responsiveness, and dialogical self-transcendence. This approach is not only compatible with, but also enriching for, current educational theories variously emphasizing cosmopolitanism (Coryell et al., 2018), transculturalism (Jurkova & Guo, 2018), diaculturalist pedagogy (Entigar, 2017), and ontological becoming (Jakubik, 2023 and 2025). Rumi's hermeneutics of meaning in life, when read through the lens of adult learning, invites pedagogical practices that cultivate self-knowledge, moral imagination, and a dynamic relationship to divine reality. These are all crucial capacities for Muslim adults who are situated in societies where they experience plural, often disorienting, diasporic life-worlds.

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36. سیاهی‌یی در روی خود می‌مالید

Wisdom pedagogy, as recently theorized (Jakubik, 2024; Kallio et al., 2024), positions the learner not merely as a recipient of information but as a meaning-seeking, ethically situated, spiritually yearning subject. Rumi's First Sermon, with its performative invocation, transformative parable, and linguistic reflection, provides a rich textual site where such subjectivity is both formed and expressed. The poetics of Rumi's theology echoes contemporary understandings of education as a "technology of the self" (Tennant, 1998) and a narrative journey of "restorying" (Rossiter, 1999) toward wholeness and purpose. The discussion that follows here can be relevant to the existing literature on psychological models of transformative learning (Dirkx, 1998; Kroth & Boverie, 2000), the existential quest for meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Park & Folkman, 1997), and theological reflections on spiritual pedagogy (Flood, 2019; Park & Paloutzian, 2005), with the aim to situate Rumi's work as a wisdom resource for Muslim adult learners in diaspora. In doing so, it also aligns with social justice-oriented approaches to adult education (Lange, 2023; Mikulec, 2025) that resist top-down, deficit-based models, and instead affirm the learner's lived experience, cultural hybridity, and spiritual interiority as central to the pedagogical process.

Drawing from the findings, we can articulate the implications for wisdom pedagogy in adult education, particularly for Muslim adults in diaspora settings. The fourfold architecture of meaning that emerges from Rumi's sermon suggests a robust model for structuring adult education around existential, spiritual, and theological growth. In diaspora contexts, where Muslim adults often experience dislocation, moral pluralism, and identity tensions, Rumi's vision provides a multidimensional pedagogical strategy that emphasizes interior formation, ethical resilience, and transformative agency.

1. Purpose as teleological orientation and eschatological literacy

Purpose, in Rumi's theology of meaning, is not merely a functional aim but a deeply teleological and eschatological orientation, where the soul's journey is framed as a movement toward divine proximity and ultimate reunion with the Beloved. His sermons call upon listeners to transcend mundane preoccupations and instead anchor their existential striving in a cosmically significant purpose: to awaken the heart's longing and realign one's life

toward the eternal. This theocentric teleology has powerful implications for adult education in diasporic contexts, especially for Muslim learners negotiating the tensions of secular-materialistic norms, cultural dislocation, and identity fragmentation. For such learners, Rumi's discourse offers a counter-narrative that re-sacralizes life, situating present hardships within a broader metaphysical horizon. Pedagogically, especially for Religious Education today, this calls for cultivating eschatological literacy as a pedagogy that trains the moral imagination to perceive the divine arc behind life's seemingly disjointed events. By integrating contemplative, dialogical, and narrative practices that evoke sacred yearning and interpretive depth, adult education can facilitate purposeful engagement rooted not only in self-actualization, but in what Rumi sees as the soul's primordial covenant and final return. Such a pedagogical approach encourages learners to reinterpret suffering and success alike within the grammar of divine love and ultimate accountability, thereby transforming education into a site of spiritual orientation and ethical empowerment.

2. Values as ethical compass and moral emplacement

The question of values within the framework of adult education, particularly for learners situated in culturally plural and diasporic contexts, emerges as a pivotal site of pedagogical negotiation. Rumi's articulation of values, centered on repentance, humility, sincerity, and divine mercy, provides a rich moral framework that resists both the rigidity of legalistic moralism and the vacuity of secular ethical relativism. In the context of value dissonance often experienced by Muslim adult learners positioned between inherited religious traditions and dominant sociocultural norms, Rumi's sermons function as a form of moral emplacement, i.e. a re-situating of the self within a spiritually anchored yet dialogically open ethical horizon. Drawing from the discourse of critical pedagogy and emancipatory ethics in adult learning (Lange, 2023; Entigar, 2017), a wisdom pedagogy informed by Rumi as such involves cultivating what might be termed "ethical reflexivity." This can embody the capacity to discern, inhabit, and reinterpret moral commitments through both theological and experiential registers. Such pedagogy necessitates a dialectical engagement with tradition, where ethical values are not simply transmitted but are re-appropriated through lived inquiry and dialogical encounter. In this respect, narrative ethics becomes a vital pedagogical strategy that, by drawing on Qur'anic exemplars, prophetic traditions, and

the learners' autobiographical moral landscapes, has the potential to promote critical moral imagination and embodied ethical discernment. Educators, therefore, play a formative role in this framework not as arbiters of normativity but as facilitators of moral becoming, guiding learners to anchor their ethical compass in traditions of divine compassion while also negotiating the complex moral geographies of diasporic life.

