

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation

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*What is the means of ascension to Heaven? This not-being.
Not-being is the creed and religion of the lovers (of God).*

(M VI: 233)

For anyone who, aside from enjoying the fascinating rhetoric and colourful imagination of the distinguished medieval Sufi-poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), aims to understand the content of his *oeuvre* along with the mystical ideas and principles upon which he elaborates therein, the first aspect likely to draw one's attention is the un-systematic character of Rūmī's legacy. To be certain, no one expects Rūmī to explain his mystical teachings in an organized way in his *Dīwān*, whose lyrics are mostly composed extemporaneously and occasionally in a trance-like mystical state, as it is not expected from any of the other poetic divans. Yet other works of Rūmī, particularly his *magnum opus* the *Mathnawī*, which was composed at the urging of his disciples to produce a 'didactic' and pedagogic work, suffer from such disorderly structures that they have raised the complaint and displeasure of numerous scholars attempting to perceive its message.¹

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¹ Several abbreviations have been used in this paper: M for the *Mathnawī* (*The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, ed. and trans. R. A. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London: Luzac & Co. 1925–1940)), followed by the number of the *Mathnawī*'s book (not to be confused with Nicholson's volume number) and the number of the verse; D for the *Dīwān* (according to the edition of Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar: *Kullīyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr*, 10 vols. (Tehran: University of Tehran Press 1336–1346 A.Hsh./1957–1967)), preceding the number of the poem that includes the cited line(s); and F for *Fihī mā fihī* (*Discourses of Rumi*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: John Murray

While A. J. Arberry describes the *Mathnawī* as 'a disconcertingly diffuse and confused composition',² Reynold A. Nicholson considers its composer an 'allegorical, rambling, tedious, often obscure'³ teacher, and Khalifa 'Abdul Hakim says that he was a 'painfully unsystematic writer'.⁴ In addition to employing a poetic and allegorical style, which requires a particular hermeneutical methodology in comprehending the meaning behind his words, Rūmī discusses almost all of the significant Islamic theological and mystical problems of his time in scattered passages throughout his masterpiece, illustrated through scores of stories following in succession, or being placed within each other.⁵ Such disorder has caused scholars to speak of an internal and transcendental order to his *chef d'oeuvre* consisting of 'subtle links and transitions' that bind its sections and stories together,⁶ or of a 'divine wisdom' according to which this 'Qur'ān in the Persian language' is composed.⁷ Recently, S. G. Safavi and S. Weightman have asserted that

1961), which is followed by the page number in Arberry's version. Translations of the *Dīwān* are mainly from *Mystical Poems of Rumi*, trans. A. J. Arberry (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2009 [in two vols.: 1968, 1979]; hereafter MPR) and William C. Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: SUNY 1983; hereafter SPL). In some cases in the *Mathnawī*, Nicholson's explanatory notes, which he puts in parentheses, have been removed. My own notes always appear in brackets. The abbreviation of Q is employed for the Qur'ān, followed by the sura and verse numbers with the translations of the Qur'ānic texts being in accordance with A. J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted*, first published in 1955.

2 Arberry, A. J., *Tales from the Masnavi* (Richmond: Curzon 1994 [1961]), p. 11.

3 Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1923), p. 51.

4 Khalifa 'Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi: A Critical and Historical Sketch* (Lahore: The Institute of Islamic Culture 1959 [1933]), p. 9.

5 Moreover, a significant methodological problem in understanding Rūmī's *Mathnawī* is that he often discusses issues and explains subjects from the perspective of characters in his stories, and it is not always clear, especially in the controversial dialogues between personas, which persona represents Rūmī's own viewpoint. Zarrīnkūb believes that Rūmī aims, in some of these dialogues, to show that different viewpoints regarding a specific controversial issue are equally insufficient, and solving such controversy is possible only through mystical intuition and not argumentation and discussion. See 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Baḥr dar kūza: naqd wa tafsīr-i qisṣahā wa tamthīlāt-i Mathnawī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī 1366 A.Hsh./1987), p. 225.

6 See Nicholson's introduction to the translation of the fifth and sixth books of the *Mathnawī*, p. viii.

7 Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī-yi sharīf*, vol. 1 (Tehran: University of Tehran Press 1346 A.Hsh./1967), p. ii. The famous description of the *Mathnawī* as 'the Qur'ān in the Persian (*Pahlawī*) language' is attributed to the Sufi scholar 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) and also the scholar Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1621), though could

a synoptic reading of the *Mathnawī* reveals a sophisticated design,⁸ a claim which, even if accepted, does not release the researcher from the task of patiently collecting dispersed pearls of Rūmī's thought regarding a specific issue and stringing them together into a common thread.⁹

The lack of clear systematization in the legacy of Rūmī and the complicated and multifaceted style of his presentation have resulted in numerous endeavours by his commentators to comprehend and systematize his ideas in the light of other mystical, philosophical, and religious systems. The rationale set forth by many of these interpreters is that since his works lack any *prima facie* order, why not adopt and borrow from other systems to bring them into a coherent order? The increasing popularity of Rūmī has also accelerated the process of reading him through other systems.¹⁰ In the time since his death, his fame has expanded considerably not only in the Islamic world from the thirteenth century onwards but also extending to the West, especially since the second half of the twentieth century, and it has in some cases been accompanied and coloured by ethnocentric, political and nationalistic agendas. Rūmī's teachings, therefore, have often been interpreted according to the speculative mysticism developed by his contemporary, the Andalusian Sufi-philosopher Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) and his school,¹¹ the transcendent philosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-*

not be located in their available works (Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld 2008), pp. 467–69). Rūmī himself compares the style of the *Mathnawī* with the Qur'ān, emphasizing that if the exterior words of both books seem disorderly, one should search for their interior and hidden spirit (M III: 4227–49).

8 Seyed Ghahreman Safavi and Simon Weightman, *Rūmī's Mystical Design: Reading the Mathnawī, Book One* (Albany: SUNY 2009). The authors suggest that Rūmī took this alleged design, based on 'parallelism' and 'chiasmus', from his predecessor poet, Nizāmī Ganjavī (d. 1209), and deliberately concealed it from the reader.

9 I owe this imagery to 'Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, p. 3. Among other efforts to discover a sort of order in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, one can mention Dabashi's suggestion regarding the structure found in the narrative discourse of Rūmī's masterpiece, which has an innate relation to Rūmī's moral imagination. Dabashi questions, accordingly, the scholarly assessments concerning the lack of structure in Rūmī's narrative (Hamid Dabashi, 'Rūmī and the Problems of Theodicy: Moral Imagination and Narrative Discourse in a Story of the *Masnavi*', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, eds. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp. 112–35).

10 For a Turkish nationalist and ethnocentric reading of Rūmī, see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, pp. 547–51.

11 Among several attempts to interpret Rūmī with the help of Ibn 'Arabī's mysticism,

muta'aliyya) of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1640),¹² and the New Age esotericism that grew in the West in the second half of the twentieth century.¹³ In these contexts, Rūmī has variously been considered a follower of Ibn 'Arabī and commentator on his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ('unity of being'),¹⁴ a preeminent Turkish (versus Iranian) philosopher and mystic,¹⁵ and even a New Age guru-poet *par excellence*.¹⁶

see, for example, the well-known commentary on the *Mathnawī*, entitled *Mesnevi-i Şerif Şerhi*, by the Rūsuhī Ismail Ankaravī (d. 1631/2), which was one of the sources for Nicholson's commentary on Rūmī's masterpiece. The German scholar of Islamic mysticism, Hellmut Ritter was highly skeptical towards commentaries on the *Mathnawī* and warned Rūmī researchers 'to take care not to rely too much on the *Mathnawī* commentaries, which read into the work the views of their own time or their personal views' ('Djalāl al-Dīn Rūmī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 2nd edition (Leiden: Brill 1991), p. 395). On the relationship between Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī, see Reynold A. Nicholson, *Rumi, Poet and Mystic, 1207–1273: Selections from His Writings* (London: Allen & Unwin 1956), pp. 24–25; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Rūmī and the Sufi Tradition', in *The Scholar and the Saint*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: New York University Press 1975), pp. 169–85; and William C. Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, eds. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp. 70–111, especially pp. 91–100.

12 One can mention here, for example, the Persian commentary on the *Mathnawī* by the nineteenth-century philosopher Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (d. 1873), entitled *Sharh-i asrār-i Mathnawī*. For a brief survey of Sabzavārī's commentary in the context of the *hikmat* tradition', see John Cooper, 'Rūmī and *Hikmat*: Towards a Reading of Sabzavārī's Commentary on the *Mathnawī*', in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. I: *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld 1999), pp. 409–33, especially pp. 424–31. Among recent commentators on the *Mathnawī* influenced by transcendent philosophy, one can mention Jalāl al-Dīn Humāī, the author of *Mawlawī-nāma: Mawlawī cha miḡūyad?* (Tehran: Āgāh 1356 A.Hsh./1977).

13 Several New Age writers and translators have propagated Rūmī's words and poetry in the West, resulting in his canonization as a New Age saint. Among them, the prolific authors Idris Shah, Deepak Chopra, and Coleman Barks are notable.

14 Fazlur Rahman, for example, categorizes Rūmī as one of the representatives of Ibn 'Arabī's school ('Islam: An Overview', in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan 1987), p. 315), and Ibn 'Arabī expert Qāsim Kākāī asserts the 'absolute conformity' between the mystical ideas of Rūmī and those of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qunawī, Ibn 'Arabī's disciple and son-in-law ('*Waḥdat-i wujūd*' az dīdgāh-i Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī wa Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī Balkhī', 21 May 2008 <<http://kakaie.com/1058>>, accessed 20 February 2014).

15 See Muṣṭafā Raḥmī's monograph about Turkish philosophers, entitled *Conception sur la vie de quelques philosophes turcs* (Izmir: Bilgi 1933), which includes Rūmī as well. The Turkish Rūmī scholar Mehmet Önder regards Rūmī as a great 'Turkish mystic', who wrote a significant percentage of passages in Turkish (*Mevlana Jaleddin Rumi* (Ankara: Culture Ministry 1990), pp. 207–10).

16 One can refer here to the high esteem of eminent New Age writers for Rūmī, for

Adopting and applying other systems as aids to understanding Rūmī's mysticism is certainly not per se problematic, and could even be beneficial to interpretation, allowing one to view his work from different perspectives. However, the problem arises when such adoption results in imposing alien frameworks on Rūmī's mysticism, forcing his ideas to conform to the mould of structures not necessarily compatible with his own mystical principles. This imposition of foreign structures onto Rūmī's works causes two major methodological failures in interpreting Rūmī's Sufism. First, it leads to the de-contextualization of his mysticism from the intellectual and epistemological context to which it belongs, thereby severing the links between his mysticism and its original setting. For example, considering Rūmī to be a New Age spiritual guide with no belief in any established religion, who would therefore deserve to be respected as a pioneer of modern unchurched spirituality, comes at the cost of disconnecting him from the Islamic discourse in which his ideas developed. Likewise, regarding him as a purely Turkish Sufi master involves separating him from the spiritual, linguistic and cultural background of Khurāsān, a setting that was highly significant in shaping Rūmī's mysticism, *weltanschauung*, and rhetoric.¹⁷ Second, such an imposition disregards the interrelation between various aspects of Rūmī's Sufism, which is, as with any other mystical system, an internally consistent system made up of different parts interacting in a cohesive multidimensional mystical structure, rather than being separate and independent identities.¹⁸ Systematization of the practical teachings of Rūmī, for example, within the framework of the theoretical teachings of another mystic whose doctrinal and metaphysical principles differ meaningfully from those of Rūmī, violates the internal consistency of his Sufism along with the reciprocity of the practical and theoretical aspects found within his

example, Deepak Chopra's words in his acknowledgements to *The Love Poems of Rumi* (New York: Harmony Books 1998), pp. 7–8.

17 Rūmī lived most of his life in Konya under the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, in present-day Turkey, and this context of his life has surely been influential in the development of the Mevlevi order and its dissemination of his Sufism. To recognize Rūmī's intellectual roots in Khurāsān is not another nationalistic approach towards him, but a necessary methodological requirement for a more accurate interpretation of his heritage.

