

Part 3. The Sufis

Chapter XLII

JALĀL AL-DĪN RŪMĪ

A

LIFE

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī is the greatest mystical poet of Islam. It can be said without fear of contradiction that in the entire range of mystical literature of the whole world there is none to equal him either in depth or in comprehensiveness and extent. There have been mystics both in the East and the West whose experiences in the realm of the spirit may have equalled the spiritual perceptions of Rūmī, but their emotional or intuition side was not matched by an equally clear and powerful intellect. Rūmī's uniqueness lies in the fact that in him reason is wedded to a wide and deep religious experience. The Muslim world has honoured him with the title of *Mawlāwī-i Ma'nawī* (the Doctor of Meaning), a religious scholar who is capable of philosophizing, of penetrating into the meaning of physical and spiritual phenomena, and lifting the veil of appearance to peep into the reality behind them. When he argues he is a match for a superb dialectician of the stature of a Socrates or a Plato, but ever conscious of the fact that logic is a poor substitute for life. He inherited vast and variegated intellectual and spiritual wealth. He surveyed and imbibed the rationalistic outlook of Hellenism sifting the grain from the chaff, separating the kernel from the husk. As a Muslim he was an heir to the spiritual wealth bequeathed to humanity by the glorious line of great prophets from Abraham to Muḥammad. We find in him the sturdy ethics of the Israelite prophets, the dynamic view of life of Islam and the all-pervading love of Jesus. He calls his *magnum opus* the *Mathnawī*, the "Shop of Unity," wherein the diversities of life are harmonized and apparent contradictions transcended by creative unities. Nothing that is human or divine is alien to him. He expands with great force and conviction the original thesis of Islam, of the fundamental unity of all spiritual religions despite the contradictory dogmas that narrow theologies have formulated. The windows of his soul are wide open in all directions. Although a believing and practising Muslim, he is temperamentally a non-conformist for he realizes the secondary nature of the form in comparison with the spirit. He is a protestant of protestants, never tiring in the exposition of his thesis that in the realm of the spirit mere authority without personal realization is of no avail. Faith in the sense of believing in the unbelievable and undemonstrable realities is repudiated by him in very strong terms. For him God is a reality to be experienced and apprehended as more real than the objects of sense-experience; similarly, the

relation of man to God is not a matter merely to be rationalized and moulded into a dogma but to be realized in the depth of one's own being where the human gets into tune with the divine and the finite is embraced by the infinite. It is impossible to put any label on a genius like him. During his life rigid orthodoxy was extremely suspicious of his beliefs and averse to some of his practices which were stigmatized as innovations and aberrations. There was sufficient material in his beliefs and utterances to convict him of heresy before a court of inquisition. His biographers have related an incident in his life which throws light on his catholicity. It is said that the chief of orthodox theologians planned to discredit him by engaging him in a controversy that would expose his heresies. At the very outset Rūmī was asked to declare as to which of the seventy-two sects he offered allegiance. Rūmī gave a very unexpected answer by saying that he believed in all of them, meaning thereby that there is some truth in every sect which has been exaggerated and distorted by the fanatical exuberance of the blind followers of its tenets. The theologian was nonplussed, not knowing how to tackle a man of such an indefinite attitude. Piqued by this disconcerting reply the theologian, in an angry outburst, said that it signified that he was a heretic and an atheist. The reply to this was still more disturbing for the theologian: Rūmī said that he endorsed even this judgment about him.

Let us start with a short biographical sketch of this remarkable religious genius to note his background and the influences that moulded him. He was born in 604/1207 during the reign of Muḥammad *Khawārizm Shāh* whose empire extended from the Ural mountains to the Persian Gulf and from the Euphrates to the Indus. The family had been settled there for several generations. As *Balkh* was in the Persian domain and Rūmī wrote in the Persian language, the modern Iranian scholars claim him as belonging to the Iranian nation. On the other hand, the Turks call him a Turk because after his early youth the family settled in Anatolia which was a Turkish province but was formerly a part of the Roman Empire, and hence the great mystic poet is called Rūmī which means Roman. The Arabs might as well claim him as an Arab because at the summit of his genealogical table we find the great Caliph abu Bakr, the first Successor of the Prophet. The spirit of Rūmī, the universal mystic, must be smiling at these attempts of racial appropriation. In one of his lyrics he says that heaven is his original homeland, to which he craves to return. In another lyric he asks his fellow Muslims as to what he should say about himself: "As to my homeland it is not *Khurāsān*, nor any other place in the East or the West, and as to my creed I am neither a Jew, nor a Zoroastrian, not even a Muslim as this term is generally understood."

