

Skirt Committees

The Forty Rules of Love by the Turkish author Elif Shafak opened a door of meditation that took me to another time and place. From this book I learned the story and origin of the dervishes' dance for the first time. Known in Egypt as *tanoura*, or skirt dancing, the practice originated with the worshiper Jalaluddin Rumi in Konya, Turkey before his adoption of the Sufi practice which was imported from Persia. Of course, this is recounted in the book, and since I didn't perform any research or verification from my side, the author is the only person accountable for this information. Don't blame me for any historical errors because my words are based on the contents of that book. More importantly, this worshiper turned into a poet and wrote mostly poems in praise of his companion on the Sufi path, dervish Shams Al Din Tabrizi. Together they managed to transform the understanding of love and worshipping God into a bizarre and strange school of thought. After months of solitude, they invented or fabricated a dance which they called *Sama*. They designed everything down to the clothes, the movements, and the rhythms that go along with the dance. It was their belief, God forbid, that performing this dance was a way to reach perfection, to earn God's blessings, and unite with Him. Whatever their goal, this practice of spinning in circles, recitation, and meditation spread as a wildfire through the Islamic world at that time. Most practitioners of this ritual aimed to restrain selfish thoughts and desires by listening to music, contemplating God, and whirling in circles. There are endless words to describe their actions.

The truth behind this, however, is that it shortens the time spent in legitimate prayer or in earning a livelihood. These pursuits are substituted with physical