18 For an analysis of the multi-dimensional definitions of 'mysticism' and the position of the practical dimension within them, see the author's article entitled 'Defining Mysticism, A Survey of Main Definitions', published in *Transcendent Philosophy* 9 (2008), pp. 77–92.

mysticism. If Rūmī's metaphysics is one of creation rather than emanation, his God always remains a personal deity, and he gives precedence to love rather than knowledge in the creation of multiple creatures by the unique God, such that his practical way cannot be systematized within the frame of an emanational metaphysics that emphasizes the non-personal feature of God in its hidden essence and lays stress on the pivotal role of the intellect and knowing in the emergence of creation from the One. A notable example of such emanational metaphysics is that of the aforementioned Ibn 'Arabī, whose theoretical structure has been repeatedly put to use by interpreters of Rūmī in understanding various aspects of Rūmī's mysticism, some of whose efforts can be considered as 'Ibn 'Arabīzation' of Rūmī's thought.¹⁹

In what follows, focusing on an important dimension of Rūmī's Sufism or his practical mysticism, an attempt has been made, contrary to some earlier efforts,²⁰ to avoid both of these methodological faults in organizing and formulating this dimension on the basis of Rūmī's own multifaceted mystical system, particularly in the framework of, and in connection with, the theoretical mysticism elaborated in his *oeuvre*. 'Practical mysticism', a term not clearly defined in the academic literature on mysticism,²¹ is used here to denote that aspect of

19 See note 14 above. There are certainly several historical connections between Rūmī's and Ibn 'Arabī's mysticism, not only due to the same intellectual sources and traditions they were influenced by but also because of Rūmī's direct acquaintance and contact with members of Ibn 'Arabī's school living in Konya in his time. Nevertheless, in spite of all possible impressions Rūmī might have taken away from Ibn 'Arabī's school, the content of his works and the terminology employed therein witness the considerable independence of Rūmī's mysticism from Ibn 'Arabī's speculative mysticism and Rūmī's attempt to remain in the framework of his own Sufism. Such an attitude is also obvious in Rūmī's spiritual mentor, Shams al-Dīn Tabrizī, who, though admiring Ibn 'Arabī's astonishing personality, accused him for not adhering to *sharī'a* and the example of Muḥammad. See Shams al-Dīn Tabrizī, *Maqālāt-i Shams-i Tabrizī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Muvaḥḥid (Tehran: Khwārazmī 1369 A.Hsh./1990), p. 299.

20 See, e.g., Annemarie Schimmel's effort (in *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddīn Rūmī* (Albany: SUNY 1993), pp. 300–13) to systematize Rūmī's practical teachings, in which she seems to follow the system of mystical states and stations developed by other Sufis like Sarrāj. See Abū Naṣr 'Abdu'llāh b. 'Alī Sarrāj, *The Kitāb al-luma' fi 'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac 1963), pp. 41–72 (Arabic text).

21 See, for instance, Evelyn Underhill's *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1915), which does not offer a clear definition of its main subject.

mysticism that includes stages of the mystical way to perfection as well as practices that ought to be performed in order to achieve those stages.²² In order to formulate Rūmī's practical mysticism, a brief account of his metaphysics of creation is first presented, which addresses the process through which the divine unity generates the multiplicity of creation. This metaphysics, which delineates the framework wherein the practical way of return (Arabic: *rujūʿ*, Persian: *bāz-gasht*) towards the divine origin may take place,²³ is taken into account, then, in the systematization of Rūmī's practical mysticism and the stages and practices he suggests for man's undoing the process of creation, thereby moving from creaturely manyness to the primordial divine unity.²⁴ Aside from considering the distinction between the two components of practical mysticism (stages and practices), such systematization also differentiates between the emotional, moral, cognitive, and ontological aspects in studying different stages and practices of Rūmī's mystical way, thus avoiding a reductionist methodology and neglecting some of these aspects at the cost of highlighting others.²⁵ Finally, a concept for a proper rubric for Rūmī's practical mysticism, based on the crucial features and pivotal concepts of his mystical path, shall be proposed.

22 For the definition of practical mysticism, its parts and features, and the distinction between practical mysticism and mystical ethics, see the author's article, 'Practical Mysticism, Its Definition, Parts and Characteristics', *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), pp. 1–13.

23 Below, in the part 'Stages and Practices of Mystical Perfection' we see that, for Rūmī, the mystical path of perfection is nothing more than the process of restoring the original perfection man experienced before the fall.

24 The mutuality between the way through which multiplicity comes out from unity and the way of surpassing multiplicity in order to re-attain unity is also conceptualized in Islamic mysticism through the two concepts of the 'descending arc' (Arabic: *qaws al-nuzūl*) and the 'ascending arc' (Arabic: *qaws al-suʿūd*). Since the terminology of descending and ascending arcs are generally used in the theoretical mysticism of the Ibn ʿArabī school as well as in Islamic philosophy, this essay employs, following Rūmī himself, the terminology of 'creation' and 'return' in referring to movement from original unity to multiplicity and its reverse process. For the use of *qaws al-nuzūl* and *qaws al-suʿūd* in interpreting Rūmī's teachings, see, e.g., Humāʿī, *Mawlawī nāma*, vol. I, pp. 121–23.

25 Schimmel, for instance, considers the moral aspect in Rūmī's mysticism as the main feature of attaining the mystical goal. She defines Rūmī's 'man of God' as one who has completely surrendered one's will to God's will and acts through him, and maintains that *fanāʾ* is 'basically an ethical concept' (*The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 254 and 263).

METAPHYSICS OF CREATION

Rūmī was not a speculative mystic, and his practical orientation and constant concern with the practical mystical way prevented him from extensive, theoretical pontification on the process through which the Divine originated the created world, a process that is for him nothing more than the creation (Arabic: *khilqa*, Persian: *āfarīnīsh*). In fact, he did not even believe in the usefulness of such theoretical explanation, and maintained that engaging in this sort of doctrinal discussion might prevent one from practising Sufism and attaining mystical perfection.²⁶ Rūmī was averse to employing traditional categorizations concerning the ontological hierarchy of the universe, which divide it into several hierarchical realms such as the descending schema of the four worlds of *lāhūt* ('world of divinity'), *jabarūt* ('world of domination'), *malakūt* ('world of dominion'), and *nāsūt* ('world of humanity'),²⁷ or the 'five Divine Presences' (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*) propagated by Ibn 'Arabī's grand disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qunawī (d. 1274).²⁸ Those specific explanations of metaphysical doctrines that are found in Rūmī's works are primarily made in a 'functional manner' as pedagogical tools for instructing the practical way of return,²⁹ a point regarded by Alessandro Bausani as Rūmī's anticipation of Luther's ideas on the relationship between metaphysics and moral actions.³⁰

26 See M III: 1124–26 and M VI: 2356–58. In a passage ascribed to Rūmī, he asserts that his purpose in creating his didactic *Mathnawī* had not been to teach certain theories and doctrines, and it had not been written as a book one takes on one's shoulders wandering from city to city; rather, it is something on which one stands and climbs up to Heaven. See Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i zindigānī-yi Mawlawī (Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad-i Balkhī)* (Tehran: Tīrigān 1379 A.Hsh./2000 [1937]), p. 181.

27 To these cosmological worlds the highest world of *hāhūt* is sometimes added. For an attempt to understand Rūmī's ontology in terms of such categorizations, see 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī 1364 A.Hsh./1985), pp. 561–65.

28 On the five Divine Presences in the Ibn 'Arabī school, see William C. Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī', *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), pp. 107–28.

29 See, for example, Rūmī's discussion about divine attributes such as *Baṣīr* ('the Seeing'), *Samī'* ('the Hearing'), and *'Alīm* ('the Knowing') in a functional way, in M IV: 215–17.

30 Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: From Zoroaster to Baha'ullah*, trans. J. M. Marchesi (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press 2000), p. 230. For Luther's phrase,

Due to such emphasis on the practical aspect of mysticism, Rūmī's metaphysics is neither complete nor comprehensive, and dispersed passages dealing with this subject in his works, which are not always congruous with each other, provide the reader with merely rough sketches.³¹ However, based on these sketches, it is clear that Rūmī's metaphysical cornerstone and main ontological theory about the relationship of God with the world is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, according to which God produces everything from nothingness or nonexistence (Arabic: *ʿadam*, Persian: *nāstī*). He believes in the appearance of forms and things from their opposites, so that in the same way that the spatial world arises from that which is without spatial relations,³² colours arise from colourlessness, wars from peace,³³ and numbers and oppositions from unity,³⁴ existence and being (Arabic: *wujūd*, Persian: *hastī*) also originate in and arises from nonexistence. Nothingness is, hence, the primary prerequisite of creaturely existence, and all things appear and come out from it towards existence and being.³⁵ This appearance is the result of God's addressing non-existence and commanding it, as stated in the Qur'ān, 'His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it "Be", and it is' (Q XXXVI: 82).³⁶

Rūmī uses this higher ontological nonexistence (*ʿadam*), which is beyond being, rather than inferior to it, in two major senses.³⁷ The first sense is the absolute *nihilum* in its unfathomable depth, God's deepest

see Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimarer Ausgabe), vol. 4 (Weimar: Böhlau 1886), p. 256. See also vol. 18 of the same *Weimarer Ausgabe* (1908), p. 633.

31 Zarrinkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, p. 551.

32 'This (spatial) world has been produced from that which is without spatial relations, for the world has received (the relation of) place from placelessness' (M II: 687). See also M II: 612.

33 'Colourlessness is the origin of colours, peaces are the origins of wars' (M VI: 59).

34 'Wherefore, sire, are we thus in opposition, and wherefore does unity give birth to these numbers?' (M VI: 61).

35 'There is caravan on caravan, O Lord, (speeding) continually from non-existence[s] towards existence' (M I: 1889). Also, see M VI: 2772–73, which reads: 'Yearning with desire they (phenomenal ideas) come in troops from the Desert of Non-existence into the visible (material) world./Caravan on caravan, they arrive from this Desert every evening and morning.'

36 'When He recites spells over the non-existences which have no eye or ear, they begin to stir./Because of His spells the non-existences at that very moment are dancing joyously into existence' (M I: 1448–49). The same idea can be found in Q XVI: 40, Q XIX: 35, and Q XL: 68.

37 Below, we see that the term *ʿadam* is also employed by Rūmī in the moral sense, indicating the annihilation of man's ego and sensuality.

essence, which is the ultimate primordial origin of all things. It is 'the desert of nothingness',³⁸ which, if regarded from a lofty mystical perspective, is absolute being and real existence.³⁹ In this meaning, 'adam is always used in a singular form. With the second sense of 'adam, however, the term takes on a plural meaning and form (Persian: 'adam-hā), which refers to a kind of relative nothingness. In referring to this meaning of nothingness, Rūmī speaks of, for instance, non-existences that have no eye or ear and dance joyously into existence,⁴⁰ and caravans of nonexistences moving quickly towards existence.⁴¹ Rūmī relates this second meaning of nothingness to the Qur'ānic concept of the 'Covenant of *Alast*', a concept frequently referred to and employed by other Sufis as well.⁴² According to the Qur'ān, before man entered into this world, God 'took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, "Am I not [Arabic: *alastu*] your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we testify"' (Q VII: 172). This verse indicates, for Rūmī, that there was a kind of pre-existence for man prior to coming into the material world, and it was this pre-existence that was addressed by God in this verse and that, in reply, testified of the divine lordship. He identifies the realm of *Alast* and primordial existence near God with the domain of nonexistence ('adam), wherein man's inward reality was present with God and God was listening to man's unsaid prayer.⁴³ In Rūmī's metaphysics, this world of Covenant incorporates not only man's existence with God but also the primitive existences or 'adams of all created things,⁴⁴ which hear God's address, and their coming into existence is their very affirmative response to the divine voice of *Alast*.⁴⁵

In his description of the world of *Alast*, Rūmī highlights three major characteristics. First, in *Alast* unity still predominates, and all primordial

38 D 2769. 39 M I: 602.

40 M I: 1448–49. 41 M I: 1889.

42 The Qur'ānic concept of the 'Covenant of *Alast*' has been interpreted in the Sufi context at least from the time of Junayd Baghdādī in the ninth century. See Robert C. Zaehner's remarks in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken 1969), pp. 139–44, in which he agrees with Louis Massignon on the point that Junayd pays attention to this concept above all else in his teachings.

43 'We were not, and there was no demand on our part, (yet) thy grace was hearken-ing to our unspoken prayer (and calling us into existence)' (M I: 610). M I: 3679 also refers to the same realm.

44 See M I: 1234–43, wherein 'in *Alast*' and 'in non-existence ['adam]' are used interchangeably.

45 M I: 2109–11.

existent beings are united there with each other and with the absolute Nothingness, which is none other than absolute Being or God, while they add nothing to the essence of such Being.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these *‘adams* are distinguishable from each other as well as from God, and, therefore, enjoy the state of multiplicity in unity. In this context, Rūmī speaks of the ‘unity of *Alast*’⁴⁷ wherein the Creator and created are found together.⁴⁸ Second, since nonexistent entities (*‘adam-hā*) have no being for themselves and are dependent upon the divine Being they remain in a state of selflessness. Rūmī connects this state to the essential love of these nonexistent entities for the Being who is their divine origin, the love that leaves no place for anything but the divine beloved in them.⁴⁹ This selflessness is also linked to the concept of substantial intoxication and drunkenness (Arabic: *sukr*, Persian: *mastī*), in which one is unconscious and empty of oneself.⁵⁰ Third, the creation of all things out of nothingness in the realm of *Alast* is not a unique event that happened only once at the beginning of time, but is a continuous process taking place in each and every moment. Following the atomistic theory of the Ash‘arite school of Islamic theology,⁵¹ Rūmī maintains that the world is successively and perpetually created and destroyed in every instant and atom of time. Hence, the ‘day of Covenant’ does not merely refer to a particular period of time but to the entire span of time, and the being of all

46 ‘God was not increased by (His) bringing the world into existence: that, which He was not formerly He has not become now;/But the effect (phenomenal being) was increased by (His) bringing created things into existence: there is (a great) difference between these two increases’ (M IV: 1666–67).

