

THE SELF AND THE OTHER IN IBN ARABI AND RUMI

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İbn Arabî ve Mevlana'da Ben ve Öteki

Bu makale vahdet-i vücûd anlayışı çerçevesinde insan benliğinin Tanrı ve diğer insanlarla olan ilişkisini ele alır. Benlik kavramının ne olduğu pek çok disiplin tarafından tartışılmış ve benliğimin *diğeri* ile olan ilişkisi hala tam olarak ortaya konulamamıştır. Ben ve öteki arasındaki ilişki nasıl olmalıdır, aramızdaki sınır nerede başlar nerede biter? Değişik ilimler ve felsefeler bu konuda farklı, pek çok zamanda tutarsız cevaplar vermiştir. Tasavvuf bir sistem olarak bu soruya cevap verecek güce sahiptir. Özellikle İbn Arabî ve Mevlana bu konuda birbirini tamamlayan ilginç görüşlere sahiptirler. Makalemiz bu iki büyük sufînin benlik konusundaki görüşlerini ortaya koymaya çalışmakta, bu konuda batıda yapılan çalışmalarını da değerlendirmeye özen göstermektedir. Bu konuda en güvenilir kaynak olarak ta A. Avni Konuk beyin mesnevi şerhi öne çıkarılmıştır, zira Konuk bu eserinde İbn Arabî ile Mevlana'yı mezcetmiş, birinin fikrini diğeri ile açıklamıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tasavvuf, ben ve öteki, Mevlana, İbn Arabî, Benötesi psikoloji

Abstract

The self and the other in Ibn Arabi and Rumi

This article will discuss human self and its relationship with the self of God as well as with other human selves. This relationship has been studied by many disciplines and there is no definite theory as to the nature of this relationship. What are the borders between my self and other? How should be the relationship with different selves? Sufism has great potential to give answers to such an experiential problem. Among Sufis Ibn Arabi and Rumi have ideas which complete each other. Avni Konuk who interprets Rumi's Mathnawi through the eyes of Ibn Arabi is the connection point between these two great Sufis.

Key words: Sufism, self and other, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Transpersonal Psychology

This article aims to study the relationship between the self and the other. The discussion of what the self is and its relationship with the body is still going on. Modern science has no definite answer to the nature of self. However, for materialist psychologists human self is decidedly microcosmic. The human species is generally conceived of as only part of the evolutionary and

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cosmological order, perhaps considered only a small speck in an infinitely vast universe. For Ibn Arabi and Rumi, such views are a total inversion of the actual situation; the human self is essentially macrocosmic. The essential reality of human self is not evolutionary or cosmological; these universes themselves are small compared with the inheritance which God has bestowed upon the human self.¹

This article will not discuss the nature of the self, but rather its macrocosmic and divine roots. Therefore the self in this title will be studied from two main perspectives. Firstly, the self as God and secondly the self of anything other than God (mâsiwâ). The relationship between God and the others has produced many philosophical and religious systems. Questions such as “what is the position of creation that we see with our eyes in relation to God, does creation exist separately from God? If yes, how do these two beings co-relate with each other? If there is only one being, then how can we explain the world of plurality which we feel with our senses? Although subject is very much related to the subject of *wahdat-i wujûd*, this article is intended not to discuss the unity between beings, but the relationship between the selves. In this context Ibn Arabi and Rumi will be studied through the eyes of Avni Konuk, the famous Turkish commentator both on the *Fusus* and the *Mathnawi*. Konuk’s commentary on the *Mathnawi* titled the *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, is done from the perspective of Akbarian tradition and it explains the verses of Rumi with the ideas of Ibn Arabi. Some difficult aspects of Ibn Arabi is simplified in the didactic verses of Rumi, therefore it is important to read them together and see the common points between these two colossal Sufis.

The separation between the self of God (Zâtullah) and other selves

Akbarian Sufis believe that there was a time when man had no separate identity from God. Man existed in God’s divine knowledge. They also project that even today man’s separate identify from God is an illusion. Hence Sufism as a movement aims to eradicate the feeling of separateness from the Divine. In this context the literal meaning of the word ‘religion’ is very interesting; religion comes from ‘religere’, to bind together, reconnection to the ‘Urbild’ whose image we are, and our soul has the duty to make,

1 Peter Coated, ‘Ibn Arabi and the self’ in Ibn Arabi and Modern Thought, The history of Taking Metaphysics Seriously, Oxford, 2002, p.164

without fail, the effort of this reconnection.² This meaning of the word religion is very much in accordance with Ibn Arabi and Rumi's understanding.

According to Ibn Arabi, there is only 'One Real Being' although it is manifested in many forms. One being is the reality of all existence that appears in the world of forms. All existence is the result of God's manifestation in various levels. Although these are classified in different names, generally the Akbarian tradition accepts seven *hazarât* (presences). In these presences at the fourth level, the selves of creation or their souls start alienation. This is called *gayriyya*, otherness. At this level every soul knows himself and his origin and his Lord separately. The verse "Am I not your Lord" (Araf, 7/172) indicates this level. At this level of *gayriyyah*, the Essence becomes manifest with otherness and separateness. The soul has a kind of relationship with the body without *hulul* (incarnation) and *ittihad*.³

However Ibn Arabi warns us that this closeness between the Self of God and the other selves should not cause us to believe in the divinity of human beings. This is particularly important as far as Christianity is concerned. Allah manifests Himself in all of His creation; hence limiting His manifestation only to Jesus is disbelief. Secondly, according to Ibn Arabi, the idea of incarnation is absurd in his system, since there is no real being after His Being.⁴ Ibn Arabi, in order to explain the relationship between the Self of God and the cosmos without falling into the dilemma of incarnation, uses the metaphor of *He* and *not He*.