In his ancestry we find great names, great not only as scholars and divines, but also from the mundane point of view. On the maternal side he is a grandson of the great monarch Muḥammad *Khawārizm Shāh* who had given his daughter in marriage to the famous mystic Ḥusain *Balkhi*, Rūmī's grandfather. The father of Rūmī, Bahā' al-Dīn, was famous for his learning

and piety. He lectured from morning till evening on religious sciences as well as on mystical lore, and delivered sermons on Mondays and Fridays to crowded audiences. Commoners as well as scholars, aristocrats, and royalty gathered to hear him. The monarch held Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, the commentator of the Qur'ān and one of the great dialecticians, in great esteem and sometimes brought him along to hear Bahā' al-Dīn. Rāzī was reputed to be imbued with Greek dialectics, and attempted to prove religious truths by logic. Seeing Rāzī in the audience Bahā' al-Dīn would pour his wrath on these attempts at the Hellenization of Islam, but the presence of the monarch and the prestige of the preacher prevented him from defending himself. Rūmī as a young boy must have heard these denunciations from the lips of his learned father. In the *Mathnawī*, when Rūmī takes up the cudgel on behalf of personal experience against mere logic-chopping, he points to Rāzī as a representative of a class of people who want to enter the realm of religious truth, walking on the wooden legs of mere argumentation:

"If dialectics alone could reveal the secrets of the spirit, Rāzī would have certainly reached them, but the feet of the dialectician are wooden and the wooden feet are most shaky."

It is said that Rāzī got so jealous of the popularity and prestige of Bahā' al-Dīn that he poisoned the mind of the monarch against him by insinuating that, if the influence of this preacher were allowed to develop indefinitely, he would wield a power that would surpass the power of the sovereign. Autocratic rulers in Christendom as well as in Muslim kingdoms have often shown fearful jealousy of religious leaders, be they popes or priests. There is no wonder that Khwārizm Shāh became apprehensive of the growing influence and prestige of Bahā' al-Dīn and his fears were fanned by the latter's rivals in the religious field. It is quite possible that Bahā' al-Dīn left Balkh along with his whole family to forestall an adverse action against him. But there is also another version about his motive to migrate. Shortly after he left Balkh the Tartar invasion overwhelmed the domains of Khwārizm Shāh. It may be that Bahā' al-Dīn had seen that it was imminent and so he decided to move away into a safer region. The family moved first to Nishāpūr and then to Baghdād where Bahā' al-Dīn's stay was prolonged because Baghdād was a cultural centre of the Muslim world and attracted scholars from distant Muslim lands. A delegation from the Sultān of Rūm, 'Ala al-Dīn Kaiqubād, happened to visit Baghdād during this period; its members were greatly impressed by Bahā' al-Dīn's lectures and sermons. On their return to Anatolia they spoke to the Sultān about the spiritual eminence of Bahā' al-Dīn, and the Sultān persuaded him to come over to his realm. Bahā' al-Dīn travelled from Baghdād to the Hijāz and passing through Syria he stayed for about a year in the town of Aque and then stopped for seven years in Laranda in Zinjān. Here, in 662/1263, his illustrious son Rūmī, now mature in mind and years, was married. It was here that Rūmī's son Sultān Walad was born a year later.

The Sultān invited the family to settle down in Qūniyah, capital of his kingdom. The Sultān with his retinue received him at some distance from the town and reaching the city wall he got down from his horse to escort the great divine on foot. Bahā' al-Dīn's family was lodged in a palatial house and the Sultān would visit him very often.

