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The Perfect Man in 'Ibn Arabi and Rūmī'
(Summary of the Article by

Without doubt one of the important sources for an understanding of the gnosis or "mystical philosophy" (عرفان) of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī is the works of the greatest gnostic philosopher of Islam, Muhyi al-Dīn ibn Arabi. In studying the works of these two figures, who are tied together by numerous factors which cannot be dealt with here, I have come across many passages which point out Ibn Arabi's influence upon Rūmī. These I have arranged in accordance with the main discussions of Islamic gnosis, such as God's Names and Qualities, the relationship of God to the world, predestination (qadā') and allotment (qadar), love and worship, the world of 'image-exemplars' (mithāl) and of imagination (khayāl), the heart of the gnostic, etc. As one example of the relationship between these two figures I would like to depict in brief their description of the Perfect Man, the doctrine of which is one of the most important in Islamic gnosis.

In the works of Ibn Arabi, in particular the Fuṣūṣ al-

hikam, man is described as follows: the world is like an inanimate body and man is its spirit. He is the ultimate cause of creation, the "seed" and origin of the world of existence, and the fruit of the tree of the cosmos. In respect to existence and at the level of the divine Knowledge and Will he is the first creature, but in respect to manifestation and his appearance in the world he is the last. Man is the reason for the existence of the world and the cause of its subsistence. He is the royal signet, the seal of God stamped upon the treasury of existence so that it might remain protected and secure. He is called man (insān) and vicegerent because he is the pupil (insān) of God's eye and the custodian of His realm.

Man has two faces: one is turned toward God and the other toward creation. On the one hand he is the representative of God and on the other he is the summation of the world and the index of the Book of Creation. He is the isthmus between God and the creatures, embracing the qualities of both, and the line which separates the shadows from the Sun. Unity and multiplicity, Necessity (wujub) and possibility (imkān) are united within him. He is a sun in the midst of shadow, a sage retired from the world. In the words of Jāmi,

What is man? An all-embracing isthmus, the forms of God and the creation occurring within him..

He possesses a body of clay and a spirit of the substance of Heaven. In respect of his body and his nature pertaining to this world he possesses all of the imperfections of servanthood, and his rank is truly low. But in respect of his spirit and heart he is a mirror which displays God and within which all of the attributes of lordship

ara reflected. So in relation to God he is 'servant', and in relation to the world he is "lord". His abode is at once the pinnacle of grandeur and the depth of lowliness. He is the image of God and he dwells in clay. He partakes of a centrality and all-embracingness possessed by no other creature. And here we uncover another secret of his being called "man" (insān) and "vicegerent", for he has familiarity (uns) with all realities and he displays and represents all the attributes of God. He is the locus of manifestation of the Name 'Allah', which embraces all the divine Names. Therefore the rank and value of man must be understood and his dignity respected. Moreover, since he was created in God's image, no one has the right to break this mirror or destroy this divine palace. To kill a man or to destroy the pattern of human life is thus not permissible and one must strive to preserve human life and to sacrifice other things for it.

This in short is the picture of man and his multi-dimensional reality presented in the work of Ibn Arabi. The discussion is sealed with the image of the Perfect or 'Most Perfect' Man, who is epitomized in the being of the prophet Muhammed. The 'Muhammadan Reality' completes and perfects the human plane of existence.

Rumi discusses these same ideas concerning man in various sections of the Mathnawi. He considers man to be the kernel of the world of existence, the fruit of the tree of creation, the foundation and support of the world, the reason for its subsistence and the first creation. He says,

From the souls of men, pure and starlike, replenishment is ever coming to the stars of the heavenly sphere.

The outward aspect of those stars is Our preserver, but our inward reality has become the preserver of Heaven.

So in outward form you are the microcosm, and in inward reality you are the macrocosm...

The thought which was first came last into actuality, in particular that thought which is the attribute of Eternity (IV 519 ff).

Man is substance, and the celestial sphere is his accident: all things are branches or supports, and he is the goal.

You are the sea of knowledge hidden in a dewdrop; you are a world hidden in a bogy three cubits long (V 3575, 3579).

In the body three cubits long which He gave man is displayed all that is in the Celestial Tablets and the divine Names.

Since God said, "He taught Adam the Names" (Quran II, 31), Adam gave instruction (to the angels) concerning all that existed from pre-eternity onward.

In comparison with the spaciousness of that pure spirit (Adam) the expanse of the seven narrow.

The Prophet said that God has said, In no way am I contained in 'up' or 'down'.

I am contained in the believer's heart- how wonderful. If you seek Me, search from those hearts" (I 2648 ff.).

Concerning the knowledge of man's worth and the importance of preserving his existence Rumi says,

Those signs- the earth's swallowing up sinners, the hurling of stones upon them, and the thunderbolts- were evidence of the might of the rational soul,

Kill all animals for the sake of man, kill all men

for the sake of the Intellect.

what is the Intellect? The Universal Intellect of the sage. The reason is also intellect, but it is infirm (I 3308 ff.).

Concerning the lowliness of the body and the grandeur of the spirit Rumi says.

Our body is a veil over our face in the world; we are like an ocean hidden beneath this straw...

What is straw that it should cover the face of the water? What is clay that it should conceal the sun? (IV 823, 927)

A Sun, hidden in a single atom— suddenly that atom opens its mouth:

The heavens and the earth crumble to bits before that Sun when it springs forth from ambush.

How is such a spirit worthy of the body? Make haste, O body, wash your hands of this Spirit (VI, 4580 ff.)

Man is like the staff of Moses, man is like the incantation of Jesus...

His external form is a piece of wood, but for him the Universe is one mouthful when he opens his throat.

In Jesus' incantation regard not the words and sounds; regard the fact that death fled from it (III 4258 ff.).

Finally his words turn to the superiority and singularity of the prophet Muhammad:

The range of your body is in fact no more than two elis; your spirit moves freely to Heaven...

Such is the capacity of the animal spirit. Go forward, behold the human spirit.

Pass beyond man also and all discourse, as far as the shore of the sea of Gabriel's spirit.

After that the spirit of Muhammad will kiss your lip and Gabriel will creep back in fear of you (IV 1880, 1887 ff.).

He became the Seal of the Prophets because in generosity none was like him nor ever will any be..

what I mean is that the allusions made by Muhammad are all revelation within revelation within revelation.

A hundred thousand blessings upon his spirit and upon the coming and the period of his children (VI 171, 164-5).



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