Inasmuch as God's essence is independent of the worlds, the cosmos is Not He, but inasmuch as God freely assumes relationships with the worlds through attributes such as creativity and generosity, the cosmos manifests the He. If we examine anything in the universe, God is independent of that thing and infinitely exalted beyond it ... but at the same time, each thing displays one or more of God's attributes, and in this respect the thing must be said to be "similar" (*tashbih*) in some way to God. The very least we can say is that it exists and God exists, even though the modalities of existence may be largely incomparable.⁵

Chittick also adds that we will not reach a concrete understanding of God's Self, His essence;

2 Gary Bruno Schmid, *the Roles of Knower & Known in The Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi, Analytical Psychology of C. G. Jung*, Diploma Thesis- C.G. Jung Institute, Zurich, 1988, p. 14

3 Konuk, A. Avni, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, İstanbul, Dergah Yayınları: İstanbul, 1990, III, p. 18

4 See Konuk, A. Avni, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, III, p.148

5 Chittick W., *Sufi path of knowledge*, New York Press, 1989, p.9

“God is known through the relations, attributions, and correlations that become established between Him and the cosmos. But the Essence is unknown, since nothing is related to It. In proof of this assertion, the Sheikh often cites the Quranic verse, “God warns you about His Self” (3:28-30) which he frequently explains in terms of the prophetic saying, “Reflect (ta-fakkur) upon all things, but reflect upon not God’s Essence.”⁶

The relationship between the divine self and the others has attracted the attention of many Ottoman sufi thinkers. Among them, Ismail Hakki of Bursa, classifies the spiritual level of the scholar according to his/her outlook to the world of plurality:

1. The first group is those who attribute a real existence to mâsiwâ separately from God. Mâsiwâ exist both in reality (haqîki) and in relativity (itibârî). They accept two different beings. Bursevi calls this group as *ulemâ-i mahjûbin*, the scholars whose eyes of heart are covered. Hence at this level, between the Self of God and the selves of the others there is a thick cover that separates them from each other. The majority of human beings belong to this group of people.
2. The second group is those who refuse the existence of mâsiwâ in all relations both in reality and in relativity. Mâsiwâ can neither be identified as being in the real sense, nor as in relationship to God. Bursevi calls this group the *ârifun-i mukâshifun*, the gnostics who have inspirations (kashf). Hence for this group there is only the Self of God, the self of man is only an illusion.
3. The third group denies the existence of the mâsiwâ in the real sense but attributes existence to them in the relative sense. For this group, mâsiwâ is the shadow of God; they do not exist separately but only exist in relation to God as the shade of an object exists. This group is called *mushâhid-i muâyininun*, the eye witnesses who have a vision.
4. The fourth group is also similar to third group in attributing “existence” to mâsiwâ in the relative sense but denying it in the real sense. However, this group is different from them in that they do not understand the mâsiwâ as a shadow; they accept it as *ayn-i Haqq*. Mâsiwâ does not exist separately from the being of God; on the other hand, it is not His shadow as in the third group. For this group, mâsiwâ is the relative and passing *izafî* and *itibari* forms of the Self *zât* of God. This group is called *muhakkikûn-i vâjidûn*, those

6 Chittick W., *Sufî path of knowledge*, p.62

who found the reality of being. However, Bursevi warns that this is the most difficult state for a Gnostic since this is a place where people's feet slip (*mazâlik-i akdâm*). This state causes misunderstanding and only those who have experience of this state can understand it.⁷

Although Bursevi divides people into four groups, in reality the last three groups can be considered in the same group. Hence there are two main groups: those who give *mâsiwâ* a real existence and those who do not attribute *mâsiwâ* a real existence. Of course this division has a direct relation between the conceptions of self. The first group believes totally separate selves of God and man, whereas the second group accepts a kind of human self which is overpowered by the Divine.

Jung shows using his knowledge of psychology shows us the way of feeling God in our selves: "God is a Passion which mankind must treat". Thus, the ardent desire of the creature, inborn within him, to know himself as his Lord, and the ardent desire of God, eternally latent within Him, to know Himself as His creation is the divine love between the one of multiplicity and the one of singularity. And this mutual, spiritual love expresses itself in a parallel way as physical love between man and woman. Love mysticism, the Gnostic way to the re-establishment of the a priori divine Singularity via the unification of opposites, in particular, the unification of the male and female principles, is a natural consequence of participation in these passion between God and man on both the spiritual and physical planes.⁸

Another important scholar who studies the relationship between the self and the other is Qashani. He similarly divides people into six groups according to their conception of the *Zâtullah* and the others.

1. Those who can only see the created, they cannot see anything beyond creation. Hence they believe in two beings; one is the creation that they can see and the other is the Real that they cannot see. They can understand the existence of God through their causes. The rest of the groups can see the unity of being through *basîrah* (the eye of the heart) and their hearts in different levels.
2. Those who can see the *vujud-i Ahadi* of the Real manifesting Himself in the creation. They only see the Haqq.
3. Those who can see both the *khalq* and Haqq from two perspectives.

