

## SEMA

Sema, or Seb-i Arus, meaning Nuptial Night or Night of Union, is a ceremony held every year on the anniversary of Mevlana's death. It begins after the afternoon prayer with the reading of the Koran. According to Mevlana's teachings, human beings are born twice, once of their mothers and the second time of their own bodies. The real birth is the second, spiritual birth. Mevlevi dervishes, guided by a spiritual leader, are expected to live as members of a Mevlevi lodge, according to the principles of his teaching. A long period of spiritual progress is necessary before they can participate in the whirling dance, for which they wear a tall cap symbolizing the tomb of carnality, and a white robe which is its shroud. They dance to music played on the ney and rebap, the latter a three stringed instrument.

Mevlana was a mystic who addressed all people, regardless of their faith or ethnic origin, speaking of love of God, truth, humanity and nature. He was born in the city of Balkh in Turkestan in the 13th century, and later settled in the city of Konya in Turkey with his father Bahaeddin Veled.

He became one of the greatest mystic philosophers of all time, and laid the foundations of modern existentialism. Divine love is the sole objective of spiritual life. Everything in the universe is spinning, and the dervishes seek true love of the divine by spinning themselves. Whirling to the enchanting sound of the ney, they attain consciousness of God. The sound of the ney, a type of reed flute, is said to be the weeping of the reeds to whom secrets were revealed. In their longing to speak they whispered them into a well, and weep from remorse. Mevlana loved the ney, and often speaks of this instrument metaphorically in his poems. This instrument therefore has a special place in mystic culture. He compared the way that the reed stem is burnt with a red hot iron to remove the nodes inside when making a ney, to the way that the fire of divine love burns away pride, arrogance, deceit and other human faults. Those who have achieved spiritual maturity resemble the ney, and listening to them is to listen to God blowing on the human soul. Mevlana wrote the most poignant of his famous rubai or quatrains on the subject of divine love. In his greatest work, the Mesnevi, he set out to enlighten people and guide them on the true path. Mevlana was in his eighties when he completed the Mesnevi, and died on the night of 17 December 1273.

**Mystic Turning** The sema, as the ceremony of the whirling dance is known, consists of seven parts.



In the first part the dervishes praise the Prophet Mohammed and the prophets who came before him and God. The beat on the kudüm or double drum, the second part, represents God's command 'Let it be.' Then the ney plays music representing carnal life. The dancers, known as semazen, then greet one another three times and walk around in a circle. This symbolizes the greeting of the mystic spirit. The dancers then remove their black jackets, symbolizing their birth into the eternal spiritual world. The return to truth has begun. Crossing their arms across their breast, to signify the number one, they testify to the unity of God. Then kissing the hand of the seyh, who silently gives his permission to participate in the sema, they begin to turn anticlockwise, their right arm held up in the air, their left foot remaining on the ground, and their right foot lifted.

The sema consists of four parts, the first representing awareness of knowledge and truth, and thus awareness of the Creator and the dervishes' own surrender to Him; the second awe at the power of God for creating humankind; the third the transformation of awe and gratitude into love, and the sacrifice of mind to love in an act of ultimate submission; the fourth the completion of the spiritual journey, acceptance of fate, and the return to the true meaning of creation. The ceremony concludes with prayers in two parts.