47 D 1117.

48 ‘Come, then, into the workshop, that is to say, non-existence, that you may see the work and the Worker together’ (M II: 762).

49 ‘Thou didst show the delightfulness of Being unto not-being, (after) thou hadst caused not-being to fall in love with thee’ (M I: 606).

50 Rūmī employs different terminologies and imageries showing these characteristics of *Alast*, wherein selflessness, love, and intoxication prevails. See D 138, D 2479, and M V: 830, which speak about the ‘wine of *Alast*’, ‘wine-house of *Alast*’, and ‘cup of *Alast*’.

51 The Ash‘arite school is one of the main theological schools in Islam, which was originally founded by Abū al-Ḥasan Ash‘arī (d.c. 935) as a response to the rational theology of the Mu‘tazilite school. For an introduction to Ash‘arite theology, see Richard M. Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash‘arites*, vol. III of *Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām* (Burlington: Ashgate 2008). For the atomism in the Ash‘arite school, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004), pp. 215–23.

things is dependent on God's creative activity.⁵² The creative divine word of *kun* ('Be!') was not heard by creatures merely once but is heard in every moment since the beginning of time, in the form of *creatio continua*.⁵³

The story of the creation of Adam, which emphasizes the special role of man in the world as the vicegerent of God having superiority over the remainder of creation, is perceived by Rūmī in relation to the concept of *Alast*. According to the Qur'ān,⁵⁴ God taught Adam the names of all things, and when the angels recognized their inability to recite these names and Adam told them their own names, they bowed down before Adam, all save for Satan or *Iblīs* (the Arabic personal name of the Devil in Islam). These names that were taught to Adam are, for Rūmī, the very 'adams of all things that exist in the realm of *Alast*, the inward realities of the creatures existing with the Creator.⁵⁵ Adam's vicegerency, according to Rūmī, consists of two aspects: the first is Adam's relationship with God, connected to a Prophetic hadith that declares that 'God created Adam in his own image (form)'.⁵⁶ Concerning this aspect, Rūmī states that God 'made a viceroy, one having a heart, to the end that he might be a mirror for His sovereignty', and God endowed Adam with 'infinite purity' and a pristine nature, which were required in order to reflect and involve the image of God.⁵⁷ Living in the divine garden, the mirror-like Adam was nonexistent

⁵² M I: 1144–46.

⁵³ For other passages on *creatio continua* in Rūmī, see M I: 1889–96, M III: 464, and D 2292.

⁵⁴ Q 2: 30–34.

⁵⁵ 'The father of mankind, who is the Lord of *He (God) taught (Adam) the Names*, hath hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein./To his soul accrued (knowledge of) the name of every thing, even as that thing exists (in its real nature) unto the end (of the world) . . . /With us, the name of every thing is its outward (appearance); with the Creator, the name of every thing is its inward (reality)./In the eyes of Moses the name of his rod was 'staff'; in the eyes of the Creator its name was 'dragon'./Here the name of 'Umar was 'idolater', but in *Alast* his name was 'believer'./That of which the name, with us, was 'seed' was, in the sight of God, thou who art at this moment beside me./This 'seed' was a form (idea) in non-existence (potentiality), existent with God, neither more nor less (than the form in which it appeared externally)' (M I: 1234–35, 1239–43).

⁵⁶ This hadith was narrated by Bukhārī (Muḥammad b. Isma'īl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. A. 'Allush (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Rushd 2006), p. 866) and is considered by some Muslim scholars to be among the *Isrā'īlīyāt*, i.e. the body of hadith originating from Judeo-Christian traditions. For a similar biblical text, see Genesis 1: 27.

⁵⁷ M VI: 2153–54.

(*adam*), existing purely and selflessly in a transparent manner in God. His relation to God was one of love,⁵⁸ and he was, before his fall, obedient to God's orders and acted in accordance with the divine will. The second aspect of Adam's vicegerency is his relation to the creatures and that, due to his transparency and essential dependence on God as the Encompasser, he contained and encompassed all things in their interior realities in God, and knew all their ontological names.⁵⁹ Adam enjoyed this expansive elevation to such a degree that 'In comparison with the spaciousness of the range of that pure spirit (Adam), the expanse of the seven heavens became narrow'.⁶⁰

Adam, 'the father of mankind',⁶¹ is for Rūmī not only a historical or mythical character but also, in the first place, the prototype of the human being in his perfection and innocence before being contaminated with the conditions of the created world. He frequently refers to the human being using the Persian word *ādamī* ('Adam-related') to indicate the connection of man to his original state from which, in this world, he is far away. 'We all have been parts of Adam', says Rūmī in the fourth book of the *Mathnawī*, who have heard the melodies of the revolution of the celestial sphere in Paradise; and though the 'water and earth' of this world with its limitations have caused us to forget our primordial existence in heaven, something of that past and those melodies returns to our memory.⁶² Therefore, the essence of Adam, 'one having a heart', is man's innermost reality of the heart and is his pure untarnished essence, which he has forgotten in this world.⁶³ The point that Adam was the vicegerent of God and was created in the likeness of the divine image means that the hidden centre of the human being is God's viceroy and the 'true transcription art of the archetype Divine',⁶⁴ a mirror containing God's image and an 'astrolabe' that is never empty of divine reflection and beauty.⁶⁵

58 'He that is blessed and familiar (with spiritual mysteries) knows that intelligence is of Iblis, while love is of Adam' (M IV: 1402).

59 M I: 1234–43.

60 M I: 2652.

61 'The father of mankind, who is the lord of *He (God) taught (Adam) the Names*, hath hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein' (M I: 1234).

62 M IV: 735–37.

63 M I: 3460. The concept of the 'heart' in Rūmī's teaching is discussed below, in the section 'Stage Two: Domination of the Heart.'

64 F 88. 65 F 22.

The fall of Adam from Paradise relates, in Rūmī's metaphysics, the story of Adam and Eve to the descent of man into the non-mystical stage of ego. The Qur'ān says that Satan tempted Adam and Eve to approach the forbidden tree, thereby causing them to be rebuked by God and expelled from the Garden of Eden.⁶⁶ Rūmī, like many other Sufis, concentrates on the fall of Adam in this story and considers Eve to have been the cause of his tragic expulsion, sometimes even condemning her as the major cause of the fall itself.⁶⁷ However, Rūmī asserts that the prime factor in the descent of Adam was the ego, the carnal soul being activated within him due to Satan's temptation, causing 'the vain fancy of egoism' to enter his mind, thus transforming him into the very antagonist of his sovereign.⁶⁸ Once more, Rūmī does not remain at the mythical level of the story, stating that Satan, who deceived the father of mankind, resulting in his descent from God's 'Paradise of union',⁶⁹ is a personification of man's ego and fleshly soul, which hinders him from realizing his original purity and innocence, concealing his innermost heart.⁷⁰ 'Man is a mighty volume', says Rūmī in his *Discourses*, 'within him all things are written, but veils and dark-nesses do not allow him to read that knowledge within himself.'⁷¹

STAGES AND PRACTICES OF MYSTICAL PERFECTION

Although Rūmī provides his reader with little explicit material, found in scattered fragments throughout his works, which expound on his metaphysics of creation, the reader can find ample material there regarding the practical way of return to the divine origin. The concept of 'return' is ever-present in Rūmī's poetry and prose, and from the very beginning of his didactic work, consisting of the first eighteen verses of the *Mathnawī* and entitled *Nay-nāma* ('Reed's Song'), he

66 The story of the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise is mentioned several times in the Qur'ān. See, for example, Q II: 36–38 and Q VII: 20–25.

67 '(Both) my first and my last fall were caused by woman, since I was spirit – and how have I become body?' (M VI: 2799).

68 M VI: 4786–90. Such egoism is also related to Adam's lust and desire, symbolized in the character of Eve.

69 For Rūmī's use of 'Paradise of union', see D 2529 and M VI: 2802.

70 'The fleshly soul and the Devil both have (ever) been one person (essentially); (but) they have manifested themselves in two forms' (M III: 4053). The identification of man's ego and fleshly soul with Satan is discussed again below in the section 'The Starting Point: Domination of the Lower Soul (*nafs*)'.

71 F 61.

speaks of man's painful separation from his origin and his yearning for a return to unity with it, using the symbolism of the reed lamenting and complaining of its severance from the reed-bed.⁷² Rūmī, like many other Sufis, relates the concept of return to the Qur'ānic text that indicates the relationship of the creation to return, 'we belong to God, and to Him we return' (Q II: 156), emphasizing that 'We were once in heaven, we were friends of the angels; let us all return thither, for that is our city./We are even higher than the heavens, we are greater than angels; why should we not transcend both? Our lodging-place is Majesty.'⁷³ The centrality of return to the original principle in the painful, practical way 'full of blood'⁷⁴ in Rūmī's teaching has caused some scholars to compare his masterpiece with Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, which depicts the travails of Odysseus in returning home despite all manner of grisly difficulties,⁷⁵ or with Dante's *Divina Commedia*, which allegorically explains the soul's journey through various stages towards God.⁷⁶

The metaphysics of creation portrayed above ultimately depicts the fallen man, separated from his original state of residing in the Paradise of union, who must return to the realm of *Alast* and restore the unity and purity he had once enjoyed. Although Rūmī's concept of the fall infers a non-gradual and sudden descent from the ascendancy of heaven to a comparatively ignominious earthly existence, he emphasizes that the process of man's return is one of a gradual and progressive character, passing through successive stages of perfection on the mystical journey. This process could be likened unto a man who, after having suddenly fallen from the roof of a house, begins gradually climbing up the ladder to eventually reach the roof once more.⁷⁷ Rūmī frequently evokes such colourful imagery in illustrating the progres-

72 'Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations —/Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament hath caused man and woman to moan . . . /Every one who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it['']' (M I: 1–2 and 4).

73 D 463 (trans. in MPR 83–84). See also M I: 767, which reads: 'That which is of the sea is going to the sea: it is going to the same place whence it came.'

74 M I: 13.

75 See Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, pp. 121–22, in which he calls the *Mathnawī* a 'spiritual *Odyssey*'.

76 Nicholson, *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p. 25. The *Mathnawī*'s comparison with Dante's *Divine Comedy* started before Nicholson. See Edward H. Whinfield (trans.), *Masnavi i Ma'navi, the Spiritual Couplets* (London: Trübner 1887), p. xiii.

77 M VI: 724–25.

sive process of mystical return such as that of scraping away earth, little by little, to create a well,⁷⁸ or gradually tearing off the bricks from a wall in order to come nearer to running water,⁷⁹ and, above all, passing through successive way-stations (Arabic: *manāzil*, *maqāmāt*) on a journey.⁸⁰ He represents such graded degrees in different classifications and enumerations, like the way-stations on dry land versus those of the ocean,⁸¹ the 'hundred way-stations of the spirit',⁸² the 'thousands of way-stations from earth's boundary to man',⁸³ and a 'hundred thousand states of existence, one after the other',⁸⁴ which generally refer to the infinity of the way-stations along the mystical path of perfection rather than a specific enumeration.

In spite of his emphasis on the infinite number of way-stations on the path towards God, nevertheless, Rūmī presents various sets of major landmarks and stages on the long journey of return. Certain passages of the *Mathnawī* bear a resemblance to Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, as these landmarks proceed from an inanimate, inorganic state.⁸⁵ For instance, the third book of the *Mathnawī* enumerates six stages in the mystical journey, including (1) the inorganic state, (2) vegetable growth, (3) animal, (4) man, (5) angel, and finally (6) non-existence. The fifth book lists six steps of: (1) inanimateness, (2) vegetable growth, (3) animal existence, (4) reason and goodly discernments, (5) that which lies outside of these five senses and six directions, and lastly (6) further progress onwards through so-called 'oceanic

78 M V: 2046. 79 M II: 1206–208.

80 Numerous Sufis have explained *aḥwāl* and *maqāmāt* along the mystical path and have attempted to present a complete list of them. Despite different definitions of these two terms offered by Sufis, they usually emphasize the given and transitory characteristic of *aḥwāl* compared to the acquired and non-transitory nature of *maqāmāt*. Among these two terms, *maqāmāt* is more relevant to the concept of stages in practical mysticism here. For an early discussion of these terms, see 'Alī b. 'Uthmān Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* (*The Revelation of the Veiled*): *An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd. 2000), pp. 180–83.

