

The Impact of The Forty Rules of Love on Modern Readers: Translating Sufi Wisdom into Micro-narratives for Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* engages complex Sufi philosophy in accessible, emotionally compelling micro-narratives to connect with the psychographic profile of Generation Z readers. The analysis of Shafak's work will employ Reader-Response Theory to study how the narrative structures characterized by condensed reflective stories and philosophical principles emitted from Shafak's work merge ancient Sufi wisdom with the soul searching for purpose, authenticity, spiritual liberation, and emotional wellness that Generation Z readers are positioned to carry out. Using qualitative and comparative skin analysis with explanatory integrated forms of study analysis, we will examine how self-awareness, love, interim transformation, and global unity resonate with young people today who are constantly engulfed in the digital revolution of fast-paced media. Ultimately, the findings evidenced that Shafak's poetic lens, inclusivity in characters, and pluralism on a spiritual level not only democratized voices of mystics but also functioned at their core for emotional healing and self-identification opportunities for young readers. It was concluded that *The Forty Rules of Love* provides a bridge through literary transformation, existing between the teachings of Sufi thought and the emerging spiritual and emotional expressions of modern readers through love, authenticity, and self-authenticity being crucial for Generation Z readers.

INTRODUCTION

The Forty Rules of Love by Elif Shafak is a masterwork that bridges the gap between the difficulties of modern life and the spiritual realm of Sufism in the thirteenth century. Shafak's story, which is organized as text within text, reintroduces the spiritual and philosophical teachings of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz while also highlighting the protagonist Ella Rubinstein's transformational journey. One branch of Islam that is essentially esoteric and involves complete departure in this life via self-actualization and surrender is Sufism. For instance, *baqa* is regarded by Sufis as a state of existence with, through, in, and for God. *The Forty Rules of Love* crosses cultural and religious divides with its universal themes of love, faith, inner transformation, and spiritual freedom, establishing Sufi wisdom as a manual for negotiating the challenges of contemporary life. Sufism's central standards are the idea of *tazkiyah*, or spiritual purification, and the ultimate objective of becoming closer to God (*taqwa*). Sufis hold that in order to achieve this state, the soul must be cleansed of all earthly attachments and desires. *Dhikr*, or "remembrance of God," is a fundamental Sufi practice involving repeating prayers and divine names to cultivate mindfulness of God. Alongside other practices like meditation, poetry recitation, and music (*sama*), this helps the Sufi focus on their inner journey toward the Divine. Sufism also highlights the importance of *Ihsan*, or spiritual perfection, which is worshiping God as if you see Him and believing that He sees you, even if you do not. Sufis aim for a state of *baqa* (subsistence in God) and *fana* (annihilation of the ego), where the soul exists in unity with the Divine and the individual self dissolves.

Gen Zers actually starting to ask more profound questions about life in the fast-paced, hectic world of today. "Who am I really?" or "What is the purpose of all this?" are questions they ask themselves. Gen Z seeks emotional balance, meaning, and tranquility amid the stress of work, school, social media, and continual comparisons. Islam is the source of the Sufi spiritual path. However, it goes beyond religion and regulations. Sufism emphasizes kindness, love, peace, and discovering God by searching within. It teaches that your inner self – your soul, your love, and your relationships with others – is more significant than your outward appearance. What exactly is Sufism, then? It's about making a connection with the Divine – not just through prayer, but also through silence, love, poetry, music, and introspection. According to Sufism, God can be found everywhere – in nature, in a gentle smile, in silence, and even in our hardships – rather than only in mosques and religious texts. Well-known Sufi poets like Shams of Tabriz and Rumi wrote about love, not just romantic love but the love that binds all people together. They held that love is the way to God and that we can get closer to something bigger than ourselves by loving others and ourselves. This message is directly in line with Gen Z's worldview. Nowadays, many young people are seeking meaningful, emotional, and personal spiritual experiences, rather than adhering to rigid religious traditions. They desire the freedom to hold their own beliefs. Sufism gives the liberty of having personal beliefs and living life based on them. "You don't need perfection," it states. Be truthful to your own self and go where your heart takes you. For Gen Z, who often face the fear of missing out, the fear of not being perfect, successful, and happy enough, the core