7 I. Hakki Bursevi, *Rûhul Mesnevî*, Istanbul, 1287, I, p.73-75

8 Gary Bruno Schmid, *The Roles of Knower & Known in The Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p.17

4. Those who can see the one Real behind various relations and forms. These are called *ehlullah*, the friends of Allah.
5. Those who cannot see creation but can only see the Real. These are those who have attained the station of *Fanâ* and *Jamm*.
6. Those who can see the Real in creation and creation in the Real. They went further than *fanâ* and *jamm* reaching the station of separation, *farq*. Their ilm is more than the above mentioned groups.⁹

What we understand from above information is that we have an earthly I, that is our nafs as well as a heavenly I that is our soul with its divine origins. Sufis are in a sense trying to uncover the divine source under the human cover of the self. These discussions are also made by theologians (*kelâmiyyûn*) with regards to free will. The subject whether man is free in his actions, or is it God who makes the choices on behalf of men was a critical dispute between Jabriyya and Qadariyya. Jabriyya refused man's responsibility claiming that he has no free will, the real actor in the human self is Divine. This is not the subject of our article, but all these show that the problem of divine self behind the human one is not the problem of sufis only. If we come back to sufis, according to Akbarian understanding, the more man attains material body, the more his self is alienated from his Lord. The body is like a cover that separates man from the Self. Hence Adam's body is a cover over his high status. But this should not deceive us since he is the perfect loci of divine manifestations. He is like the Kaba, the loci of the Essence (*mazhar-i Zat*). However both in the Kaba and man, the real *mescûdun leh* (the one who is prostrated) is God. Their *suver-i Muteayyine* is only a dream. The famous sufi, Abul Hasan Harakani, implying this high spiritual reality says: *Lew areftumûnî lasajattumûnî* "If you knew my reality, you would prostrate to me".¹⁰ This is also supported by the words of Abdulqadir al-Jilani who said on behalf of God: Man is my secret and I am his secret.¹¹

Sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) indicating togetherness between the Self of God and man

In the Quran the transcendence (*tanzîh*) of Allah is emphasized more than

9 Konuk, A. Avni, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, Dergah Yayınları, İstanbul, 1990, III, 12-13

10 Konuk, *Fusus*, III, 162

11 Jilani, Abdulqadir, *Tercüme-i Gavsîyye*, trans. Feyzullah Eyyubi, İstanbul, n.d., p.3

His similarity (*tashbîh*). However, we find other material that shows closeness between God and man. Such hadiths mostly express that God always wants to be close to His slaves, and does not put high barriers between His Own Self and the other selves. In some of them God even identifies His own Self with the self of the slaves. Both Ibn Arabi and Rumi use these kinds of hadith very often. For example, Ibn Arabi quotes the following hadith:

“When one of his servants is hungry, He says to the others, “I was hungry, but you did not feed Me.” He says to another of His servants, “I was ill but you did not visit Me.” When the servants ask Him about this, He replies to them, “Verily so and so was ill; if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him. So and so was hungry; if you had fed him, you would have found Me with him...”¹²

In this hadith God identifies His Self with the sick and hungry. God loves His servants so much that any favor done to a slave is considered as done to God Himself. Ibn Arabi thinks that since experiencing such closeness needs long training in spirituality, the scholars of external knowledge denied it. He writes:

“Most of the exoteric scholars (*ulamâ al-Rusûm*) lack the knowledge of this through tasting and drinking. So they deny such things in the Gnostics, out of envy on their part. If it were impossible to ascribe such things to God, He would not have ascribed them to Himself, nor would His messengers have ascribed them. But the envy of these people prevents them from seeing that they are rejecting the Book of God and forbidding God’s mercy from reaching some of His servants. Most of the common people (*awâm*) follow the jurists in this denial, in imitation of them.”¹³

This closeness was supported by another hadith which was often quoted by Rumi:

*“I am not contained in aught above or below,
I am not contained in earth or sky, or even
In highest heaven. Know this for surety. O beloved!
Yet I am contained in the believer’s heart!”¹⁴*

By quoting this hadith Rumi emphasizes that God is happy to enter into man’s heart. In another place Rumi, quoting another sufi, states, “God never entered Kabah, but He never went out of my heart.” All these show the close

12 Chittick W., *Sufi path of knowledge*, p.72 (Futuhât, II, 596)

13 Chittick W., *Sufi path of knowledge*, p.72 (Futuhât, I, 272)

14 Rumi, *Masnâvi i Manevi*, trans. E. H. Winfield, P.61

relationship between the Self of God and the selves of sufis.

Rumi commenting on the verse “Allah is with you wherever you are; and Allah sees what you do.” (Hadîd, 57:4) says that if you knew who was guest in your heart you would never be unhappy. In his *rubai* he says that since we do not know ourselves properly, we feel alone and alienated. We feel displeasure with life or with ourselves. These are all negative feelings, due to our misjudgment of our value. Most psychologists today confirm that the feeling of separateness causes psychological disorders among people. For example Fromm writes: *The existence of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety.*¹⁵

The identification between the Self of the Divine and perfect sufis always attracted the enmity of scholars and rulers at large. They have even killed sufis like Hallaj for claiming this unity. Ibn Arabi again says:

“But were a friend of God to express these and similar matters on his own, he would be declared an unbeliever, and perhaps be killed.”¹⁶

According to Konuk what is understood from this line is that the real aim of Sufism is to eradicate this imaginary being (*mevhum*), and to be annihilated in the Being of God. One who can not reach this level cannot be considered a dervish.¹⁷ Supporting Konuk, Shefik Dede (d.2005), a modern commentator of Rumi, says that since very few dervishes attain the level of annihilation in God, Rumi said there is no dervish in the world in the real sense of the word.¹⁸

Rumi uses different metaphors to show how the human self is annihilated in the divine self. Man's self is like a candle in the presence of the divine sun. Like the flame of a candle in the presence of the sun, he is (really) non-existent in (formal) calculation.