81 M V: 803–804. 82 D 2606. 83 D 322. 84 M V: 792.

85 The evolutionary theory of development formulated by Rūmī has caused some scholars to believe that Rūmī has invented an original idea of his own that addresses creative evolution (Afzal Iqbal, *The Life and Work of Jalāluddīn Rumi* (Oxford: OUP 1999 [1956]), p. 204) and even consider him to have been 'out and out an evolutionary thinker' ('Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, p. 32). Schimmel (*The Triumphal Sun*, p. 329) suggests that in the Islamic world, the first who emphasized the interpretation of Rūmī's idea of development in the sense of evolution was the Indian Muslim scholar Shibli No'mani.

stages'. The *Mathnawī*'s fourth book refers to five stages of: (1) inorganic things, (2) vegetable state, (3) animal state, (4) intelligent humanity, and (5) escape from this intelligence to behold many higher intelligences.⁸⁶ Rūmī also explains the major stages of mystical return in terms of the degrees of the soul. Again, though speaking about the infinite and hierarchical degrees and layers of the soul which consist of a hierarchical psychology, a 'nine-hundredfold' thou that is 'the ocean and the drowning-place of a hundred "thou"s',⁸⁷ he mentions different sets of landmarks in such a hierarchy of the soul. For instance, the second book of the *Mathnawī* enumerates, after the manifest body, three levels: the vital (animal) spirit, the intellect, and the spirit, which partake in divine inspiration – each of which is progressively more concealed.⁸⁸ Also, the same book refers to four progressive degrees of the spirit, including the spirit of animals, the human spirit, the spirit of the angels, and the height of the spirit of mystical adepts, the latter being the spirit of Adam who is the object of the angels' worship.⁸⁹ The fourth book of the *Mathnawī* also lists similar successive levels of the soul, namely the animal spirit, the human spirit, the spirit of Gabriel, and the spirit of Muḥammad.⁹⁰ In addition to these classifications, Rūmī's works contain other categorizations connected to the subject of mystical way-stations, for example, his several references to the famous triad: the Islamic 'Law', the 'Path', and the 'Truth' (Arabic: *sharī'a*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ḥaqīqa*).⁹¹

As these examples demonstrate, Rūmī does not offer a single, unique set of mystical stages in his works, a point that causes significant difficulty in systematizing his practical mysticism. The problem of ambiguity of the mystical stages in Rūmī's teachings was even noticed and criticized in his own time, as Rūmī himself refers to one critic who complained that, 'from the stations of asceticism to the

86 M III: 3901–906, M V: 799–805, and M IV: 3637–51.

87 'Thou art not a single 'thou', O good comrade; nay, thou art the sky and the deep sea./Thy mighty 'Thou', which is nine hundredfold, is the ocean and the drowning-place of a hundred 'thou's' (M III: 1302–303).

88 M II: 3253–59. 89 M II: 3327–30. 90 M IV: 1886–90.

91 Rūmī especially invokes this triad in the preface to the fifth book of the *Mathnawī*. Yet his explanation of the triad in this preface shows that he does not consider *sharī'a*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ḥaqīqa* as three stages of the mystical path, and that this triad refers, at most, to only one mystical stage, i.e. the final stage of the Truth. On this triad and the relation of *sharī'a* to the Path and the Truth in Rūmī, see Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, pp. 671–83 and 721–24; Humā'i, *Mawlawī-nāma*, vol. I, pp. 426–29; and Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 290–93.

passing away (from self-existence), step by step up to union with God', the *Mathnawī* does not contain 'the explanation and definition of every station and stage, so that by means of the wings thereof a man of heart (a mystic) should soar.'⁹² Yet the above sets of landmarks on the mystical path and those mentioned in other passages in Rūmī's *oeuvre* can be utilized, in spite of such inconsistencies and insufficient elaboration, in arranging Rūmī's own practical system. Starting the practical path of return from the state of man – rather than that of the inanimate, vegetable growth, or animal existence – one can glean from these passages, that for Rūmī the mystical way begins from the state of the ordinary man, who is under the control of his bestial and inferior part, and proceeds through the two major mystical stages of angelhood, or the domination of the intellect, and nothingness, or the domination of the heart. Based on such a two-stage scheme of the mystical way, achieving the goal of mystical perfection requires two mystical practices: first, the practice of moving from the starting point of ordinary man to the stage of domination of the intellect and becoming united with the highest angelic being; and second, passing through this intermediary stage to attain the stage of the domination of the heart wherein one becomes non-existence itself.⁹³ The subsequent sections shall endeavour to briefly describe these stages and practices, in relation to each other and to Rūmī's metaphysics of creation, with regard to their different aspects.

The Starting Point: Domination of the Lower Soul (nafs)

In explaining the *point de départ* of man's mystical way, Rūmī generally places emphasis on the interior struggle between man's soul

⁹² M III: 4232–36.

⁹³ The term 'practice' is employed here for both processes of the mystical passing away of man and the passing away of one's angelic aspect due to their relation to the second part of practical mysticism among the two parts of its stages and practices. However, both of these processes of inferior and superior *fanā'* explained below refer more to the strategy and method of acting rather than to specific and concrete mystical techniques and actions. Rūmī recommends to his audience, particularly in his didactic *magnum opus*, to perform a number of mystical techniques such as practicing patience, all of which are related to these two major practical strategies. The concrete characteristic of Rūmī's practical teachings is evident also in a short testament attributed to him by Jāmī and other Sufis. See Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafāḥāt al-uns min ḥadārāt al-quds*, ed. M. Tawḥīdīpur (Tehran: Sa'dī 1336 A.Hsh./1957), p. 463.

and the impediments to man's mystical fulfilment, depicted mostly as a conflict between man's angelic-divine versus bestial-satanic parts. In this conflict, though the former part is still alive and continues its struggle at this starting point, what dominates and governs man's soul is the latter part, which has enfeebled and 'captivated'⁹⁴ the angelic part in such a strong way that it is rendered unable to function in a proper and effective manner. From the divine part of man, what is active in this state is a faint and meagre portion ruled and restricted by the other part. In the context of this conflict, the predominant term employed by Rūmī in reference to man's bestial nature and the principal impediment to achieving mystical perfection is the *nafs*, an originally Arabic word that is also a cognate with the Hebrew *nefesh* (נֶפֶשׁ, having various meanings such as soul, breath, and appetite).⁹⁵ Among the diverse array of meanings attributed to the *nafs* in the Islamic tradition,⁹⁶ Rūmī applies it most often, following in the footsteps of his preceding Sufis and ascetics, in the sense of that part of the soul in man that incites and commands it to do evil (Arabic: *nafs-i ammāra bi al-sū'*), rendered in English by different scholars as 'lower soul', 'carnal soul', 'appetitive soul', and 'flesh'.⁹⁷ In many cases in his works, Rūmī identifies the *nafs* with Satan, who not only caused Adam's fall from Paradise but is also still allowed by God to constantly lead man astray from the true path of God.⁹⁸ It is man's adversary who is both the creative and sustaining cause of man's separation from the Paradise of union. Rūmī believes that Satan is nothing other than the embodiment of the *nafs*, and the *nafs* is Satan internalized, a force

94 M III: 2504–10.

95 See David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. V (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001), pp. 724–34, which lists twelve major definitions for the term *nefesh*.

96 In his classical Arabic dictionary, *Tāj al-arūs*, Zabīdī (d. 1791) lists fifteen meanings for *nafs* and adds two others from *Lisān al-Arab*. See E. E. Calverly, 'Nafs', in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, (Leiden: Brill 1993), VII, pp. 880–81.

97 It is worth noting that Rūmī occasionally uses the term *nafs* in connection with human beings in a positive sense, as the higher level of the man's soul and being. For example, in F 68 *nafs* is mentioned in relation to a saying from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, which is also considered a Prophetic hadith, asserting 'He who knows his own *nafs* knows his Lord.' This positive *nafs* is what Rūmī calls, in the *Mathnawī*, 'one's own essence' (M V: 2114 and M V: 3341). In a few cases, Rūmī also employs *nafs* similar to its usage by Islamic philosophers, for example in the passages in which he deals with the rational soul (M I: 3308) and the universal soul (D 810).

98 Q 15: 36–40.

that has been the enemy and envier of both Adam and humanity.⁹⁹

The notion of the *nafs* in Rūmī's works is a multi-dimensional concept, and the *nafs* hinders man's mystical perfection in different aspects. First, in the emotional aspect, Rūmī associates the *nafs*, in the sense of the carnal soul, with a group of other terms like *hawās* and *shahwa*, which signify strong sensual desire and lust. Though the *nafs* and lust are occasionally used interchangeably in his works,¹⁰⁰ the latter is generally considered a major characteristic of the former, so the *nafs* has an increasingly insatiable appetite for worldly pleasures. One of the places wherein Rūmī discusses the connection of sensual desire and pleasures to the *nafs* is the story of the snake-catcher and the frozen snake in the third book of the *Mathnawī*,¹⁰¹ in which the *nafs* is likened to a frozen dragon, which becomes invigorated and kills man when the sun of lust and sensual pleasure beats down upon it. Hence, Rūmī maintains that satisfying the sensual desire of the *nafs* by means of bestial pleasures feeds it and makes this great foe of man stronger and stronger. Rūmī considers such carnal desire to be 'the root of [all] sin and error',¹⁰² which produces an intoxication in man that renders him needful of the 'dessert and date-wine' of sensuality.¹⁰³

Second, regarding the moral aspect of the *nafs*, Rūmī asserts that the emotional attachment of the *nafs* to carnal pleasures causes man to be motivated by desire for sensual experience to appease his animalistic urges, and since such motivation directs and energizes man's actions and behaviour, it results in the moral attachment of man to the lower realms of animality and matter. The evil that the carnal soul incites man towards is, for Rūmī, anything that prevents man from progressing further along the stages leading to mystical perfection. The story of the contention between Majnūn and his she-camel in the fourth book of the *Mathnawī* depicts this evil-commanding character of the *nafs*.¹⁰⁴ Majnūn, who loved a woman named Laylā, mounted his

99 'The flesh (*nafs*) and the Devil have (also) been (essentially) one from the first, and have been an enemy and envier of Adam' (M III: 3197). See also M III: 4053 and D 2021.

100 See, e.g., M I: 3697–702.

101 M III: 976–1066. 102 M I: 3697.

103 M V: 2446. See also M III: 2257–59, which reads: 'Even so every lust in the world, whether it be (for) riches or power or bread —/Each of these things produces an intoxication (ardent desire) in you, and when you gain it not, it inflicts a headache upon you./This headache of grief has become a proof that your intoxication was caused by that missed object (of desire).'

104 M IV: 1533–61.

she-camel and set forth on the journey to his beloved, but the she-camel desired to return to her foal rather than seek out Laylā. Therefore, whenever she perceived that Majnūn had become heedless, she turned her face back towards her own beloved foal, and whenever he became heedful again, he would find that he had gone back many leagues. Rūmī explains that, in the same way, the *nafs* or the animal part of man, due to its desire for sensual pleasures, hinders him, along with his angelic part, from their journey to the Beloved. As long as the *nafs* guides man and controls his conduct, the whole of man's movement is towards the foal of animality and carnal pleasures and, therefore, his actions are entirely evil.

Third, in the cognitive aspect, Rūmī emphasizes the deceitfulness of the *nafs* and that 'the fleshly soul is a great plotter, she will bring some plot against you to birth'.¹⁰⁵ This characteristic of the *nafs* is similar to that of its outward embodiment, Satan, whose major feature has always been deluding man by means of satanic justification and deceit.¹⁰⁶ Rūmī speaks about the 'intelligent soul',¹⁰⁷ which constantly deludes man and from which proceeds, every moment, an act of deceit.¹⁰⁸ He relates this deceptive feature of the *nafs* with man's 'partial intellect' (Persian: *'aql-i juzwī*), which is under the control of the carnal soul and ego and strives to justify whatever the *nafs* wills and orders. Aside from being obedient to the *nafs*, this partial intellect suffers from an inherent limitation and inability to attain true knowledge to lead man to perfection, so if it is regarded as the real cognitive faculty, it brings about man's imperfection and ignorance. The partial intellect works with data collected via the senses as well as memory, and seeks to understand and interpret this data through discursive and rational reasoning, both of which, data and methodology, are defective and restricting.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ M II: 2274.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to several passages in Rūmī's works highlighting the role of Satan's deceit in the story of the Fall, his deceitfulness is also considered by Rūmī to be his fundamental characteristic in this world. See, for instance, the story of awakening the Caliph Mu'āwiya by Satan for morning prayer, in which Satan says to the Caliph: 'I am the enemy: my (proper) work is deceit and malice' (M II: 2785).

¹⁰⁷ M IV: 1409.

¹⁰⁸ 'Every moment (there proceeds from the self) an act of deceit, and in every one of those deceits a hundred Pharaohs are drowned together with their followers' (M I: 780).

¹⁰⁹ M I: 2125–40; M III: 1259–70; and M IV: 1963.

Finally, regarding the ontological aspect, Rūmī employs the term *nafs* not merely as a part of man fighting against the other non-bestial part, but also as man's individuality, his ego, or sense of 'I'. This meaning of the *nafs* is also referred to in Rūmī's works by other terms such as *khud* or *kh'ish* ('self' or 'ego'), *khudī* or *kh'ishī* ('selfhood'), *hastī* or *wujūd* ('(self-) existence'), and *manī* ('I-ness' or 'egocentricity'). The relationship of this ontological *nafs* to the carnal soul is that when the carnal soul predominates in man, man identifies his 'I' with this prevailing part of the soul, which does not leave much room for the activity of the other divine part and its faculties.¹¹⁰ Though this ego appears to be man's real existence, it is only an illusion, a 'night-like selfexistence'¹¹¹ based on the lower aspect of man, rather than being his own essence.¹¹² To follow this ego is the worst sin committed by mankind, according to the famous dictum cited by Sufis like Junayd Baghdādī (d. 910),¹¹³ and is the very cause of all spiritual ruin.¹¹⁴ This *nafs* was the main cause of Adam's fall and his subsequently being cast out of Paradise, when Adam considered a separate self outside the unity of the divine for himself, and it continues to be the main obstacle in the way of man's return to that unity through attachment to his illusory 'I'.¹¹⁵ This sense of the *nafs* as ego is also related to the moral aspect of the *nafs*, since man's assumption of himself as an independent 'I' and the agent of his own actions brings about the illusion of freedom and moral autonomy,¹¹⁶ and impedes man from attaining true liberation, which, according to Rūmī, is nothing other than complete, volitional surrender to the divine will.¹¹⁷

110 M IV: 2003. 111 M I: 3010.

112 'Make thyself pure from the attributes of self, that thou mayst behold thine own pure untarnished essence' (M I: 3460).