thought of Sufism is a relief. Self-love is arguably Sufism's finest teaching. According to Sufism, each person carries a light, or a piece of the Divine. All you need to do is to recognize that you are enough already. "Don't look outside of yourself for your worth," Sufism advises our youth amid a plethora of likes and filters. Examine yourself. You already deserve it. The power of quietness and silence is another strong Sufi notion. In Sufism, you really do not have to constantly talk or act -----sometimes sitting there with your thoughts, listening to your heart, or simply being quiet can lead to the most powerful moments. This radically aligns with Sufism which indicates that sincere answers come from resting within the silence in oneself and not strictly from reading authors, social media, etc. Sufism teaches a powerful lesson on unconditional love as noted by the most famous Sufi poet, Rumi, when he said, "Love has no labels, no definitions." Essentially, love is above all laws. It is beyond background, gender, race, or religion. This message fits with Gen Z really well, because they are known for openness and inclusivity. They believe that people should be accepted and love should be free, sincere, and full of compassion - whether love be romantic in nature, self-love, or love for others. Sufism fully endorses that viewpoint. The way that Sufism incorporates poetry, music, and art into its spiritual path is also fascinating. Sufis feel closer to God through poetry, music, and dance (such as the well-known whirling dervishes). They think that heart is opened by creativity. Gen Z is well aware of this since they enjoy using writing, music and social media to express themselves. Young people are inspired to rise, dream, and be themselves when they read a quote by Rumi that goes something like, "You were born with wings, why prefer to crawl through life?" Sufism also promotes emotional recovery and mental wellness. Pain is viewed as a teacher rather than as something negative in many Sufi poems and teachings. "The wound is the place where the Light enters you," Rumi wrote. This implies that you have the opportunity to develop and recover even when you're in pain. This message gives hope to Gen Z, who are very candid about therapy, anxiety, and trauma. It serves as a reminder that sadness is normal and that recovery takes time. According to Sufism, suffering can make you stronger and wiser.

Research Questions

1. How does The Forty Rules of Love make Sufi teachings relatable for Gen Z?
2. How do Gen Z readers connect with the book's spiritual and philosophical ideas?
3. What makes the novel emotionally powerful and transformative for today's readers?

Research Objectives

- To explore how The Forty Rules of Love uses short stories to share Sufi ideas that connect with Gen Z.

- To analyze how modern readers, especially Gen Z, relate to Sufi wisdom in today's digital world.

To assess how the book affects Gen Z emotionally and mentally, especially around love, identity, and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until a reader interprets the marks on the page as spoken symbols, Rosenblatt (1978) sees the text "as an object of paper and ink." (23). According to Rosenblatt, the reader and the text engage in a transaction whereby the reader's actions on the text give the inkblots meaning. On his part, Iser theorizes that the literary work is created by the reader and the text coming together. Iser (1978) interprets this convergence as "always remaining virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader," despite the fact that it cannot be precisely located at that point (275). He draws attention to the aesthetic (reader) and artistic (author). The sociocultural norms and presumptions that shape a reader's interpretation of any literary work in a particular historical moment are referred to as "horizons of expectations" by Jauss (1982). According to Jauss, every literary work has a historical context, so any interpretation and significance are linked to the dominant cultural milieu. Jauss emphasizes that a literary work relies on the reader to absorb and actualize the text rather than the work existing independently. But it's crucial to recognize Jauss's allusion to the cultural context, which facilitates the reader's interpretation. Stated differently, the reader must find a common ground with his social background in order to validate his interpretation, as it informs his interpretation. This is echoed by Rosenblatt (1978), who notes that different readers will interpret written works differently and that each person brings their own background information, beliefs, values, cultural expectations, and reading context to the reading experience (144).