We see from this family background that Rūmī grew up in an atmosphere of religious learning in which religious problems were discussed and controversies entered into with great enthusiasm. Rūmī must have learnt much from his father and the great scholars who were devoted to him. The most eminent among them was Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq whose title denotes that he carried on independent research (*taḥqīq*). Rūmī's father entrusted the education of his promising son to this teacher who inculcated in his pupil the habit of independent thinking. Rūmī's education continued after the death of his father and we find him at the age of twenty-five travelling in search of knowledge to great centres of learning like Damascus and Ḥalab (Aleppo). Rūmī lived for some time in the hostel of Helariyyah College. There were very eminent teachers on the staff of this College, one of whom was Kamāl al-Dīn ibn 'Adīm Ḥalabi, who wrote a history of Ḥalab, a fragment of which has been published in Europe. Rūmī's education covered the whole curriculum: the Qur'ānic commentary, Ḥadīth, jurisprudence, and Arabic language and literature. His *Mathnawī* bears ample evidence of this vast learning. It is on account of this intellectual and academic training that his mysticism is not merely emotional. At every step we find him intellectualizing his supra-rational spiritual experiences. He spent seven years in the colleges of Damascus and we find him still engaged in academic pursuits even at the age of forty. The Holy Prophet Muḥammad had started his mission at that age. In Plato's *Republic* Socrates proposed a similarly long process of education for those who would be philosophic rulers of his ideal republic.

Although it is stated in the *Manāqib al-'Arifin* that at the time of the death of Rūmī's father his teacher and tutor Burhān al-Dīn certified his pupil's thorough attainment in prevalent sciences and then launched him on a long course of mystical practices which continued for nine years, yet we do not find any fruits of these spiritual experiences in the life of Rūmī before his encounter with the mystical and mysterious Shams of Tabriz. Rūmī now engaged himself in teaching theology and giving sermons as the learned religious teachers of his time usually did. His verdict or *fatwa* was sought and quoted about religious questions on which he was held to be an authority. He avoided music as the rigid puritanical orthodoxy of his time did. There is no doubt that his meeting with Shams was a turning point in his life. As to what happened when Shams and Rūmī met for the first time, there exist a number of legends that are inconsistent. According to one version, Rūmī, surrounded by books and pupils, was engaged in teaching when Shams suddenly dropped in and asked him, "What are these books about?" Taking him to be a man without learning Rūmī replied that the questioner could not know what they

contained. At this the heap of books burst into flames. Rūmi in great consternation asked him the meaning of this miraculous phenomenon. At this Shams said, "This is what *you* cannot understand." Another version of this legend is that Shams threw the books in a cistern of water and when Rūmi was enraged at this Shams brought them out without the water having touched them; they were as dry as before. Shibli, the eminent modern writer of a book on Rūmi, is evidently right in his judgment that these legends are not based on facts because Sipāh Sālār, who spent forty years in intimate contact with Rūmi, relates his meeting with Shams in a simple story unadorned by any legend. If anything unusual had happened, surely this friend and devotee would not have missed mentioning it. He says that Shams was the son of 'Alā' al-Dīn and was a descendant of Kaya Buzurg, an Imām of the Ismā'īlī sect before dissociating himself from it. Shams received his education in Tabriz and then became a disciple of Bāba Kamāl al-Dīn Jumdi, who introduced him to mystic way of life. He travelled from place to place living in caravanserais, weaving girdles and selling them for bread. He was staying in a serai of Qūniyah when Rūmi went to see him. The impression of this mystic on Rūmi's mind was deep and lasting. Sipāh Sālār says that the two were closeted together for six months in Ṣalāh al-Dīn Zarkūb's room, which none but Zarkūb was allowed to enter. Now Rūmi left off teaching and preaching and spent days and nights only in the company of Shams. It was rumoured that a magician had bewitched the great divine. Rūmi's sons and disciples turned against Shams whom they considered to be a charlatan and a sorcerer. Under these circumstances Shams left Qūniyah suddenly, leaving no clue about his whereabouts. After a long time Shams wrote to Rūmi from Damascus. This letter kindled the flame in Rūmi's mind again. In the meantime his disciples whose resentment had driven away Shams had repented of their conduct. Rūmi's son Sultān Walad in his *Mathnawī* has mentioned this incident in detail because he was deputed by his father to go to Damascus accompanied by some other disciples to persuade Shams to return to Qūniyah. The epistle of Rūmi written in verse is recorded in the *Mathnawī* of Sultān Walad. This letter shows how deeply Rūmi had felt the pangs of separation from his spiritual guide and in what great esteem he held him. Shams accompanied this delegation and returned to Qūniyah where he was received with great honour by Rūmi and his disciples. It appears that Shams now meant to stay on, having allayed the suspicions of Rūmi's disciples by marrying a maid of Rūmi's house whose name was Kīmīya. A residential tent was pitched for the wedded couple in front of the family residence of Rūmi. Something happened again which turned Rūmi's son 'Alā' al-Dīn Chalpi against Shams and others joined him with the result that Shams disappeared now for good. Rūmi's reliable biographer Sipāh Sālār says only this much that Shams left Qūniyah again in indignation and although Rūmi sent people to search for him in various places no one could find him. But other biographers of Rūmi are in full accord about the conviction that Shams was assassinated by some