113 For Junayd's use of the dictum 'Your existence is a sin with which no other sin can be compared', see Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 297. For the reflection of Junayd's saying in Rūmī's works, see, e.g., D 499.

114 M I: 3012. 115 M VI: 4786–90.

116 See M I: 1473, which points out that free will is, like compulsion, a mere fancy in non-mystics.

117 The concept of mystical freedom is again dealt with below, in the section 'Stage Two: Domination of the Heart'. Rūmī emphasizes in M I: 637–38 that the infidels are necessitarians with regard to the works of the next world, while for prophets such works are a matter of free will.

Practice One: Inferior Annihilation

Rūmī starts his mystical way of return to God with man's fighting against the main impediment to mystical perfection, that is, the *nafs*. The variety of terminology and imagery employed by Rūmī in referring to this spiritual struggle can be categorized into two major groups. The first group uses the language of purifying and polishing the originally pure essence of man from the pollution of the *nafs* and whatever is connected to it, such as likening man's essence to water in a canal that is polluted by the earth and rubbish of the *nafs* and that has lost its capacity for reflection.¹¹⁸ The second group, however, invokes the language of mystical death and killing or of sacrificing one's *nafs*, language that shows the strong influence that the great Sufi Ḥallāj (d. 922), with his bold rhetoric, had on Rūmī.¹¹⁹ In spite of the difference in language, both of these groups place emphasis on the necessity for man to oppose his carnal soul and sensuality (opposing the inciting-to-evil *nafs*) and the need for naughting man's ego and self-existence (opposing the ontological *nafs*). A central notion for the struggle against the *nafs*, which is utilized by Rūmī throughout his works and refers to both of these sides, is the concept of *fanā'* ('passing-away' or 'annihilation'), a notion with a long history in Sufi tradition prior to Rūmī's time, which played an essential role in the teachings of such prominent early Sufis as Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (d. c. 875).¹²⁰

Since the *nafs* hinders man from attaining mystical perfection in all emotional, moral, cognitive, and ontological aspects, the practice of annihilation (*fanā'*) and struggling against this internal enemy is also a multidimensional process consisting of all four of these aspects. In the emotional aspect, due to the *nafs*' craving for sensual pleasures

¹¹⁸ M V: 2802–11. For similar imageries, see M III: 2244–56 and M IV: 2481–83.

¹¹⁹ Rūmī, for instance, refers several times to Ḥallāj's famous lines, 'Kill me, my faithful friends! For in my slaughter is my life; my death is in my life and my life in my death' (Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr Ḥallāj, *Diwān al-Ḥallāj*, ed. Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī (Baghdad: Maktaba al-Nahda 1974), p. 24). See M I: 3934–35, M III: 4186–87, D 2086, and D 2813.

¹²⁰ Due to the similarity of the concept of *fanā'* and passing away with the teachings of Indian religions, especially Buddhism, some scholars have suggested an Indian origin for this notion. Certain historical evidences may support this idea, for example, the influence of Abū 'Alī of Sindh on Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Inc. 2002 [1914]), p. 12).

and its attraction to the magnet of worldly enjoyments, man is emotionally attached to the realms of animality and materiality through the fascinating and intoxicating power of such pleasures. Therefore, in order to neutralize the magnet of worldly pleasures and break man's attachment to it, it is necessary to restrain the frozen serpent of the *nafs*, preventing it from being warmed by the sun of lust,¹²¹ and extinguishing the fire of lust by means of denying it the kindling of worldly delights. Rūmī emphasizes the necessity of abandoning worldly pleasures and lust,¹²² highlighting such concepts as 'suffering' (Persian: *ranj*) and 'ascetic discipline' (Arabic: *riyāḍa*), which convey a sense of self-mortification and austerity.¹²³ Rūmī's practical way, from this angle, is in line with the current of asceticism (Arabic: *zuhd*) in the Islamic tradition and is close to the practical mysticism of those Sufis regarded by some scholars as representative of 'ascetic Sufism'.¹²⁴ A major example of these ascetic Sufis is Ghazālī (d. 1111), the distinguished theologian and Sufi, whose magnum opus, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) is replete with recommendations about the observance of ascetic practices.¹²⁵

Regarding the moral aspect, *fanā'* includes avoiding the performance of whatever the *nafs* commands one to do and restraining oneself from doing what is motivated by worldly pleasures and lust. The necessity of such preventive measures is shown in the aforementioned story of the contention between Majnūn and his she-camel (symbols for man and his *nafs*), wherein Majnūn finally decides to

¹²¹ M III: 1057–60.

¹²² See, for instance, M II: 1272–74, which stresses that 'the abandonment of lusts and pleasures' is the true munificence drawing spirit up to Heaven, and that no one sunken in lust can rise up.

¹²³ M I: 2302, M III: 3365, and M IV: 2985. Due to the clear nature of the Islamic ritual of fasting, Rūmī praises it frequently in his *oeuvre* and even considers it to be the greatest pillar among five pillars of Islam. See D 1602, which stresses 'Although faith is built upon five pillars, by God, the greatest pillar among them is fasting' (my translation).

¹²⁴ 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh, *Qumār-i 'āshiqāna: Shams wa Mawlānā* (Tehran: Mu'assisa-yi Farhangī-yi Širāt 1379 A.Hsh./2000), pp. 33–37. It deserves mention that those passages in Rūmī's works (e.g. M V: 2179–94) that denigrate *zuhd* do not, in fact, criticize self-mortification and austere practice themselves; rather, they reproach those forms of asceticism whose motivating force is fear and whose goals differ from attaining union with the Beloved.

¹²⁵ The similarities as well as differences of Ghazālī and Rūmī are addressed by several scholars. See, e.g., Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, pp. 51–52; and Surūsh, *Qışsa-yi arbāb-i ma'rifat*, (Tehran: Mu'assisa-yi Farhangī-yi Širāt, 1373 A.Hsh./1994), pp. 135–214.

throw himself headlong from the camel and travels towards his beloved Laylā in the reverse direction of the she-camel's way towards her foal.¹²⁶ The story of Iblīs and the Muslim Caliph Mu'āwiya in the second book of the *Mathnawī* also emphasizes the need to abandon any acts that are in conformity with the *nafs*. In this story, Rūmī concludes that even if the satanic *nafs* recommends seemingly good and virtuous things, which in the narrative was Iblīs' urging the caliph to awaken for prayer, man should not act in accordance with it.¹²⁷ In addition, the moral aspect of the annihilation of the self (*fanā'*) consists in demolishing the fancy of egoism along with man's presumption of an autonomous created will of his own, independent from the divine will. Since, according to Rūmī, it is only God who is the one real agent of all works, gaining release from the domination of the *nafs* and ego – due to which one imagines oneself as the real agent of all his works – includes naughting one's illusory created will, allowing one to willingly perform one's works in accordance with God's volition.

In the cognitive aspect, *fanā'* includes annihilation of the intriguing *nafs* and struggle against its deceitfulness and the deluding power of the partial intellect. Rūmī accentuates time and again the necessity of rejecting and opposing the argumentation of the *nafs* and its servant, the partial intellect, which is merely the justification and rationalization of what keeps man from attaining mystical perfection.¹²⁸ In addition, cognitive *fanā'* also implies the releasing of oneself from the limitation of the rational activity of the partial intellect – that is, liberation from both its reliance on data collected through sense perception and memory and its discursive methodology, which is essentially incapable of leading one to the truth – to a perception of the essential nature of reality.¹²⁹ Likewise, *fanā'* in the cognitive sense also aims to avoid dependence on knowledge gained from the activity of such an imperfect intellect, the mediate knowledge derived from outside, which can only serve to increase doubt and opinion instead of providing certainty.¹³⁰ In this regard, Rūmī attacks not only philoso-

126 M IV: 1551–61.

127 M II: 2604–792. Rūmī explains elsewhere (M II: 2266–75) as a general rule that if one counsels with the fleshly soul, one should do exactly the contrary of what it bids. The same point can be found in M I: 2955.

128 See, for example, the abovementioned story on Iblīs and Mu'āwiya, especially verses 2700–13.

129 M III: 3650–51. 130 M III: 1558 and M V: 1288–91.

phy and rational theology but also all sciences not based on mystical intuition. He criticizes philosophers such as Plato,¹³¹ Muslim Peripatetic philosophers like Avicenna (d. 1037),¹³² the rationalist Mu'tazilites,¹³³ theologians like Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1209),¹³⁴ jurists and the founders of the schools of Islamic law (Arabic: *fiqh*),¹³⁵ and experts in other branches of science.¹³⁶

Finally, *fanā'* includes, in its ontological aspect, man's rejection and abandonment of himself as real and existing independently. In order to return to the realm of unity, man should discard what makes him identify himself as a separate and particular being, leaving behind anything that builds up a border between himself and 'others', like destroying a battlement that causes the unique light to appear as multiple shadows.¹³⁷ It is to give up attachment to 'I' and 'we', to burn up one's night-like self-existence, to consume oneself in the presence of the One, and to melt away one's very existence into the divine Being.¹³⁸ Ontological annihilation is to remove the Pharaonic vice of pride and arrogance from the soul, which confines man in the delusion of 'I' and egoism,¹³⁹ and to rid oneself of the gravest sin of man, his own illusory being.¹⁴⁰ Rūmī refers to such an 'escape from the prison of existence'¹⁴¹ by employing both the lexicons of polishing and of mystical death, exhorting the aspiring mystic to 'make thyself wholly purged of self'¹⁴² and praising Ḥallāj's words about killing and

131 D 1075. 132 M IV: 506.

133 See M II: 61–64, which states that the Mu'tazilites are 'in thrall to sense-perception', and M III: 1027, accusing them of lacking the light of intuition.

134 M V: 4144.

135 See M III: 3831–32, which says that Abū Ḥanifa (d. 767) and Muḥammad Shāfi'ī (d. 820), the founders of two schools of Islamic law, gave no instruction useful for the pain of love.

136 M I: 528, M I: 2847, and M IV: 1516–19. 137 M I: 686–89.

138 'What is (the meaning of) to learn the knowledge of God's unity? To consume yourself in the presence of the One./If you wish to shine like day, burn up your night-like self-existence./Melt away your existence, as copper (melts away) in the elixir, in the being of Him who fosters (and sustains) existence./You have fastened both your hands tight on (are determined not to give up) 'I' and 'we': all this (spiritual) ruin is caused by dualism' (M I: 3009–12).

139 The concepts of arrogance and delusion are both present in one of the terms Rūmī uses for the vice of pride and arrogance, i.e. the original Arabic term *ghurūr*, which means both arrogance and delusion.

140 'Become naughted from selfhood, because there is no sin worse than being' (D 499, trans. in MPR 88).

141 M III: 4514. 142 M I: 3458.

slaughtering oneself. He emphasizes man's purification from and killing of 'himself' (man's entire 'I' and self-existence) instead of 'his self' (the carnal self as a part of man).¹⁴³

Stage One: Domination of the Intellect

A person who can succeed in being released from the enemy of the *nafs* in all its emotional, moral, cognitive, and ontological aspects through the purgative practice of annihilation attains a mystical stage that is referred to on several occasions by Rūmī as becoming an angel or the intellect. As indicated above, Rūmī presents himself as one of the prominent Muslim anti-rationalists, who severely attacks 'aql ('reason'/'intellect'), reliance upon it, and the knowledge produced by means of it throughout his works. Such hostility, nevertheless, only reflects one side of the story of 'aql in Rūmī's teachings, the negative side, which would best be rendered into English as 'reason'.¹⁴⁴ On the other side, 'aql is strongly praised by Rūmī in several passages of his *oeuvre*, as the 'seer of the inward (reality)'¹⁴⁵ whose light is 'the nutriment for the soul'¹⁴⁶ and about which 'Excellently well said the complaisant Prophet, "A mote of intelligence is better for thee than fasting and performing the ritual prayer."¹⁴⁷ In its second, positive sense, which is better translated as 'intellect', 'aql is defined by Rūmī as the opposite and enemy of the *nafs*, contrary to the first sense of 'aql as

143 The need for such effacement of the ontological *nafs* is particularly well depicted in the story of the person who knocked at his beloved's door in the first book of the *Mathnawī* (M I: 3056–76), who could not attain unity with the beloved as long as he was attached to himself and his own existence.