Theoretical Framework

It is beneficial to use Reader-Response Theory to analyze how Gen Z readers engage with these themes. Supported by theorists like Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, this theory holds that the reader co-creates meaning rather than existing solely in the text. It recognizes the varying subjective interpretations resulting from personal experiences, cultural contexts, and beliefs. Applying this to *The Forty Rules of Love*, it examines how Gen Z readers adapt Sufi teachings to fit their own stories and modern sensibilities, influenced by the values of individualism, inclusivity, mental health awareness, and digital engagement. Reader-response theory is essentially a reaction against the New Criticism's proponents, who believed that meaning could only be found in the text and could only be understood by a skilled literary critic with succinct analytical abilities. Advocates of this theory emphasize the significance that is caused by the reader's reaction to a particular text in a particular way, as well as by the text itself. As a result, the reader's interpretation is influenced by his or her prior knowledge and experiences as well as insights and deductions. However, based on whether or not a text has an objective existence, differences among reader-oriented critics

have been established. While some critics, like Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, and Hans Robert Jauss, emphasize that meaning is produced through a transactional process between the reader and the text, others, like Norman Holland, David Bleich, and Stanley Fish, theorize that the reader alone is responsible for the meaning that is produced.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: Data of research is collected by books, journals, online essay and online articles

Data Analysis: The data analysis is conducted qualitatively.

Research Approach: The research approach is qualitative, comparative and explanatory

Research Instruments: The research instruments include primary source: text and secondary sources (books, essay, and journals).

RESEARCH RESULT

The data shows that Shafak's poetic and symbolic language significantly increases the reader's emotional connection. Shafak's use of metaphors and poetic prose converts abstract concepts to felt experiences and elevates spiritual truths into aesthetic experiences. Gen Z readers, who are attracted to emotionally genuine and visually appealing content (often presented via quotes, poetry or forms of artwork on social media), may find in Shafak's writing an effective means of self-expression and emotional literacy. Sufism sits at the center of Islam's rich spiritual roots, affirming love, inner purification, and deepened awareness of God. In the modern-day context of Islam, Sufism is still very much alive as a spiritual force. As a movement that arose a few centuries into Islam, it has inspired countless individuals through its practice, prose, and devotion, and it has lent inspiration to people in their journeys of seeking the Divine presence at numerous junctures of their lives. For those motivated to reach a deeper understanding of what Sufism is and where it positions itself in the role of Islam, Sufism offers a mystical path that has shaped the perspectives of millions of people for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Sufism adheres to teaching a path of relationship with the divine as a path of love, as a path of devotion, and as constant remembering of the Divine, whether that expression be through poetry, music, or silent meditation. In Generation Z readers, the novel's structure, themes, and narrative technique demonstrates how this can be a transformative and life-changing read. Not only does it move readers into a two-dimensional relationship with Sufi wisdom, but it also updates and interprets Sufi wisdom to meet their emotional requirements, spiritual hunger, and sense of identity as they seek meaning and identity in a postmodern, digitally interconnected world.

DISCUSSION

The Forty Rules of Love by Elif Shafak is organized around two stories: the historical account of the relationship between the Sufi poet Rumi and his spiritual companion Shams of Tabriz in the 13th century, and the contemporary story of Ella Rubinstein, a middle-aged American woman going through a personal and spiritual awakening. The novel's structure is essential to its impact because it directly connects Sufi thought to the inner lives of contemporary readers by contrasting timeless spiritual wisdom with contemporary existential crises. The book's chapters frequently serve as standalone micro-narratives that are full of philosophical depth and emotional resonance. In the same way as Gen Z consumes media, these easily digestible morsels of meaning could be short, affective fables, and very often are used for identity formulation and self-exploration. The "Forty Rules" themselves are guiding principles spelled out written dialogue, spoken monologue, and actions symbolically written throughout the book. Each rule represents an essential tenet of Sufi thinking: humility, compassion, ego-awareness, and love of the Divine.