of Rūmi's disciples, and the author of *Nafahāt al-Uns* mentions the name of Rūmi's son, 'Alā' al-Dīn, as his murderer. The assassination or disappearance of Shams took place in about 645/1247.

It is difficult to assess the mind and character of a man who appeared from nowhere and disappeared without leaving a trace after having influenced so deeply one of the greatest religious geniuses of all times. Could a man of Rūmi's mental calibre be the subject of an abiding delusion created by a master hypnotist? The world has valued Rūmi as a man of deep spiritual apprehension; a man whose religious life was rooted in a personal experience which could stand the test of reason. We find him acknowledge his debt to Shams in a thousand soul-stirring lyrics. Shams found Rūmi an academic theologian and conventional preacher and converted him into an ecstatic mystic in deep personal contact with the ineffable verities of life. The prosaic Rūmi was overnight turned into an ecstatic lyricist, who now found poetry and music better than philosophy and theology as vehicles for the expression of truth. Rūmi identified himself so completely with Shams that the voluminous collection of his mystical lyrics is called *Diwān-i Shams-i Tabriz*. In hundreds of lyrics the inspiration received from this mysterious spiritual guide is acknowledged with vibrating gratitude. The realm of mystical experience is a doubly sealed mystery to the uninitiated, but he has to accept the testimony of Rūmi about it, however personal and subjective it may be, when he says with unshakable conviction that in Zarkūb's shop, where the guide and the disciple were closeted together in mysterious intimacy, he found a spiritual treasure of indescribable value and ineffable beauty, both of form and meaning. We can say only this much that Shams must have been a man of extraordinary psychical power capable of influencing the master mind of his age, whose *magnum opus* of intellectualized and versified religious experience created a monument of mystical poetry in which eternal love and cosmic reason seem to have achieved perfect accord.

Rūmi had no intention of either founding a new sect or initiating a new movement; his devotees and disciples, however, did form a distinctive group after his death, but they developed and perpetuated only some external observances and rituals, and degenerated into a community of whirling dervishes. A felt-cap without a seam—the leaders also wrapping a turban round it and wearing voluminous trousers of many folds—became the standard livery of this group which was incapable of comprehending either the depth of Rūmi's thought or the spirit of his religious experience. Rūmi who was bitterly averse to imitation and blind conformity in religious life became a victim, by irony of fate, of what he had persistently fought against. With Rūmi ecstatic dance accompanied by spontaneously gushing forth lyrics was an involuntary expression of a deeply stirred soul. The imitators of externals adopted it as a regular practice of inducing religious emotion, unconsciously believing, like William James, that the voluntary adoption of the physical expression of an emotion tends to create the emotion itself. The ecstasy-seeking group sits in a circle,