Its essence is existent, so that, if you put cotton upon it, the cotton will be consumed by the sparks;

But it is really non-existent: it gives you no light: the sun will have naughted it. (Mathnawi, IV, 3671-73)

Konuk in order to clarify above verses further gives the example of iron

15 Erich Fromm, *The art of Loving*, London: Unwin pub. 1963, p. 7

16 Chittick W., *Sufi path of knowledge*, p.72

17 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, coordinator Mustafa Tahralı, İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006, VI, 334

18 Mevlâna (Rumi), *Konularına Göre Açıklamalı Mesnevî Tercümesi*, trans. Şefik Can, İstanbul, Ötüken, v. V-VI, p.638

which was heated to the extent that it became like fire. If this iron claims to be iron, that is true; if it claims to be fire, that is also true. Hence the iron both existed and non-existed at the same time. The iron is not fire but if you touch it, you will be burnt by its heat.¹⁹

Rumi also explains how God is always working in us, that the actions of man are not related to man but to God. Attributing actions to man is only a metaphorical usage. The real actor behind every act is God Himself. This can be understood better in using the verb to die:

Mata zaydun (zayd died): if Zayd is the agent (grammatical subject), yet he is not the agent, he is defunct.

He is the agent (only) in respect of the grammatical expression; otherwise, he is the one acted upon (the object of the action) and Death is his slayer

What agent (is he), since he has been so overpowered and all the qualities of an agent have been removed from him? (Mathnawi, III, 3683-85)

Konuk, explaining this, says that from the appearance Zayd is the agent (subject) of the action of dying, whereas from the reality point of view, he is the victim and object of death. In reality it is God who takes away one's life.²⁰

Having said that, Rumi also gives examples of those who have achieved this state. Bayazid is the hero who has eradicated his self in God and reached such a state, that if Rumi explained it, hearts would turn into blood out of fear. Rumi relates the experience of Bayazid in the following verses:

That venerable dervish, Bayazid, came to his disciples, saying, "Lo, I am God."

That master of the (mystic) sciences said plainly in drunken fashion, "Hark, there is no god but I, so worship me."

When that ecstasy had passed, they said to him at dawn, "Thou saidest such and such, and this is impiety."

He said, "if I make a scandal, and I am with the body, you must kill me when I say a thing like this." (Mathnawi, IV, 2102 -2139)

According to Rumi Bayazid reached such a state that what he said in this state was not wrong. It is, as a matter of fact, modesty. Konuk refers to Rumi's other work *Fihi ma fih*, in which Rumi explains how it is modest to say "I am Haqq":

19 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, VI, 334

20 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, VI, 338

People think that saying 'I am Haqq' is a great claim on the contrary "I am a slave" is a great claim. Enel haqq is great modesty since the one who claims this is really modest since he demolishes his own existence, in another words, he says: I am not, but God is. I am absolutely nothing. But the one who says 'I am a slave', he attributes separate existence to himself apart from God.

The author of *Sipehsalar* explains this station as "after completing all the stations of the Sufi path, one reaches the station of *Ittihad*. With the power of mortification (*mujahada*), the disciple transforms the copper of his nafs to *al-exir*, the water of life. He gives up all his will and desires connecting his will with that of God. He takes up the attributes of God. The prophet (pbuh) reached this station. The verse of the Quran " (O Muhammad!) So you did not slay them, but it was Allah Who slew them, and you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah Who smote," (Anfal, 8/17) and the hadith 'the slave hears through Me, and sees through Me' indicates this high level of the Prophet (pbuh) and other believers who followed him.

Commenting on this information Konuk says that not only the scholars of external knowledge (*ulema-i zahir*) but also most of the people of Sufi orders are scared of such words and they escape. Because they are covered under the veil of *bashariyya* (humanity), they cannot understand the secret behind it. As narrated by the holy Quran;

"So when Musa had fulfilled the term, and he journeyed with his family, he perceived on this side of the mountain a fire. He said to his family: Wait, I have seen a fire, maybe I will bring to you from it some news or a brand of fire, so that you may warm yourselves. And when he came to it, a voice was uttered from the right side of the valley in the blessed spot of the bush, saying: O Musa! surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds." (Qasas, 28/30)

The verse clearly shows that God manifested Himself in the bush. If God addresses someone through a bush why would He not address someone through a man, who is more honorable than the bush.²¹

Konuk, in order to make this difficult subject easier to understand, also gives the example of a jinn talking through a man in different languages. In the year 1195 (H.) a young man twenty years of age used to speak a different language every day, and the next day he would not understand the language he spoke the day before. The soul of the man was completely overta-

21 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, coordinator Mustafa Tahralı, Kitabevi, 2007, VIII, 80-81

ken by the Jinn. Commenting on this, Konuk asks, "If a jinn, being a lowly creature, can work in the body of a man, how then cannot man be a vessel in the hands of God?"²²

Konuk's example is an interesting case to study. Unfortunately, we have very little experimental data in these kinds of transpersonal relations. Due to the personal and subjective nature of the field, these claims are only left to the study of psychologists.