The Forty Rules of Love by Elif Shafak serves as a bridge between modern spiritual inquiry, and the more traditional Sufi wisdom. The book tells a deeply mystical and reflective story of love, ego, faith, and the human condition by overlaying the voices of Shams of Tabriz and Rumi. From a subjective Sufi place, all of these teachings become avenues of spiritual illumination. At another level, they equally resonate with Gen Z, a generation that is redefining identity, spirituality, and the meaning of connection in contemporary, hyper-digitalized ways.

One of the most striking rules comes from Shams of Tabriz, who says, *"How we see God is a direct reflection of how we see ourselves. If God brings to mind mostly fear and blame, it means there is too much fear and blame welled inside us. If we see God as full of love and compassion, so are we."*

This implies that our thoughts about God reflect our inner feelings. We might experience fear or guilt if we believe that God is irate or punishing us. However, if we believe that God is kind and loving, it indicates that we are at peace and love with ourselves. Sufism holds that self-awareness and self-healing are the first steps on the road to knowing God. This could be interpreted as a call to love oneself more and let go of negative thoughts by Gen Z, who are highly conscious of mental health and emotional well-being. In search of a loving, compassionate connection with something greater than themselves, many people are turning away from religion that is based on fear.

Another quote from Shams says, *"The path to the Truth is a labour of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide. Not your mind. Meet, challenge and ultimately prevail over your nafs (false ego) with your heart."*

Shams asserts that striving for perfection or overanalyzing is not the true path in life. It's about conquering your ego – the aspect of you that experiences pride, fear, or selfishness – and listening to your heart. Sufism holds that genuine

wisdom originates in the heart rather than the head. Being genuine and having emotional intelligence are highly valued by Generation Z. Instead of just doing what society expects, many young people today place more emphasis on doing what feels right in their hearts. They might also associate this quote with concepts like accepting oneself, staying loyal to oneself, and avoiding performative or phony conduct on social media.

One of the most beautiful lessons in the book is: *"You can study God through everything and everyone in the universe, because God is not confined in a mosque, synagogue or church. ... There is only one place to look for Him: in the heart of a true lover."*

This implies that God is present outside of religious structures and ceremonies. Rather, God is present in every moment, in every person, and most particularly in love. Someone who loves deeply and selflessly is referred to as a "true lover." According to Sufism, the closest thing to God is love. This concept may resonate with Gen Z, who frequently investigate spirituality outside of conventional religion. Many of them think that spirituality is not limited to religious laws but can also be found in friendship, art, nature, and serving others. This generation views kindness, defending others, and loving others as means of establishing a connection with something bigger.

Another rule from Shams says, *"Most problems of the world stem from linguistic mistakes and simple misunderstandings. Don't ever take words at face value. ... That which cannot be put into words can only be grasped through silence."*

This shows that misunderstanding or lack of communication is the main cause of many arguments and challenges. Words can be helpful for sure, but are not always enough to express deeper emotions or truths. If anything, sometimes discovering and connecting with ourselves or others is best done in stillness and silence. Sufi wisdom sees silence as potent, too, as it is the means for communication with God and your soul. Having grown up in the age of social media and texting, Gen Z is aware how simply you can get someone very wrong online. This quote might offer them to really consider slowing down, to think first, and to give time to reflect outside of reality and away from technology.

Another powerful teaching of Shams was about patience. He says, *"Patience does not mean to passively endure. It means to look at the thorn and see the rose, to look at the night and see the dawn."*

This shows that patience is more than suffering. It means having faith that dark times will be replaced by better days and being aware of the positive side of suffering.

Sufism reinforces that every dark moment is followed by light and that suffering is necessary for growth. This message is relevant for Gen Z because they are facing a lot of situations where social pressure, the economy, and climate and

all play a part. Many are working through it with healing, creativity, and activism to turn suffering into power. This guideline is intended to give them hope to appreciate the beauty that can come from suffering.