while one of them stands up to dance with one hand on the breast and the other arm spreading out. In the dance there is no forward or backward movement but that of whirling around with increasing tempo. When accompanied by music, only flutes and drums are used. There is a trying process of undergoing a discipline of service to others before a candidate for membership could qualify for it. It starts not with the service of men but the service of animals for forty days, obviously with the idea that if a man can serve animals dutifully with love and consideration he would serve his fellow beings still better. After this he sweeps the floors of the lodgings of poor devotees. It is followed by other terms of service of forty days each of drawing water and carrying fuel and other general domestic chores. This is considered to be a cure for man's love of power and privilege of class and caste. At the end he is given a bath to symbolize riddance of lower passions. He takes a vow of total abstinence from all forbidden acts and is allowed to wear the garb of the sect.

B

BELIEFS AND PHILOSOPHY

Rūmi as a philosopher of religion stands shoulders above all those Muslim thinkers who are called *ḥukamā'* in the history of Muslim thought. He compiled no systematic treatise either on philosophy or theology and made no sustained attempt to build a system of either speculative or mystical metaphysics. One cannot put him in the category of philosophers like al-Fārābī, ibn Sīna (Avicenna), ibn Rushd (Averroës), and even al-Ghazālī. He did not hitch his wagon to these stars with the exception of al-Ghazālī, who attempted a monumental synthesis of orthodox Muslim theology and mysticism attempting to bridge the gulf between the two. He is the heir to the ethical monotheism of the Israelite prophets which culminated in the dispensation of Islam, but by the time this heritage reached him it had already been supplemented by Hellenistic thought. But he deepens and broadens all that he inherits. He belongs to no school or sect. He picks up what he considers to be true and discards whatever he thinks to be false, however time-honoured and orthodox the view or dogma may be. A patient study of his *Mathnawī* reveals him not as a mediocre eclectic but a man with a definite view of the nature of existence. He has a deep-rooted feeling about the basic unity of reality and appearance. For a man like him every thesis and antithesis is transcended by a higher synthesis wherein contradictions are resolved in the ever-advancing movement of life. He talks of mere dialecticians with disdain but does not shun dialectics to sustain a thesis. You may consider him a free-lance both in philosophy and religion, but his freedom is informed with a basic attitude that never wavers and perpetually returns to itself after numerous digressions and deviations. While dealing with a genius like Rūmi one is always conscious of a feeling of injustice towards him. The best that he has uttered vibrates with life, while

an intellectual analysis in relation to life itself is, in the words of Goethe, like grey autumn leaves as compared with the sapful green tree which has dropped them. But this drawback is inherent in all intellectual analyses and theories and one has regretfully to remain contented with it. We will make an attempt to give a brief summary of his beliefs, outlook, and metaphysics under a few headings.

C

THE NATURE OF EXISTENCE AND EVOLUTION

The ground of all existence is spiritual. It is not easy to define the meaning of the term "spiritual," especially in the world-view of Rūmi. For him the ground of being is akin to what we feel in ourselves as spirit or ego. Infinite number of egos emerging out of the Cosmic Ego constitute the totality of existence. In this view even matter is spiritual. The thinker nearest to Rūmi in this respect is the German philosopher Leibniz, who centuries after Rūmi conceived of existence as an infinity of egos at different levels of consciousness. As in the metaphysics of Leibniz, Rūmi believed God to be a universal cosmic Monad. There is nothing like lifeless matter; matter is also alive though at a lower gradation of being. "Earth and water, fire and air are alive in the view of God, though they appear to be dead to us."

In all speculative philosophy, the starting point, the point of departure, is an undemonstrable postulate. So is the case with the thought of Rūmi. Assuming existence to be spiritual in the process of creation, he starts with a belief in devolution. There is no satisfactory explanation of why the infinite, self-existent, self-sufficient Spirit should start dropping egos to the lowest level of sentience and consciousness.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have inculcated a belief in creation *ex nihilo* by a voluntary act of the Creator at a particular moment of time. In Rūmi's view there is no creation in time because time itself is created and is a category of phenomenal consciousness which views events in serial time, and mystic consciousness diving into the spiritual ground of being apprehends reality as non-spatial and non-temporal. We see here the Neo-Platonic influence replacing the orthodox Islamic concept of creation in time. Instead of creation in time, we have eternal emergence of egos. Rūmi has repeated in many places his view of the eternity of spirits. "I existed when there were neither names nor the things that are named."