3. Efficacy as spiritual agency and participatory praxis

In adult education discourse, particularly within emancipatory and transformative learning paradigms, the notion of efficacy is often tied to concepts of empowerment, critical consciousness, and agency. Rumi, however, seems to have offered a reconfiguration of efficacy that challenges dominant Western notions of autonomy and mastery. In his theistic hermeneutics of meaning, efficacy is reframed not as the assertion of control over circumstances, but as spiritually attuned responsiveness. This entails in Rumi's view a relational ontology of servanthood to God but still participatory praxis rooted in trust and active surrender to Divine initiative. For Muslim adult learners who often find themselves in positions of social marginality, cultural displacement, or institutional exclusion in diasporic settings, Rumi's vision presents a radical redefinition of agency: not as domination or resistance alone, but as co-creative participation in a divinely infused moral cosmos. In the vocabulary of adult education, this can align with notions of "transformative praxis" (Freire, 1994) and "critical hope" (Schwittay, 2025), yet it adds a distinct theological dimension by foregrounding spiritual mindfulness as a core competency. Pedagogically, this requires learning environments that cultivate spiritual agency through embodied practices such as contemplative reflection, ritual literacy, ethical action, and collective discernment. Drawing on prophetic models of engagement and resistance, Muslim educators can guide learners to enact faith as lived praxis, where learning is not only cognitive or discursive, but performative and world-engaging. This repositioning of efficacy within a spiritually resonant framework allows for the reclamation of human agency as both inner transformation and outward responsiveness. Thus, learners are supported in cultivating forms of action that are guided not only by strategic intent but also by a deep attunement to divine orientation and a heightened sense of moral responsibility.

4. Self-worth as divine recognition and ontological nobility

In the landscape of adult education, particularly within identity-affirming and healing-centered pedagogies, the issue of self-worth emerges as a critical domain of both psychological resilience and existential affirmation. Rumi's hermeneutics of meaning offers a countercultural vision of self-worth; one that simultaneously challenges, at both ends of the spectrum, the meritocratic logic of neoliberalism and the shame-based moralism that can dominate certain religious discourses. In his view, human dignity is not contingent upon achievement, status, or even moral perfection, but is ontologically rooted in divine recognition and sustained through spiritual remembrance and individual intimacy with the Divine. This reframing can be especially transformative for Muslim adults in diaspora, who frequently confront the dehumanizing effects of Islamophobia, racialization, and cultural alienation. Rumi's vision offers a restorative theological anthropology in which the human being is seen as a carrier of Divine breath, akin to the Judeo-Christian concept of *Imago Dei*, and as the entrusted bearer the moral-spiritual responsibility that signifies human nobility rather than burden. Within the context of adult education, this calls for pedagogical approaches that integrate spiritual affirmation, trauma-informed practices, and what might be termed a "theology of selfhood" as a framework that affirms human worth as divinely inscribed and irreducible to external valuations. Educators can draw on narrative reconstruction, communal witnessing, and reflective theological engagement to support learners in reclaiming a sacred sense of self, one grounded not in egoic inflation but in ontological worthiness. Such pedagogical strategies do not merely build self-esteem; they cultivate what might be called "existential esteem" as a deep, relational awareness of being seen, known, and dignified by the Divine, even in the midst of marginality and fragmentation.

Concluding Remarks

This study sought to investigate the pedagogical potentials of Rumi's First Sermon in the *Majāles-e Sabʿa* by uncovering its resources of wisdom literature for contemporary settings adult learning. I have attempted to translate Rumi's language of longing, repentance, divine mercy, and moral clarity into curricular practices that cultivate existential self-reflection and spiritual resilience. Educators can implement dialogical inquiry around

concepts like *purpose as return with a divine orientation* and *self-worth through humility and sincerity*, with the aim to invite learners to reframe their lived experiences within a spiritual narrative of meaning in life. For example, reflective storytelling and contemplative reading of sacred texts can serve as praxis to explore themes such as moral struggle, eschatological hope, and the theology of trust. Rumi's framework invites learners to engage not only intellectually but also spiritually and bridge the interior formation of the soul with ethical imagination and relational selfhood. This creates a spiritually generative pedagogy where adult learners are not merely acquiring knowledge but re-storying their lives within the metaphysics of divine love, moral renewal, and eschatological accountability. In plural and disorienting diasporic spaces, such wisdom pedagogy can help learners cultivate what might be called *eschatological or teleological literacy* as a vision of life anchored in divine purpose and oriented toward ultimate return.

While Rumi's framework offers a helpful pedagogical promise, its application can raise critical challenges from the standpoint of educational philosophy and ethics. A primary tension might lie in reconciling the theological normativity of Rumi's discourse with pluralist principles in contemporary education. Rumi's theocentric hermeneutics of meaning in life presumes a worldview structured around divine justice, mercy, and return which can raise ethical questions about inclusivity and epistemological openness in multicultural classrooms. Can such a model remain dialogically open, or does it risk re-inscribing a particular metaphysical vision as normative or hegemonic? Furthermore, from a philosophical perspective, translating mystical language into pedagogical form demands careful negotiation of interpretive authority. For instance, educators must avoid moralizing or romanticizing suffering through selective readings of repentance and despair, and instead consistently promote critical, context-aware engagement. Another challenge pertains to the ethics of emotional and spiritual formation: how does one responsibly facilitate experiences of vulnerability, grief, and longing without overstepping the psychological or pastoral boundaries of education? These dilemmas point to the need for pedagogical frameworks in Religious Education that are both theologically rooted and hermeneutically reflexive, i.e. honoring the depth of Rumi's insights while maintaining ethical attentiveness to learners' diverse spiritual, cultural, and psychological horizons.

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