One of the most poetic rules comes from Rumi: *"A life without love is of no account. Don't ask yourself what kind of love ... Divisions only lead to more divisions. Love has no labels, no definitions. ... Love is the water of life. And a lover is a soul of fire! The universe turns differently when fire loves water."*

According to Rumi, love is the most significant thing in life and shouldn't be constrained or given a name. True love transcends social norms, gender, and rules. It could be spiritual, romantic, or just your love for the world. The picture of fire and water falling in love demonstrates how opposites can unite to produce something lovely. This is especially significant to Gen Z. Labels related to identity, gender, and love are being questioned by a large number of young people today. They think that love should be unrestricted and embracing because it is love. This rule encourages people to love freely and boldly and supports that idea.

However, they are delivered in poetic yet approachable language, which makes them perfect for a worldwide, multigenerational audience. These guidelines provide readers with opportunities to consider their own lives in addition to acting as a moral and spiritual compass for the characters.

For example, Rule 18, which states, *"Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you,"* encourages young readers to embrace flexibility and growth in the face of an uncertain social and economic environment.

Furthermore, Ella acts as a current avatar for Gen Z readers, taking on the status quo, the roles of spouse, and the flimsy ideals of satisfaction and success. Her transformation, initiated by reading a book about Rumi and Shams, is akin to what many contemporary readers experience while reading the book: an interior conversion sparked by literary immersion. The inclusion of letters, internal ruminations, and short meditative reflections, in the book comprise a fractured narrative structure in terms of Gen Z's deductive reasoning, non-linearity, conceptual mutability and fluidity, and digital multitasking, highlighting the themes that embody Gen Z's potentialities for meaning making. Respectively, the story's execution of the exploration of multiple perspectives is equally significant: Shafak affirms the inclusive and pluralistic nature of Sufi thought by articulating the perspectives of characters from different social, religious, and cultural situations. The perspective of the uptight scholar is portrayed alongside the viewpoint of an outcast dervish, the multiple locations and perspectives allow for reader identification in a variety of experiences that collectively explore divine love and spiritual freedom. Gen Z views and values are aligned decisively with the idea that truth cannot be one thing with no multiplicities of angles, as this complexity of visual storytelling reconfirms.

In order to bridge the gap between traditional Sufi knowledge and the emotional and psychological needs of contemporary readers, the novel's poetic language, spiritual discourse, and multicultural landscapes are critical. It is the

ability to convey philosophical ideas through personal narrative that transforms *The Forty Rules of Love* into a powerful literary agent of spiritual investigation, self-exploration, and intercultural connection. Not only does Shafak's book recast Sufi ideas for a contemporary readership, she recontextualizes them in ways that are compelling for Gen Z in their search for purpose and authenticity, and meaningful emotional connection, as illustrated by the content analysis. Living, according to Sufism, involves letting go of the ego, following your heart, loving with fullness, and seeing God everywhere. These lessons resonate with the values of Gen Z. Values such as kindness, honesty, and choosing your own spiritual course, as opposed to simply following rules, are shared between Sufism and the younger generation. In summary, *The Forty Rules of Love* is a guide for living with more purpose and heart in the present for Generation Z, not just a chronicle of the past.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Forty Rules of Love is a spiritual map designed to guide the modern heart through the language of love. Elif Shafak transforms the deep, timeless wisdom of Sufism into short, powerful stories that can now be called "micro-narratives." The Gen Z generation, who often seek meaning in brief yet emotionally impactful content, can connect with these stories. The lessons from this book feel fresh, personal, and relevant whether they appear as an Instagram quote, a voice message among friends, or a catchy caption that sticks with you all day. Each of the 'rules' from Shams of Tabriz offers a small universe of meaning that is simple to remember, yet can impact how you see life and love. What is special for Generation Z about this book is how it is a space between the inner and outer worlds. *The Forty Rules of Love* provides a soothing reflection for a generation that has an abundance of information yet often feels purposeless. It provides a call to looking within, following one's heart and overcoming fear, judgment and the ego. It expresses that love is more than a feeling. Love is an action, a spiritual act, and a way of forming relationships that matter. The message is a welcome change in today's fast-paced distracted, digital world. It encourages young readers to stop, reflect and feel. Generation Z cares about real emotional connection, self-rated worth, and mental well-being. Sufism brings forth a healing message with this book: your journey is sacred, your love is valuable, and your pain is real. The rules about "unity in diversity," "welcome change," "be kind to the poet," "love and love again," "find beauty in hardship," "don't control everything," and "do not label others" represent the exact message Generation Z needs. They utilize *The Forty Rules of Love* as a journal, a lens, and even a sanctuary in this world during difficult times, rather than only for the incredible story. The book's ability to transcend cultures, times, and religions renders it truly enchanting. It preserves the meaning of 13th-century Sufi ideas into modern times. The novel illustrates that wisdom is not bound to time but is applicable to our present lives through the lives of Rumi and Shams, and the contemporary narrative of Ella Rubinstein. After all, love never goes out of style. Most people, regardless of religious or non-religious, can relate to the central idea of love being the path to truth (or whatever term is useful in their belief). The