Going back to the story of the Bayazid, when he exclaimed that there is nothing in his gown but God, his disciples were all furious.

When that (spiritual freeman gave the command, each disciple made ready a knife. (Mathnawi, IV, 2107)

...

Every one who plunged a dagger into the Sheikh's was reversely making a gash in his own body

Whoever aimed a blow at his throat saw his own throat cut and died miserably. (Mathnawi, IV, 2127-28)

If this body of thine were a human body, it would have been destroyed, like a human body, by the daggers.

O you who stab the selfless ones with the sword, you are stabbing your own body with it! Beware!

For the selfless one has passed away (in God) and is safe; he is dwelling in safety for ever. (Mathnawi, IV, 2136-2139)

Commenting on these verses, Konuk says that explaining the level of Bayazid is very difficult. He says that when the body of the Divine covers over the body of the slave, the slave does not become God. Bayazid's corporal body did not disappear, perhaps it was transformed into the angelic level (*mertebe-i letâfet-i melekiyye*). In order to support this further, Konuk narrates the story of Haji Bayram Wali. Once a wazir wanted to poison him out of jealousy by offering him a poisonous drink. Bayram Wali told the wazir: 'I will drink this but you will get the harm of this drink.' Hence he drank it but the poison showed its results on the evil hearted wazir himself. The wazir died out of poisoning immediately.²³

What we understand from the above examples is that when the sufi looses his self by spiritual training, the Divine Self overtakes him. But the

22 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, VIII, 84

23 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, VIII, 90

nature of this overtaking cannot be understood by the ordinary people (awâm). Hence, Rumi like Ibn Arabi advises us to keep silent about these dangerous topics:

When the discourse reached this point, it closed its lips; when the pen reached this point, it broke to pieces. (Mathnawi, IV, 2144)

It is understood from this verse that the high spiritual states should be kept as secrets, the lips should be closed. Explaining this verse, Konuk refers to Imdâdullah who is a commentator of the *Mathnawi*. He says: ‘This subject of (wahdat-i Wujud) is a matter that needs to be abandoned, not spoken about. There is a great difference between saying and knowing, knowing and seeing, and seeing and being.’²⁴

Rumi however shows us the way of the melting away of the self. His method is well known and repeatedly occurs all over the *Mathnawi*, namely love:

Love is that flame which, when it blazes up, consumes everything else but the Beloved. (Mathnawi, V, 588)

Of course this love is the love of God. Any love other than that for God is a veil even if it is for paradise. Explaining this verse, Konuk says that ascetics are veiled from God by the pleasure of their own selves, since they desire the Hereafter. Paradise is a place that is enjoyable by the self who is not eradicated in the divine beloved. The following verse is meant for such people who have not eradicated their selves in God:

“Enter the garden, you and your wives; you shall be made happy. Therein are brought round for them trays of gold and goblets, and therein is all that souls desire and eyes find sweet. And ye are immortal therein.” (Zuhruf, 43:70-71)

Since they enjoy seeing the forms of paradise, they cannot be accepted as lovers; lovers only watch the face of The Real. Love on the other hand, kills everything other than God. In order to prove his case, Rumi gives an interesting interpretation of the profession of faith:

He (the lover) drives home the sword of not in order to kill all other than God: thereupon consider what remains after Not. There remains only God: the rest is gone. Hail, O mighty Love, destroyer of polytheism! (Mathnawi, V, 589-590)

24 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, VIII, 94

The lover erases the love of *mâsiwâ* and clears away the imaginary (*mewhumeh*) being of *mâsiwâ* with the sword of *la ilâhe*, 'there is no god'. After doing so, the lover confirms the Real Being (*wujud*) of God with the words '*illallah*' meaning 'except Allah'. Hence the *tawhid* of the lover of God clears away duality in Being. On the other hand, if one believes in the existence of *mâsiwâ* separately and keeps repeating the words of the *shahadah*, his belief denies his words. By confirming the existence of two separate beings, he falls into the hidden polytheism (*shirk-i Khafi*). This is the extent of *tawhid* that the people of Exterior (*ahl-i Zâhir*) can reach.²⁵

According to Rumi the eyes of ordinary man always see the one as double. Only the eyes of the Gnostic (*ârif*) see the reality as it is.