We see him moving only one step with Plotinus in conceding that there is emanation instead of creation in time, and then he suddenly parts company with him. Starting with initial unexplainable devolution he becomes a creative evolutionist. All beings have emerged from God by a kind of overflow of the divine spirit, but every being or ego is impelled irresistibly by an urge to return to its origin. This urge which Rūmi calls love becomes the evolutionary principle of all existence. Existence, viewed phenomenally, is graded, the

egos in one grade being superior or inferior in self-realization. The essence of all egos or monads is spiritual which may be called divine because they have all emerged from the self-same divine principle. The doctrine of the Fall of Adam is reinterpreted in Rūmi's metaphysics. The original state from which the ego fell was not the traditional paradise of gardens and streams but the unitary ground of divinity. The Fall is concerned not only with man or the disobedience of Adam and Eve, but is a universal cosmic phenomenon. One might say metaphorically that monads in the realm of matter and vegetable and animal kingdoms are all fallen angels striving to return to their original divine ground. The principle that everything has a natural tendency to return to its origin, holds good in all spheres and applies to every existent. Previous to Rūmi we find among Greek thinkers guesses about the biological evolution of birds and beasts and man having been gradually differentiated and developed from fish due to environmental changes and the needs of adaptation, but this speculation was never developed any farther either by materialistic thinkers like Democritus or idealists and realists like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We find a doctrine of graded existence and a theory of development in Aristotle's concepts of form and matter and entelechies. Inorganic matter is organized into different species of plants because every plant realizes the idea of its species. Every realized form serves as matter for the embodiment of a still higher entelechy until we reach God who is pure idea or self-thinking thought unconcerned with the particularities of phenomenal existence and unrelated to creatures contaminated with matter. Matter for Aristotle is a negative end-concept without a shadow of reality because all reality belongs to ideas, and matter as such is bereft of any idea. Aristotle is not a monadologist like Rūmi and Leibniz and for him the human ego also has a transitory phenomenal existence; what is real in it belongs to universal reason and whatever is personal or individual has no abiding value or reality. After Aristotle the doctrine of Emanation and Return is found in Plotinus. In his view also there is a gradation in existence which is a result of more or less distance from the original ineffable One who is devoid of all qualities like the *Nirguna Brahman*, the Absolute of *Advaita Vedānta*. The human souls, according to Plotinus, can rise again to their original ground by discarding material and biological urges. This leads logically to a negativistic, quietistic, and ascetic view of life of which we find no trace in Rūmi because of the Islamic ethics of integration and the eternal value of the individual. For Aristotle the scheme of graded existence was eternally fixed and there was no idea of the evolution of species. In Plotinus, too, there is more of eternally graded devolutionary states of existences than an eternal urge to develop into higher and higher states which is so clearly depicted in the metaphysics of Rūmi. Rūmi touches Plotinus and Aristotle only tangentially and then develops a thesis of his own, not found before him in any speculative or religious metaphysics except that of the *Iḥwān al-Ṣafa* and *ibn Miskawaih*. In the whole history of philosophy he is one of the outstanding evolutionary thinkers. He is not a mechanical

or biological evolutionist like Darwin and Spencer. Bergson's creative evolution comes nearest to Rūmi. For Bergson, too, life is creative and evolutionary; however, he believes this creative evolutionary process to be without any goal. But how could one say that life evolves unless there is an implicit idea of a goal towards which it moves? For Rūmi God is the ground as well as the goal of all existence, and life everywhere is a goal-seeking activity. Bergson developed no concept of the self, nor is evolution for him a process of self-realization. Rūmi tells us why life is creative and evolutionary and defines for us the nature of the creative urge. It was only in the last decade of his life that Bergson in his book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* identified the *élan vital* with love and moved from philosophy to religion by accepting the prophets and the saints as individuals endowed with intuition and saturated with love which is the creative urge of evolutionary life.