144 For example, Reza Shah-Kazemi (*Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Alī* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co 2006), pp. 22–23) distinguishes, in translating the term 'aql, between the original meaning of *intellectus* in Latin Christendom, as that which is capable of a direct contemplative vision of transcendent realities, and the original sense of the Latin *ratio*, as that which is of an indirect, discursive nature and works with logic and mental concepts. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr (*Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad 1981), p. 52), who differentiates between the 'intellect' and 'reason', regarding the latter as the reflection of the former. However, since Rūmī employs the single term 'aql for both the intuitive and discursive aspects of the cognitive faculty, and the distinction between the 'intellect' and 'reason' in contemporary Western languages is not as essential as, for instance, in the Christianity of the Middle Ages. In this essay, 'aql is always translated as the 'intellect.'

145 M IV: 2178. 146 M IV: 1954. 147 M V: 454.

reason, which is itself ruled by the *nafs* and influenced by its associates like sensual desire and lust.¹⁴⁸

Rūmī does not provide extensive detail on the intellect as a mediatory stage of the mystical path, and most of his explanation on the positive sense of the intellect is focused on the concept of the Universal Intellect (Persian: *‘aql-i kull*)¹⁴⁹ as an element of the final goal of mystical fulfillment. However, taking into account the opposition between *‘aql* and the *nafs* helps us understand what he means when he describes the first stage of mystical perfection as becoming the intellect or an angel. While the *nafs*, or the bestial side of man, is effaced through the practice of annihilation, such effacement paves the way for the *nafs*' contrary, the intellect or angelic side of man, to be reborn and strengthened in him, and it is what Rūmī calls the process of becoming the intellect. Since the *nafs* has two major senses in Rūmī's Sufism — a part of man that is his carnal soul as well as man's whole illusory self-existence or ego — this reinforcement takes place again in two aspects juxtaposed to these senses: rebirth of the intellect when it is regarded as opposite to man's carnal soul, and its reinforcement when it is considered as being contrary to man's self-existence.

As far as the first aspect of becoming the intellect is concerned, Rūmī characterizes the intellect as a 'polishing instrument' that can purify man's inner being from sensuality and carnal desire,¹⁵⁰ while it keeps mindful watch,¹⁵¹ warning man not to deviate to a crooked path by following the desires of the bestial soul.¹⁵² Such an intellect is like a police-inspector (Persian: *shihna*) and guardian within the soul, which is able to imprison the *nafs* and restrain it from bad deeds and the pursuit of vice.¹⁵³ It is the struggling against the deceitfulness of the *nafs* and its associate, the partial intellect, that provides man with true knowledge, shows him the right way, and brings him to the door of the divine King.¹⁵⁴ Annihilating and weakening man's bestial part loosens the bonds from the hands of the intellect, which was captivated and controlled by the *nafs* before undertaking the mystical

148 The concepts of *‘aql* and *nafs* are juxtaposed time and again in Rūmī's *oeuvre*. See, among others, M I: 2051, M III: 2557–58, M IV: 1533–61, and F 89–90.

149 For the concept of the Universal Intellect in Rūmī, see F 151–52 and M V: 459–66.

150 'God hath given thee the polishing instrument, Reason, to the end that thereby the leaf (surface) of the heart may be made resplendent' (M IV: 2475).

151 See, for example, the story of the contention between Majnūn and his she-camel, in which Rūmī states 'That which is regardful was (ever) reason' (M IV: 1537).

152 M IV: 1983. 153 M IV: 1984–87. 154 F 122–23.

path, and allows *‘aql* to recover its strength and natural function, attain supremacy over the carnal soul, and resume its divine activity.¹⁵⁵ In other words, becoming an angel or the intellect in this aspect is nothing other than achieving a stage wherein the intellect, and not the bestial soul, possesses the upper hand in man, and the more one's *nafs* is weakened, the more one becomes the intellect.

Concerning the second aspect of becoming the intellect, when it is regarded as opposite to the ego or the ontological *nafs*, Rūmī refers to the intellect not merely as a part or faculty of the soul struggling against another part, but as the whole inward reality of man and the true ‘I’ as compared to his base materiality and animal nature, or as the human soul juxtaposed to his animal body.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, the intellect is synonymous with other terminology used in Rūmī's works to refer to man's inner reality such as *rūḥ* (‘spirit’) and *jān* (‘soul’ or ‘spirit’),¹⁵⁷ though he does not always use these terms in a clearly defined or consistent manner.¹⁵⁸ Through the process of annihilating self-existence, man dies from his confined selfhood and separate existence and is prepared for being filled by a novel, higher being. Rūmī alludes to this dialectic of emptiness and fullness, death and birth, and nothingness and being in various ways,¹⁵⁹ yet the specific terminology he makes use of in this regard is that of *fanā’* and *baqā’* (‘subsistence’). *Baqā’* is for him, similar to its correlative term *fanā’*, not merely a quality of the mystical goal or the mystical goal itself,¹⁶⁰ but

155 ‘Thou, O prayerless man, hast put the polisher (Reason) in bonds and hast loosed the two hands of sensuality./If bonds be put on sensuality, the hand of the polisher (Reason) will be untied’ (M IV: 2476–77).

156 See, for instance, M VI: 1627–28.

157 There are numerous passages in Rūmī's works that make use of *‘aql wa jān* (‘intellect and soul’) conjointly. See, e.g., M I: 3167, M II: 3311, D 2548, and D 2900. The terms *rūḥ* and *jān* have been translated into English variously as ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’, depending on their context.

158 Concerning Rūmī's unsystematic and vague use of the terminologies referring to different degrees of the soul such as *rūḥ*, *jān*, and *‘aql*, which are sometimes employed synonymously and occasionally in juxtaposition with each other, one cannot build a clear psychological system based on these terminologies without taking into account the context wherein such terms are used. See Chittick, SPL 40–41, and Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 277.

159 See, e.g., M I: 3201–11, M II: 1939–40, M III: 3210–12, and D 1400, which employ imageries of pain and cure, poverty and wealth, and thirst and water.

160 The terms *baqā’* and *fanā’* have been used in referring to the characteristic of mystical goal since the ninth century, the time of the great Sufis: Abū Sa‘īd Kharrāz (d.c. 899) and Junayd Baghdādī. See Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill 2000), pp. 52–60.

a progressively unfolding process that occurs along the entire Sufi path. The mystical way is, hence, nothing more than a chain of mutual *fanā's* and *baqā's*¹⁶¹ similar to what is called *Stirb und werde* ('Die and become!') by Goethe in his *West-östliche Divan*.¹⁶² In this context, becoming the intellect means to receive a new *jān* or spirit after dying to and mortifying the lower soul, transcending the intellect, leaving behind the husk of the partial intellect and its limited capacity for reaching the height and infinity of the Universal Intellect or the 'intellect of intellect' (Persian: *'aql-i 'aql*).¹⁶³

From Rūmī's explanation of the stage of angelhood and domination of the intellect, it is evident that such an intermediary stage between the domination of the *nafs* and the goal of mystical fulfilment is, in both its aspects, dynamic and gradual rather than static. His statement that man becomes an angel, or *malak*, after the non-mystical stage of the *nafs*' dominance does not mean that angelhood is a fixed stage without any progress, nor that transformation into an angel occurs all at once. There are different degrees of angelhood from the lowest levels to that of the superior angel, Gabriel, with which man is united in his progressive state of becoming an angel.¹⁶⁴ The more one advances in the gradual stage of the domination of the intellect, the more his intellect gains sovereignty over his soul, and the more his inward reality or real 'I' expands.

Practice Two: Superior Annihilation

In the stage of the domination of the intellect, the former supremacy of the *nafs* is replaced by the hegemony of the intellect and man's spirit, which after its progressive process of death and annihilation, gains identity with its loftiest angelic nature, or Gabriel. However, becoming the highest angel and coming entirely under the sway of

¹⁶¹ M V: 789–807.

¹⁶² See Goethe's *West-östliche Divan*, the poem 'Selige Sehnsucht', which reads: 'Und so lang du das nicht hast/Dieses: Stirb und werde!/Bist du nur ein trüber Gast/Auf der dunklen Erde' (poem *Selige Sehnsucht* from *Buch des Sängers*). Zarrinkūb (*Sirr-i nay*, p. 898) believes that these lines in the poetry of the German poet are a reflection of the teachings of Rūmī or his followers.

¹⁶³ For the concept of the 'intellect of intellect' in Rūmī, see M III: 2528–32.

¹⁶⁴ For different degrees of the intellect, which differ from the earth to the sky, and the concept of 'a hundred thousand intelligences', see M V: 459–60 and M IV: 3648–49.

one's own intellect is not, for Rūmī, the summit of mystical perfection that one can attain, and in various sets of landmarks on the mystical journey mentioned above, he points to a higher stage connected to the deepest level of man's soul. In several occasions, he speaks of the limitations of the stage of angelhood by juxtaposing it with the zenith of mystical perfection, particularly during his interpretation of the story of the Prophet's ascent (Arabic: *mi'rāj*) to God's presence. According to one hadith, Gabriel guided the Prophet in the night of ascension through different spheres upward, yet when they arrived at the seventh sphere, the archangel was unable to go further and Muḥammad, mounted atop his marvellous steed, the *Burāq*, continued his ascension alone into God's presence.¹⁶⁵ For Rūmī, the inability of Gabriel to ascend to the height of God's intimacy symbolizes the inability of the intellect to bring man to the summit of mystical fulfillment,¹⁶⁶ indicating that man should not tarry in the stage of angelhood but must advance forth in his mystical progression riding the steed of love: 'Without the *Burāq* of love and the labor of Gabriel how will you like Muḥammad attain all the stages?'¹⁶⁷ In other analogies involving the intellect, as with that of the police inspector who imprisons the *nafs* while the vizier shows the path of righteous conduct to man, Rūmī also emphasizes that the guardian and vizier are authoritative so far as the king of love himself is not present.¹⁶⁸

The juxtaposition of the intellect and love in the stage of angelhood in Rūmī's teachings, nevertheless, should not be confused with the conflict between the partial intellect and love, which he addresses in several places throughout his works. The partial intellect ruled by the *nafs* rejects the divine love and tries to convince man to refute the existence of heavenly love entirely,¹⁶⁹ yet the illuminated intellect, on the contrary, is allied with faith and acknowledges the supremacy of

165 On the Prophet's ascent, see Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, pp. 526–27. The Qur'ānic verse referring to this ascension is Q XVII: 1.

166 'The understanding [intellect] says, like Gabriel, "O Aḥmad (Muḥammad), if I take one (more) step, it will burn me;/Do thou leave me, henceforth advance (alone): this is my limit, O sultan of the soul!"' (M I: 1066–67). See also M IV: 1888–90, M IV: 3800–807 and D 724.

167 D 2894 (trans. in MPR 353). Rūmī identifies the *Burāq* with love several times, particularly in his *Dīwān*. See D 228, D 1595, and D 2910.

168 M IV: 2110 and F 122–23.

169 'Partial (discursive) reason is a denier of Love, though it may give out that it is a confidant' (M I: 1982).

love over itself.¹⁷⁰ However, this placing of the illuminated intellect and love side by side is not meant to contrast Muḥammad to *Iblīs*, but rather to juxtapose Muḥammad with the Angel Gabriel. The guiding vizier and watchful prefect of the intellect is neither the captive of the *nafs* nor is it limited due to the restrictions of sensual perceptions and discursive reasoning. It is juxtaposed with love due to its essential inability to appreciate love or follow its way. Though restricted and incompetent when compared with love, this intellect is respectable for Rūmī and the tone and language he chooses in order to criticize its inability are not as bold or antagonistic as those he makes use of in denouncing the partial intellect and reason.¹⁷¹

The illuminated and positive intellect is man's guide in annihilating the lower self (*nafs*), thereby gaining liberation from the fetters of this inner foe, preparing man for love¹⁷² like a ladder through which one can climb to the roof of love.¹⁷³ Yet the same intellect can also function as a hindrance to mystical progression if man regards it as the final destination of his spiritual journey and fails to transcend its limitations. The intellect, which was once man's teacher and instructor, should now become a pupil who follows Love's guidance through the practice of superior annihilation, being as a child just entering school.¹⁷⁴ The powerful intellect, which has defeated so many lions and killed the dragon of the *nafs*, should now become the captive of love, being shackled with its chain.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, in respect to the ontological aspect of the intellect (equivalent to man's spirit: *jān*), one's attachment to and remaining in the limitation of such an angelic being, which has already been expanded during the successive process of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, again becomes an impediment in the mystical way and prevents man from traversing through the higher stages on Rūmī's ladder of evolutionary mystical progress. At the stage of angelhood, though man has naughted the illusory self-existence

¹⁷⁰ M IV: 1986.

¹⁷¹ It is worth mentioning that Rūmī's *Mathnawī* generally employs a milder language in addressing the inability of the intellect in attaining mystical perfection, compared to the *Diwān* wherein domination of the perspective of love is stronger.

¹⁷² See D 2438, which states: 'This is good: an intellect from that side, effective in looking toward the ultimate end, free of cupidity and sensuality, and prepared for Love' (trans. in SPL 221).

¹⁷³ D 2730.