*Verify, He is the First and the last: do not regard polytheism as arising from aught except the eye that sees double.*²⁶

Konuk explains this verse refer to Ibn Arabi directly and quotes him:

Let it be known that as our master Sheikh-i Akbar (k.s) states that the existence of *other* than God will be lost (*muntefi*) in the sight of gnostic. This state is called *jam'* and *fanâ*. When the gnostic come back from *jam'* to *tafrika*, he watches/*musahade* the many with the eye of One. Sometimes he perceives this plurality as the being of the Real. Hence he watches the One in plurality. At another time, he sees plurality in the One. And at another times, he joins between these two states since he knows that the plurality is not a real plurality. It is the works of the One Being. Although other than God is visible, the Gnostic knows that this vision is only the shadow of the Real Being of the Real (*wujud-i Hakiki-i Haqq*). For him existence consists of *Zât-i Haqq*. He sees them as existing in the Being of God. Hence these works (*şuunat*) do not exist in his sight. There is no existence except that of God. Konuk concludes from the words of Ibn Arabi that to attribute a separate existence to the *mâsiwâ* is polytheism. Seeing double is the result of an unhealthy eye or mind that sees double.²⁷

Shafii brings an interesting interpretation of seeing double:

Also, when we judge another being, his work and achievements negatively, we are seeing with one eye, not two. One eye that only sees reality the way things appear as we know it, at face value and as we understand it through our own limited understanding and judgment. But to see with two eyes is to see with the set of eyes that the Friends of God see with, be-

25 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2008, IX, 212

26 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, IX, 214

27 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, IX, 214

cause it is the second set of eyes which contains the attributes of patience, wisdom and moreover a humility that knows that we can never be aware of the entirety of the pieces of reality put together that add, subtract, bring justice and balance the running of God's Kingdom on Earth (or his Mulk) who's knowledge belongs to God alone.

The best way to a fuller life, a remedy to disappointments and the only way to lead a life of true strength and fulfillment, one that is devoid of milking others and one that is devoid of resentment, is to Give it All to the One who Owns it All. In other words, do everything for God's sake, to love, to worship, to work not for any personal gain, but with the recognition that it has all come from him and that it all belongs to Him.

In the story of a person who knocked at a friend's door, his friend asked who he was. He said, "It is I". The friend answered, "Since thou art thou, I will not open the door. I know not any friend that is 'I'."²⁸

Rumi says: One went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.

A voice asked, "Who is there?"

He answered, "It is I."

The voice said, "There is not room for Me and Thee."

The door was shut.

After a year of solitude and deprivation

He returned and knocked.

A voice from within asked, "Who is there?"

The man said, "It is Thee."

The door was opened for him.

In this story the beloved is either God or the perfect man (insân-i Kâmil), in both cases Rumi disdains the egoistic personalities who see themselves separate from their friends. A sufi should not feel a separate identity from his sufi friend, they must be one and there should not be any separation. Shafii gives a psychological interpretation to this state: A person's completion lies in following his or her calling and through this calling that person is likely to meet and form the right set of relationships. These Relationships are those where you support and love others, not for any personal or emotional fulfillment, but purely for the sake of God. The sufi Sari al-Saqati (A.H. 253), said that There is no true love between two people until they say "ya ana" to each other. Ya ana means thou are I, but it also means that you love for that person that which you love for yourself. You want for

28 Rumi, *Mathnawi*, c.1, 3055

them what you want for yourself and you wish them all the best. And this kind of love is the highest form of love as it is not dependent or motivated by self interest or self satisfaction and can only be done by those who know that God is the source and the rightful owner of all things in life. And they regularly practice being rooted in God by submitting to Him.²⁹

If we accept the Beloved with capital letter, then this is God and according to Konuk, attributing existence to one's illusionary being against God is a hidden associating of partners to God (shirk al-khafî). This shirk can be only cleared away by following the path of Gnostics (ârifûn).³⁰

In Jalaluddin Rumi's famous story and poem on the lion, the wolf and the fox exemplify this:

"A lion, wolf and a fox had gone to hunt in the mountains in quest of food. The fierce lion didn't need the company of the fox and the wolf to catch his pray. For whoever is in the company of a lion at his hunt is surely to have meat for his supper by night or by day. Yet the lion did the fox and the wolf an honor and gave them his company on the way.

Now the three animals came upon an ox, a goat and a rabbit and successfully attacked and killed them. While they were aware that their successful hunt was due to the presence of the majestic king of all animals, the lion, they still wanted the hunt to be divided into equal measures. The lion perceived their intentions, did not declare his knowledge and paid courteous regard to them. But the lion thought to himself, Was my judgment (of what I would give to you of the worldly bounty) not enough for thee? O ye whose understanding and judgment are derived from my judgment and from my worldly gifts?"

While meditating upon this thought the lion continued to smile visibly. Then the lion requested the wolf to divide the bounty according to his knowledge. The wolf divided it by giving an ox to the lion, a hare to the fox and kept a goat to himself stating: the goat is mine!

The lion said, "O wolf how has thou spoken? When I am here, dost thou speak of I and thou." The lion then seized the wolf with his claws and beheaded it.

The lion next turned to the fox and asked the fox to divide the bounty. The fox bowed low, recognized the rightful owner of all the bounties and gives all the animals from the hunt to the lion, King of animals. The king of animals pleased with the fox says "O fox thou has made justice shine forth:

29 Mohammad Shafii, *Freedom From the Self, Sufism, Meditation and Psychotherapy*, New York, 1988, p.240

30 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, II, p.320-21

from whom didst thou learn to divide in such a manner?" and the fox replied, "from the fate of the wolf". And the lion replies " In so much as thou has pledged to love me, pick up all the three animals and take them and depart. I am thine and all the beasts of chase are thine: set thy foot on the seventh heaven and mount beyond."³¹

This story can be given as an example for all cases. If man claims a separate identity against God as the wolf has done, this will cause destruction of the man. However, the clever fox by giving up his claim to have a separate existence from the lion has attained all the egos.