Forty Rules of Love will guide Generation Z through their own process of identity construction in their own value systems; it is a brief, heartfelt and genuine text that resonates with them. Importantly, it leaves them with a sense of confidence that to be authentic is the most courageous thing they can do; that love is not weakness; that their feelings matter. It helps translate lofty spiritual ideas into simple, everyday actions, like listening, forgiving someone, or practicing self-kindness. So, the book not only influences readers but also transforms them, helping a new generation bring the light of Sufi wisdom into a future that's both challenging and hopeful.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Elif Shafak's book can inspire everlasting principles. It shows that self-awareness, love, patience, and silence are not out-of-date ideas, but concrete skills to cultivate for living in the modern world. The Forty Rules of Love can teach anyone, especially young people searching for a deeper meaning in this confusing, frenetic modern world, Shams' passionate words or through Rumi's poetry. These rules remind us that we should begin with love; pure love, sincere love, deep love.

1. Several significant points derived from the analysis of The Forty Rules of Love highlight the book's remarkable capability to connect the spiritual, intellectual and emotional needs of modern readers, particularly Generation Z, to ancient Sufi philosophy. First, the book successfully reintroduces complex Sufi concepts through the use of micro-narratives, which are the short and emotionally compelling stories and meditative stories that appeal to Gen Z's appetite for easily digestible and yet meaningful material to read. The readers can engage with deeply spiritual ideas through these narrative fragments, such as the title "forty rules," without being informed by Islamic mysticism or historical context. The relevance of Sufi wisdom to a generation that is often estranged from orthodox understandings of spirituality is heightened by this accessibility.
2. Second, readers have the opportunity to undergo change in relation to the character driven narrative of the book. For Gen Z readers, who are searching for authenticity, self-knowledge and purpose in an increasingly fragmented and materialistic world, Ella's and Shams of Tabriz's, stages of emotional maturity are the most powerful metaphor for inner awakening. Ella's inner conflict, the battle between her own fulfillment and societal expectations, illustrates the struggles of many of today's young readers. Ella's ultimate victory over fear and tradition underscores that spiritual growth and development is possible and important in today's world.
3. A third and very significant finding is The Forty Rules of Love's encouragement of pluralism and inclusivity. The featured characters purposefully included a range of voices and cultural references, making it easy for readers of many social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to identify with or feel included within the narrative. The values of Generation Z - diversity, empathy, and global citizenship - not only mirror those of Ella but also directly reflect the book's inclusivity. Readers can appreciate Shafak's

pluralistic representation of love as a force that can bring people together in spite of their differences and cross-cultural and religious divides. This opened the book up for spiritual democratization; instead of presenting Sufi love as a doctrine, she represents it as lived and experienced truth. Additionally, the data shows that Shafak's use of poetic and symbolic language significantly increases the reader's emotional connection. Shafak makes use of metaphors and poetic prose to convert abstract concepts to felt experiences and to elevate spiritual truths into aesthetic experiences. Shafak's style provides Gen Z readers, who are attracted to emotionally genuine and visually appealing content (often presented via quotes poetry or forms of artwork on social media), a pathway for self-expression and emotional literacy.

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