¹⁷⁴ 'When man's understanding [intellect] has been his teacher, after this the understanding becomes his pupil' (M I: 1065). See also D 2534.

¹⁷⁵ D 1276.

that was attached to the *nafs* and has become purified from 'human defilement',¹⁷⁶ his soul still has an angelic contamination, which should be effaced in order to attain total nothingness and absolute surrender to the Beloved. Despite its transcendent nature, the angelic self is the root of man's sense of self-reliance and autonomy,¹⁷⁷ though in a lofty and sublime manner, as depicted in the Qur'ānic account of the angels' conversation with God during the creation of Adam.¹⁷⁸

The crucial point of Rūmī's juxtaposition of the intellect with love in the practice of annihilation is that neither the partial nor the illuminated intellects are able to perceive the divine essence or experience unity with God, as God is 'comprehended of no reason'. Rūmī likens the intellect to a moth that tries to approach the candle of the Beloved, and 'Whensoever the moth dashes itself against the candle, it is consumed and destroyed.'¹⁷⁹ The intellect is like a hen whose house cannot contain the camel of divine love and is destroyed as soon as the camel enters it.¹⁸⁰ God's essence is, for Rūmī, neither knowledge nor knowable, and being beyond the faculty of apprehension, knowledge is by its very nature incapable of grasping it. The highest degree in relation to the divine Beloved that the intellect can attain is surrendering itself to love, becoming intoxicated before it,¹⁸¹ and by eating opium from love's hand, becoming mad.¹⁸² This summit of man's cognitive power is not naïve ignorance but the height of 'bewilderment' (Arabic: *ḥayra*), wherein the perfect intellect is conscious of its own limitation and inability.¹⁸³ In Rūmī's Sufism, though God's essence is unknowable, it is loveable, and it is only love that enables man to experience and approach the zenith of divine intimacy.

¹⁷⁶ D 3056.

¹⁷⁷ D 2807. Additionally, Rūmī emphasizes in the *Discourses* (F 123) that the intellect, having brought one to the door of the divine King, still has autonomy and a sense of possession, which must be abandoned in order to become wholly subordinate to the heavenly King.

¹⁷⁸ According to the Qur'ān (Q II: 30), based on their limited knowledge, the angels discussed the creation of Adam with God, instead of exhibiting complete submission to the divine will in his decision, while the created Adam was totally free of selfhood and thoroughly subordinate to God. As soon as the first appearance of the selfhood appeared in Adam, he fell from Paradise.

¹⁷⁹ F 47–48.

¹⁸⁰ 'If you build yourself a hen house, try not to put a camel inside it – with its long neck./The hen is the intellect and the house your body; the camel is the beauty of Love, with its stature and upright head' (D 2937, trans. in SPL 223).

¹⁸¹ D 353 and D 812. ¹⁸² D 1931.

¹⁸³ For the concept of 'bewilderment' in Rūmī, see M IV: 1425–27 and M VI: 3712–14.

When man endures both practices of *fanā'*, inferior and superior annihilation, and transcends both the stage of the domination of the *nafs* and that of the intellect, he can attain the climax of absolute love wherein the heart dominates the soul.

Stage Two: Domination of the Heart

The long path of the mystical return to God ultimately brings man back to the point from which the process of his creation had initially begun, for 'the ends are nothing but to return to the beginnings', according to a Sufi maxim referenced by Rūmī.¹⁸⁴ By means of successive annihilations, there finally remains nothing of man's self-existence, and the wayfarer once more becomes an empty reed that is ready to be filled with the divine breath.¹⁸⁵ Man's inmost essence, which was polluted by a thick layer of contamination after the Fall from Paradise, is now purified from all manner of defilement – be it material, animal, human, or angelic – and regains its original purity and clarity. In the final stage of the mystical path, man goes back home to the Paradise of union after a lengthy period of banishment, once again holding the office of God's vicegerency, becoming once more the one to whom all angels bow. He again realizes the Covenant of *Alast* and testifies to the divine lordship by becoming non-existent and submitting himself entirely to the Omnipresent Deity. He becomes intoxicated and selfless once more before the divine Beloved, as he was formerly at the 'day of Covenant', experiencing the realm of love, union, and meeting¹⁸⁶ without any interference of selfhood.

From an anthropological point of view, the last stage of mystical perfection is the stage wherein neither the *nafs* nor the intellect governs the soul. Instead, it is the innermost part of the soul, its 'pure untarnished essence',¹⁸⁷ that dominates and rules the whole soul while man's mature intellect, which is now united with the Universal Intellect, is totally subordinate to it. Rūmī refers to this deepest aspect

¹⁸⁴ Rūmī refers to this maxim in both explicit and implicit manners. See, e.g., D 3208.

¹⁸⁵ M VI: 2002–2006. In his prayer to God in M I: 599, which is put in the mouth of the characters of his story, Rūmī again employs the symbolism of the reed in connection with the selflessness of the perfect man filled with the Divinity.

¹⁸⁶ 'The wave of *Alast* came along and caulked [broke] the body's ship; when the ship is wrecked once more, the turn of union and encounter will come' (D 463, trans. in MPR 84). See also D 2243.

¹⁸⁷ M I: 3460.

of man's soul in different ways, for example, as the spirit partaking in divine inspiration, the height of the spirit of mystical adepts, the spirit of Muḥammad, man's 'secret' or 'mystery' (Arabic: *sirr*), and 'Thy mighty "Thou"'.¹⁸⁸ However, the most pervasive term he makes use of for the core of the human being is the 'heart' (Arabic: *qalb*, Persian: *dil*, *sīna*), which is generally used, unlike other words referring to man's whole inwardness (as with the abovementioned *rūh* and *jān*), specifically for man's most central aspect. Correspondingly, the man who has attained the goal of mystical perfection is described, among other monikers, as the 'man of the heart' (Persian: *ahl-i dil*)¹⁸⁹ and the 'possessor of the heart' (Persian *ṣāhib-dil*).¹⁹⁰

The final stage of mystical perfection in which the unlimited and ineffable heart dominates the soul, is a multidimensional stage containing all emotional, moral, cognitive, and ontological aspects. The emotional aspect of the 'man of the heart' consists of two sides regarding his relationship with this world and with God. On the one side, on account of the absence of the *nafs*' influence on the soul, man is no longer attached through the carnal soul and ego to the inferior realms of animality and materiality and the power of sensual pleasures and bestial desire cannot attract or fascinate him anymore. He is emotionally released from the world; this world is unable to produce any emotion or feeling in him, making him neither happy nor sad,¹⁹¹ and he attains emotional equanimity, being in a state of rest from the emotional sway caused by this world.¹⁹² On the other side, this emotional tranquillity allows man to be filled with strong and fiery love for the divine Beloved, which encompasses all his feelings and emotions. Man is replete with the abundant pleasure and joy caused by union with the Beloved, since 'Union with you is the source of [all] happiness, for those are but forms and this is reality.'¹⁹³ No one is happier

188 M II: 3258, M II: 3329, M IV: 1889, F 196, and M III: 1303.

189 See, e.g., M III: 3565 and D 2468. 190 See, e.g., M I: 725 and D 601.

191 In the story of the Prophet's looking upon the captives and smiling (M III: 4473–560), Rūmī defines 'freedom' as being emotionally released from this world. See especially M III: 4524, which reads: '[The captives said:] Hence we knew that he is not free (from the bondage of the flesh), and that only on account of this world is he happy and glad at heart.'

192 M I: 987–88 and M I: 3794–800.

193 D 2756 (trans. in MPR 338). Like many other Sufis, Rūmī also makes use of erotic language in referring to such a climax of happiness. See, for instance, M I: 1435–37, D 419, and D 922.

than such a 'man of (spiritual) pleasure',¹⁹⁴ and any kind of sorrow that should approach him is beheaded and welters in its own blood.¹⁹⁵

Regarding the moral aspect of the final stage of mystical fulfilment, man's conduct at this stage is no longer directed by the *nafs*, so he is free from the motivation of sensual desire and lust. Moreover, due to the annihilation of man's illusory self he is now loosed from the manacles of the fantasy of moral autonomy and free agency, finally able to comprehend that he is not the self-sufficient agent of his own actions. Instead, such a man is totally subordinate to the real agent of all works, and voluntarily allows God in His Omnipotence to do His work in and through him, so that all of man's conduct is motivated and controlled by the stronger force of divine love that predominates in his soul through his heart. He is totally transparent to God's will, and all the qualities of an agent have been removed from him.¹⁹⁶ Rūmī emphatically distinguishes between such mystical annihilation of man's will and its replacement with divine volition and the naïve theory of compulsion (Arabic: *jabr*), which denies even man's own inward consciousness and rejects his responsibility for his own conduct. He calls the praiseworthy mystical compulsion 'the secret of the secret of the Necessitarianism'¹⁹⁷ and considers it the utmost degree of freedom,¹⁹⁸ which is perceived only when one has abandoned the superficial conception of predestination held by the literal-minded vulgar masses.

Concerning the cognitive aspect of the goal of mystical fulfilment, man's return to the Paradise of union restores him to his original state

194 'Although he was unaffected by (worldly) pleasures, (yet) he was a man of (spiritual) pleasure and became the recipient of (that) pleasure' (M IV: 405).

195 D 1247. Relating to such spiritual pleasure in the summit of his practical mysticism, Rūmī describes himself as follows: 'My mother was fortune, my father generosity and bounty; I am joy, son of joy, son of joy, son of joy' (D 1638, trans. in MPR 213).

196 See M III: 3683–85, which compares the annihilation of agency in the mystic with the situation of the subject in the sentence 'Zayd died'. In this sentence, Zayd is only in the agent in respect to the grammatical expression, while he is killed in reality by death and cannot be the agent. Invoking the Qur'ānic text 'and when thou throwest, it was not thyself that threw, but God threw' (Q VIII: 17), Rūmī also employs the imagery of archery several times in his works, likening the mystically perfect man to a mighty bow that is completely in the hand of the grip of God. See F 208, M I: 615–17 and D 984.

197 'Abandon this Necessitarianism, which is very empty (of good), in order that you may know what is the inmost secret of Necessity [the secret of the secret of the Necessitarianism]./Abandon this Necessitarianism of the idle party, in order that you may gain knowledge of the Necessity that is (dear) as the soul' (M V: 3187–88).

198 M IV: 401–402.

of knowing the names of all things, that is, knowing all things through their primordial existence in God, and enjoying by way of intuitive heart-savour (*dhawq*) 'hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein'.¹⁹⁹ It is to become purified totally from the veils and darkness that hinder man from reading the infinite knowledge within himself²⁰⁰ and from recovering the ability to see by the light of God.²⁰¹ This light is the very illuminative power of the candle in the story of the elephant in the dark in the third book of the *Mathnawī*, by means of which one can attain the comprehensive knowledge of the Truth, that is, the divine elephant in the dark room of the world.²⁰² The story of the Greeks and the Chinese in the first book of the *Mathnawī*, which Rūmī tells as a 'parable of the hidden knowledge',²⁰³ also explains how, when the Greeks removed the rust from the walls and burnished their mirror of the heart from all pollutions, the image of God and the innumerable images of all things were reflected in their hearts, and they attained the cognitive state of *'ayn al-yaqīn* ('essence of certainty') after going beyond their previous non-mystical state of *'ilm al-yaqīn* ('knowledge of certainty').²⁰⁴ However, though the perfect mystic knows all things through their essential existence in God by a knowledge free from the limitations of time and space,²⁰⁵ he is completely aware of the unknowability of the divine Beloved, and his cognitive faculty remains in total bewilderment and unable to perceive the incomprehensible essence of God.

199 M I: 1234–43.

200 'Consider when these darknesses and veils are removed [from man], how then he will be apprised and what varieties of knowledge he will discover within him!' (F 62).

201 Regarding the characteristics of such divine light, Rūmī refers several times to the hadith, 'Beware of the clairvoyance of the true believer, for verily he sees by the Light of God', narrated in Abū 'Isā Muḥammad b. 'Isā Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, (Cairo: al-Ḥalabī 1975), V, p. 298. See M II: 1580 and M IV: 3400.

202 Narrated in M III: 1259–70, this story concludes that: 'If there had been a candle in each one's hand, the difference would have gone out of their words' (M III: 1268).

203 M I: 3467–99.

204 M I: 3483–99 and M III: 4125. Three technical Arabic terms, *'ilm al-yaqīn*, *'ayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* ('truth of certainty'), originated in the Qur'ān (Q CII: 5–7 and Q LXIX: 51) and are frequently employed in Sufi texts in reference to the three levels of knowledge and certainty, from the non-mystical degree of *'ilm al-yaqīn* to the advanced degrees of *'ayn al-yaqīn* and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*. In his explanation of the cognitive aspect of mystical perfection, however, Rūmī merely mentions the first and second levels.

205 'To them the unseen things of the future became manifest; to them recollection of the past became naught' (M I: 1467). See also M IV: 3395–96.