THE SELF OF MAN AND OTHER HUMAN SELVES

Explaining the relationship between the Self of God and others is really a very difficult phenomenon, as was expressed by Ibn Arabi, since it is experiential and not many Sufis talk about this subject. However, there is more material concerning the relationship of the human selves and their closeness to each other. Generally talking, the barrier between the selves of ordinary men (*awâm*) are thick and insurmountable. Everyone is living in his own castle. Especially in modern life, man is totally separate from the others and the only relationship with the other is a personal interest. If there is no personal interest there is no relationship at all.

However, this concept of otherness is not welcomed among sufis. A sufi, after a difficult training period, realizes that his self and the other selves are not totally separate as it seems to be. They all share common divine origins. The first step in sufi training is called *fanâ fil Ihwân*, that is losing yourself among the brethren. A sufi should identify himself with the sufis in his group. If this is not realized he cannot identify himself with his sufi master (*fanâ fi al-Shaykh*), and consequently with the prophet (*fanâ fi al-Rasûl*). In other words sufi training can be described as a process of making one's self unified with others. This is reflected the behavior of sufis with words such as "my slippers, my towel" and any word indicating a kind of separate selfhood being disdained by them.³²

As a result of this approach, the border between "the self" and "the other" among the perfect Sufis is not very thick. According to Rumi when a soul/self climbs the spiritual ladder, he will realize the commonality and the

31 Trans. Naz Georgas <http://www.alfathu.com/blog/?p=104> (10.12.3008)

32 For conceptions of human self see Jung, Carl Gustav, *The Undiscovered Self*, London, 2002

collective nature of all human selves. In this section, we will look more into the commentary of Avni Konuk on Rumi's *Mathnawi* and see how Ibn Arabi was translated into the verses of the *Mathnawi* by the commentary of Konuk.

For Rumi, the souls of the refined mystics are very close to each other; the more the souls attain perfection the more they become similar. On the other hand, the more one becomes less spiritual, the more he/she is alienated from the others. Hence there is only harmony and peace between the perfect mystics, whereas there is disharmony and hate between un-matured souls:

"When you see two of them meet together as friends, they are one, and at the same time (they are) six hundred thousand.

Their numbers are in the likeness of waves; the wind will have brought them into number (into plurality from unity).

The Sun (spirits), became separated (broken into rays) in the windows, (which are bodies.

When you gaze on the Sun's disk, it is itself one, but he that is screened by (his perception of) the bodies is in some doubt.

Separation (plurality) is in the animal spirit; the human spirit is one essence.³³
(Mathnawi, v.II, 184-88)

Avni Konuk explains that although all perfect men possess different physical bodies, they all share the same meaning and soul. The souls are like the sea, which is one, but the waves that come out of the winds (the divine names) are many in forms. According to Konuk, the Sun here represents *Rûh-i kullî-i Muhammedî*. The sun of *Rûh-i Muhammedî* is reflected differently according to the colors of the window of human bodies. Although the disk of the sun is one, it takes different shapes and forms according to the number of the windows. Those who only see the forms are ignorant of their common origin. The eyes and ears of the ignorant are veiled:

(All) eyes and ears have been closed, except for them that have escaped from their Selves (egos). (Mathnawi, III, 837)

This verse clearly shows that those who did not purify their egos are veiled from peace and harmony. They have opposing souls. Commenting on this verse Konuk states that "those who have eradicated their own being in the One Real Being have reached salvation. Anyone other than those, their

33 All translations are taken from Nicholson translation.

eyes and ears are veiled."³⁴ Rumi advises the eradication of one's selfhood in order to reach a state where one feels united with the rest of the creation.

Konuk thinks that there is a proof in the Quran about the sameness and commonality of the soul. The Quran uses the singular form for the word soul "*er-Rûh*", although human beings have apparently many different souls. The following three translations of the holy Quran into English also use the singular form of the word soul:

"They ask thee concerning the **Spirit** (of inspiration). Say: "The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you."³⁵

"They are asking thee concerning **the Spirit**. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord, and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little.³⁶
SHAKIR: And they ask you about **the soul**. Say: The soul is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little. (al-Isrâ, 17:085)³⁷

How can we explain this? In order to explain this phenomenon, Konuk says that one needs to experience this state, by completing the spiritual training. It is true that every human being has a different animal soul. Since the animal soul/body is visible/apparent (*zâhir*), both believers and non-believers accept it, but the human soul is a divine work (*ş'e'n-i İlâhî*), hence it cannot be easily described or witnessed. It can be understood through tasting and experiencing. Before the physical existence of man, our souls were united, they were contained in God's knowledge. In this level all the souls were united and the same. The otherness started by the descending of the Absolute Existent into the fourth level which is called *Ruh-i Kullî Muhammedî*. At this level, the Real Being appears with the garment of otherness.³⁸ Before this level there was no otherness, and this state can be regained by the perfect Sufis.

Therefore Rumi states that finding a real sufi in the above sense is very difficult to find. According to him, a real dervish is the one who eradicated

34 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, 2005, V, p.231

35 Yusuf Ali, Abdullah. c1989. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Brentwood, Md.: Amana.

36 Pickthall, Marmaduke William. *The meaning of the glorious Koran*. New York: New American Library, [between 1970 and 1984]

37 Taken from <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/> (10.12.3008)

38 Konuk, Ahmed Avni, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, 2005, III, p. 74-76

his ego and became united with the rest of humanity. Hence the meaning of the above verse will be realized in the true sufi.

Someone said, "There is no dervish in the world; and if there be a dervish, that dervish is (really) non-existent." (Mathnawi, III, 3669)

He exists in respect of the survival of his essence, but his attributes have become non-existent in the attributes of Him (God). (Mathnawi, III, 3670)

Rumi believes that the problems between human beings are caused by their feeling of being separate identities. If a soul feels separate and its being higher than others, this will create a headache for that soul. The more one inflates one's self, the more it will hurt:

*No highwayman ever attacked a beggar; does a wolf ever bite a dead wolf?
Kfizr made a breach in the boat in order that the boat might be saved from the wicked.*

The sword is for him who has (high and proud) neck; no blow falls on the shadow that is thrown flat upon the ground.

*How should anything that is level with the earth become a target for arrows?
Consider!*

This egoism is the ladder of the creatures; they must fall from this ladder in the end.

The higher anyone goes, the more foolish he is, for his bones will be worse broken.

Unless thou hast died and become living through Him thou art an enemy seeking to reign in copartnership with (Him)

When thou hast become living through Him, that (which thou hast become) is in sooth He: it is absolute Unity; how is it copartnership?(Mathnawi, v.IV, 2755-66)

According to Konuk dying means to get rid of the supposition (wahn) that one exists, failure in doing so means committing the crime of associating partners with God. You left slavery for being a master and became a criminal since you asked for power and possessions in opposition to God. However when one lives through God that means one eradicated the human attributes and God worked through you (*mutasarriif*). This station is called *maqam-i ittihad* (the station of unification). At this level all spiritual, formal wills of the slave are eradicated; the slave is united with the will of God as the iron turns into fire after being heated. However this state cannot be understood by gainsay or foolish talk. It can be understood in following the

path. If the reality of this state is understood; many Muslims will be sad, since they will see their low station.³⁹

Rumi realizing the difficulty of experiencing this state, ends this section with the following verses:

If I tell that which I have within, many hearts will immediately turned into blood

I will refrain; indeed, for the intelligent, this (which has been said) is enough: I have shouted twice, if anyone is in the village. (Mathnawi, v.IV, 2769-70)

Rumi in many places of the *Mathnawi* states that he is in search of such people who have sound vision.

I am seeking with all my soul one who is free from egoism, that I am become the ball of that goodly bat

In sooth any one who has become without ego is all egos: when he is not loved by himself he becomes loved by (them) all. (Mathnawi, V, 2664-65)

Konuk, commenting on this verse, says that whoever left his own imaginary existence for the sake of God and considered his being as that of the Real, he can contain all the other 'selves'. When one leaves friendship with his own ego, then he becomes friends with all other 'selves'. In Rumi's words, such a person will be like a mirror without images or dirt; it can reflect all other images.

A Muslim psychologist Muhammad Shafii who is also a scholar trained in sufi discipline wrote a book titled "Freedom from the Self, Sufism, Meditation and Psychotherapy" this book also gives the psychological benefits of freedom from one's ego. According to him a person who attained freedom from his self gains the following attributes:

1. Freedom from fears, greed and sexual aggressive impulses.
2. Freedom from duality
3. Freedom from the temporal or the conditioned self
4. Total integration of all *nafs*es within-vegetative, animal, human, accusing, inspired, secure, fulfilled, fulfilling, and complete
5. Total involvement with life and total integration with moment
6. freedom from the past and future
7. realization of one's relationship to the ecological order of nature and the invisible rhythm of life

39 Konuk, VIII, p.281-82

8. experience of transcendental and trans-temporal reality
9. existential communion (*fanâ* and *baqa*)⁴⁰

Shafii also adds that freeing from the self means direction our consciousness towards God rather than towards our ego/

We expect our friendships or a set of relationships to bring us our joys our happiness and to satisfy the unfulfilled dimensions of our being. The prophet Muhammad's saying paraphrased below by the famous Sufi mystic of the 13th Century provides an answer to those suffering from this sort of a disappointment:

“Direct the consciousness towards God alone. O thou bewildered in the way. For whoever makes God's care his care, God will relieve him of all his cares. And whoever is distracted by his own concerns, God will not be concerned with what valley (in which place) he loses himself.”

In conclusion sufis speak the possibility of the unification of selves between God and man. Sufis like Hallaj and Bistami are examples of such unification. The more one attains perfection in the sufi path the more the borders between the selves get thinner. To the extent that one day Bistami saw a donkey beaten up by its owner; he felt so much empathy that at the end his back started bleeding. Although unification between the selves of men among themselves or between man and other creatures does not create much problem, the unification between the Self of God and man brought many dangers. Hallaj was victim of such a unity. Sufis either advised hiding such incidents or claimed that this unification cannot be explained with words since this is a very high spiritual experience.

The second aspect of unity between the selves of men is also discussed by sufis. The claim that we all share the same soul is made by Konuk. This claim needs some more studies by theologians as well as doctors and psychologists. The terms such as *fenâ fil ihwân* and *fanâ fi al-Shaykh* are concept which should be studied from this perspective that is uniting the selves of different personalities.

Sufis brought very useful methods to bring harmony and peace between people. They even showed us to unify with the nature. All these things need further study from transpersonal psychology in a world where lack of unity in all walks of life reached disturbing levels.

40 Mohammad Shafii, *Freedom From the Self*, p.240

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