Finally, regarding the ontological aspect, the annihilated and selfless mystic is filled and united with God's being. Rūmī, once again, evokes a variety of imagery in referring to such *unio mystica*, including the invisibility of the candle's flame in the presence of the sun, the deer collapsing senselessly while overpowered beneath the lion's clutch, and the iron's being heated by fire to the extent that, though remaining iron, it claims, 'I am the fire'.²⁰⁶ He also describes the height of mystical union in terms of man's being clothed with divine qualities.²⁰⁷ These examples show that he does not believe in an absolute, undifferentiated identity of man and the divine essence in the climax of mystical perfection, but rather in restoring the mode of unity in multiplicity wherein 'the work and the Worker' exist together.²⁰⁸ Rūmī does not begin his story of creation from an indistinct identity of God and man, nor does his mystical journey of the return to God end at that point. Nevertheless, these images and instances also do not imply, as some scholars suggest,²⁰⁹ that perfection in Rūmī's mysticism consists merely of acquiring the qualities of God with no ontological or essential alteration. In Rūmī's Sufism, as explained above, such perfection consists of both an ontological aspect as well as substantial unification, yet God and man remain separate and differentiable even at the height of their union. Through such unity with God, man is united with all creatures existing in God in their primitive mode of non-existence, and his fathomless heart becomes the container of not only the *imago Dei* but also immeasurable images of all things in the divine presence.²¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Any study of the mysticism of Rūmī in general, and his practical mysticism in particular, would be incomplete without addressing the central theme of his Sufism and the connecting force of all his teachings, that is: love (Arabic: *ishq*, *mahabba*).²¹¹ Undoubtedly, Rūmī's

206 M III: 3671–76 and M II: 1345–49.

207 M III: 3670, M III: 1790–98, and M III: 3912–14. 208 M II: 762.

209 See, for example, Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 66, which emphasizes that '*fanā*' is not a substantial union'.

210 M I: 3485–88. See also F 88, which emphasizes that nothing in the universe is outside the heart.

211 The experience of love is more strongly reflected in Rūmī's *Dīwān*, and some scholars have identified Rūmī's poetic experience mirrored in his lyrics with his deeply mystical yearning and experience of love (Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading*

theory of love owes a great deal to the doctrine of love that had already been developing in the Islamic world for centuries, not only by numerous Sufis²¹² but also by philosophers like Avicenna²¹³ or the authors of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity).²¹⁴ However, it is difficult to find more than a handful of Sufis in the Islamic world with an intense personal experience of love that even approaches that of Rūmī in its fervour, or for whom the love penetrates so deeply in the theoretical and practical aspects of their mysticism or is presented in such lofty poetry as his.²¹⁵ For Rūmī, love is not merely the motivating force behind the creation of the universe, thus playing a significant role in his metaphysics of creation,²¹⁶ but it is the motivating power that drives all movement and activities towards perfection, therefore it is crucial in his practical mysticism. Besides being the principle of life and activity, love is also the principle of unity and unification and the very unitive force that 'gave oneness to hundreds of thousands of motes'²¹⁷ and is the impetus for things to

Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi (Columbia, C: University of South Carolina Press 1998), pp. 18–22). However, love is the spirit of other works of his even when it is not directly addressed, especially those belonging to the period after the dawn of his beloved and spiritual mentor Shams al-Dīn Tabrizī in his life. Rūmī's *Majālis-i sab'a* (The Seven Sermons) and even his *Maktūbāt* (The Letters) also deal with love several times, though mostly in a language not as startlingly original as that used in the *Dīwān* or the *Mathnawī*.

212 For the historical development of the classifications of the stages of love in early Sufism before Rūmī's time (until Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, who died around the same year Rūmī was born), see Carl Ernst, 'The Stages of Love in Persian Sufism, from Rābī'a to Rūzbihān', in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. I: *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld 1999), pp. 435–55. For the concept of love in Rūmī, see Chittick, SPL 194–231; Zarrīnkūb, *Sirr-i nay*, pp. 493–522; and Annemarie Schimmel, *I Am Wind, You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston, MA, and London: Shambhala 1992), pp. 173–94.

213 Avicenna deals especially with the subject of love in his *Risāla fī al-ishq* (*Treatise on Love*). For an English translation of this treatise, see Ibn Sīnā, 'A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sīnā', trans. Emil L. Fackenheim, *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945), pp. 208–28.

214 See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa khullān al-wafā'*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir 1957).

215 In juxtaposing Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī, for example, who also considers himself a follower of the 'religion of love' (Ibn 'Arabī, *The Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyī'ddīn Ibn al-'Arabī*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Theosophical Publishing House Ltd 1978), p. 67), Chittick ('Rūmī and *Waḥdat al-wujūd*', p. 96) states that although Ibn 'Arabī could be imagined without love, it is impossible to imagine Rūmī without it.

216 Rūmī explains this creative role of love several times in his works, e.g., in M V: 2738–40.

217 M II: 3727.

move from multiplicity to unity. It is the power that causes, in the evolutionary chain of existent beings listed by Rūmī, the assimilation and absorption of the lower existents into higher ones and a gradual movement 'in love with that Perfection'.²¹⁸ As part of such a broad spectrum, the mutual love of man and God²¹⁹ functions as the power that causes man to be absorbed and elevated towards his divine origin and pass through the successive way-stations of the mystical path.

To start with the role of love at the beginning of the mystical way, since annihilation of the *nafs* releases man from the impediments to his receptivity to God's attraction and love, one may suggest that *fanā'* is the prerequisite of love in the process of return, and that the mystical path initially starts with pure annihilation lacking any influence of love. Several passages in Rūmī's work also seem to support this suggestion, for instance, those passages employing the imagery of the hunter's being attracted and guided by the smell of the deer's musk-gland after his first approach of following its footprints,²²⁰ or the verse in the fifth book of the *Mathnawī* exhorting the reader to 'Advance one or two paces, make a good endeavour: Love will lay hold of your ear and *then* draw (you onward) [emphasis added].'²²¹ Yet it should be taken into account that for Rūmī even that initial attempt to cast off the bonds of the *nafs* and worldliness is the result of divine love and its attraction,²²² and 'wherever there is a wayfarer, 'tis the pull of God (that draws him on)'.²²³ When man starts travelling the mystical way of the return to God through commencing the practice

218 M V: 3854–58.

219 The mutuality of love is one of the principles of Rūmī's theory of love, which is explained in his works in different languages (e.g., in M I: rubric before verse 2744; and M III: 4398). Such reciprocity does not mean that the love on both sides is completely identical. Divine love is attraction, affection, and desire without the perception of need, yet man's love for God appears in man as strong affection and aspiration accompanied with need (M III: 4393–96 and 4445–47).

220 'He (the Ṣūfī) stalks the game, like a hunter: he sees the musk-deer's track and follows the footprints/ For some while the track of the deer is (the) proper (clue) for him, (but) afterwards 'tis the navel (musk-gland) of the deer that is his guide./ When he has given thanks for (having been favoured with knowledge of) the track and has traversed the way, of necessity by means of that track he arrives at a goal' (M II: 161–63). See also M III: 492.

221 M V: 2515.

222 'Thy shifts and attempts to find a means (of gaining access to Me) were (in reality) My drawing (thee towards Me), and released thy feet (from the bonds of worldliness)' (M III: 196).

223 M V: 4216.

of annihilation under the attractive force of love, it is the reciprocal love of man and God that plays the pivotal role in the gradual practice of *fanā'* and man's becoming united with angelic beings. On the one hand, love is the force of all purgatorial practices; it is love that motivates and reinforces the intellect in its subjugation and domination of the *nafs* and causes the replacement of the authority of man's bestial part in the soul with that of man's angelic part. On the other hand, the unitive power of such love progressively fills the soul with higher degrees of being and spirit (*jān*), thereby enabling it to attain sequential modes of subsistence in God, after already having been repeatedly emptied from illusory self-existence and having endured successive levels of annihilation. Consequently, love is an essential factor in both the first practice and the first stage of the mystical journey in Rūmī's practical mysticism.

After man attains the summit of the domination of the intellect, and his bestial *anima bruta* (*nafs*) becomes ineffective in him, it is again the power of love that is the most decisive factor in the second practice and second stage of the mystical path. In the first practice of *fanā'*, the 'polishing instrument' of the intellect contributed in opposing the carnal soul and the purification of the soul from sensuality and carnal desire. However, in the second practice of *fanā'*, or superior annihilation, where man's intellect is unable to continue the mystical journey and remains bewildered, it is love that, besides being the unitive power bringing man closer to the Paradise of union, becomes the major purgative and annihilative power that purifies the soul from all refined modes of impurity, whether these be intellectual or angelic. Believing in the principle of *amor est mors* ('love is death'),²²⁴ Rūmī accentuates that 'To lovers there is a burning (which consumes them) at every moment',²²⁵ and love is the flame which consumes everything else but the Beloved.²²⁶ In the last degrees of the mystical way, it is only love that both kills and revives man, purifies him and fills him up, makes him 'non-existent' and bestows upon him a new being, and leads to both man's *fanā'* and *baqā'*.²²⁷ The more one advances along the mystical path and approaches its end, the stronger and loftier

224 For a biblical text related to this principle, see Song of Solomon 8: 6.

225 M II: 1765.

226 M V: 588. See also D 728, which emphasizes the purgative role of love in terms of killing man's self-existence.

227 D 1639 and D 1689.

becomes the power of mutual love between him and his heavenly Beloved. Ultimately, the zenith of mystical perfection culminates in the climax of love, which fills the purified and receptive heart of man and predominates his entire being.

In order to summarize our study of Rūmī's practical teachings, it seems useful to suggest a rubric for his practical mysticism that is capable of highlighting its major characteristics and specific qualities. The pivotal feature of the process of mystical perfection for Rūmī, as explained above, is that his practical path of return is one of annihilation (*fanā'*). He makes use of every opportunity in his works to accentuate the necessity of such effacement, and asserts that no one can be admitted into the divine presence until he has naughted his self, calling the way of becoming *nihilum* 'the creed and religion of all lovers of God'.²²⁸ He even characterizes his masterpiece, the *Mathnawī*, as being the shop where the wares of spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and annihilation are sold,²²⁹ and he relates all mystical practices in one way or another to the practice of *fanā'*.²³⁰ In the way of mystical progress, annihilation remains the central practice from beginning to end, such that the more one advances in mystical realization, the more refined one's annihilation becomes. During one's initial steps on the Sufi path of spiritual perfection, annihilation is directed towards opposing the carnal and bestial self, while amongst advanced adepts it is aimed at purifying man from the limitations of his higher angelic being. Rūmī also uses the term *fanā'* in its non-verbal form to refer to a major spiritual quality of man at the apex of mystical fulfilment, an adept who has become absolutely effaced from self. Hence, the path

228 'There is no way (admittance) for any one, till he become naughted [*fanā'*], into the audience-chamber of (Divine) Majesty./What is the means of ascension to Heaven? This not-being [*nistī*]. Not-being is the creed and religion of the lovers (of God)' (M VI: 232–33). Taking into account the difference between ontological and moral nothingness, it is better to translate *nistī* here as the way of 'annihilation' rather than 'not-being.'

229 M VI: 1525.

230 Rūmī generally employs the term poverty ('*faqr*') in the sense of poverty from one's self-existence and being empty of the *naḥs* (e.g., in M VI: 1522–25 and D 863), hence poverty appears as the equivalent of *fanā'* in many passages in his *oeuvre*, like its appearance in the works of several other Sufis before him. For example, see the chapter on *faqr* and *fanā'* in: Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1986), pp. 203–13. Therefore, such statements as 'Poverty is the shaykh of shaykhs, all hearts are its disciples' (D 890, trans. in SPL 188) and 'the *Mathnawī* is a shop for spiritual poverty' represent commendations of *fanā'* as well.

of mystical return for Rūmī starts with the practice of *fanā'*, advances through the successive series of inferior and superior annihilations, and ends at the stage wherein total *fanā'* is realized in man. To characterize Rūmī's practical mysticism as a 'mysticism of annihilation', however, puts him into an excessively broad category in which some practical approaches that he criticized, such as the ascetic purgative way based on a fear of God, are also included therein.²³¹ This generic title takes on greater precision and specificity when it is further clarified by the addition of another central element of Rūmī's practical mysticism, namely the element that is the force behind annihilation, and like it, crucial throughout the entire mystical path. This element is none other than the aforementioned love, the *sine qua non* of mystical perfection in Rūmī's Sufism. The rubric of the 'mysticism of love-based annihilation', therefore, better describes the particular character of Rūmī's practical mysticism and can be employed as a useful tool for distinguishing his mystical way from other systems of spiritual practice.²³²

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²³¹ For Rūmī's critique of fear-based asceticism, see M V: 2179–94 and D 818.

²³² This title can be juxtaposed, for example, with the rubric of 'mysticism of intellectual detachment' suggested by the author ('Eckhart's Mysticism of Intellectual Detachment', in *Meister Eckharts Erfurter Reden in ihrem Kontext (Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch 6)*, eds. Dagmar Gottschall and Dietmar Mieth (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2013), pp. 347–76) to describe the practical mysticism of the German Dominican Meister Eckhart (d. 1327/1328). These two rubrics indicate both a similarity (annihilation in Rūmī and detachment in Eckhart) and a difference (love in Rūmī and the intellect in Eckhart) between the practical ways of these two great medieval mystics.

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