Rūmi has presented his view in a language which conforms partially even with the view of materialistic and biological evolutionists. Like them he says that life has evolved from matter, but for him matter was from the outset essentially and potentially spiritual. This removes the insoluble problem of lifeless and goalless matter evolving out of itself a germ of life which even in the lowest and initial stage is adaptive and goal-seeking. The Odyssey and voyage of the ego's self-discovery and its gradual unfoldment are given in Books III and IV of the *Mathnawī* with great definiteness. "For several epochs I was flying about in space like atoms of dust without a will, after which I entered the inorganic realm of matter. Crossing over to the vegetable kingdom I lost all memory of my struggle on the material plane. From there I stepped into the animal kingdom, forgetting all my life as a plant, feeling only an instinctive and unconscious urge towards the growth of plants and flowers, particularly during the springtime as suckling babies feel towards the mother that gave them birth. Rising in the scale of animality I became a man pulled up by the creative urge of the Creator whom one knows. I continued advancing from realm to realm developing my reason and strengthening the organism. There was ground for ever getting above the previous types of reason. Even my present rationality is not a culmination of mental evolution. This too has to be transcended, because it is still contaminated with self-seeking, egoistic biological urges. A thousand other types of reason and consciousness shall emerge during the further course of my ascent; a wonder of wonders!"

The same course is traced in Book III of the *Mathnawī* hinting at higher stages till the ego reaches back the divinity from which it had emanated, a state which cannot be grasped by our present rationality nor could imagination visualize it. No category of reason or phenomenal existence applies to this state: it is ultra-existential. We must note here that it is not an impersonal existence which goes on moving from phase to phase but selves or egos from the very start which are perpetually engaged in self-realization. Orthodox Islam like Christianity believes in the creation of the universe in time. The

souls are believed to be created with the birth of the individuals though after that they are destined to be immortal remaining eternally either in heaven or hell. But, according to Rūmi, the category of time does not apply to the realm of the spirit, so the question of the temporal creation of egos is irrelevant. For Rūmi as for al-Ghazālī time and space are categories of phenomenal consciousness only. He says about serial time, "You think in terms of the past and the future; when you get rid of this mode of consciousness, the problem will be solved." There is also a hint in the verses that follow that our concept of time is interlinked with space, an idea which has been mathematically and scientifically developed in modern times by Einstein. Rūmi says that in the realm of divine light, which is non-spatial, serial time, divisible into past, present, and future, does not exist. Past and future are relative to the individual self. About space there are numerous verses in the *Mathnawī* and Rūmi repeatedly points to his conviction, which may either be the result of spiritual experience or an epistemological thesis, that in the realm of the spirit the category of space does not hold and has no relevance. The Qur'ānic verse about divine light which definitely states that it is non-spatial, *la sharqīyyah wa la gharbīyyah*, supports this view, and Rūmi's intellect and experience must have been strengthened by this scriptural corroboration. As the human spirit too is basically divine, as corroborated by the Qur'ān in which it is said that God breathed His own spirit into Adam, man also, diving into his own real self, can realize the non-spatial nature not only of his own reality but also of all existence viewed as noumena and not as phenomena. He exhorts man to realize this basic fact both about himself and the universe. "You live in space but your reality is non-spatial; close this shop situated in space and open a shop on the other side to which your real non-spatial spirit belongs. The ground of this spatial universe is non-spatial; space is a phenomenal creation of that which in itself is not space." Rūmi develops this thesis still further. He says that space is the basis of division and multiplicity, in which the basic unity of the cosmic spirit is infinitely pulverized and atomized. Human egos are also basically one. It is only material frames in which the selves at the biological level create the illusion of diversity. Here too Rūmi gets support from the Qur'ānic teaching that there is a fundamental unity in the multiplicity of human egos. "It is He who created you of one spirit."¹ Rūmi uses similes to make his meaning clear. He says that sunlight entering houses through many windows is split up by spatial barriers but remains essentially the same. In another place he says that lamps lightening a hall may be many but the light that emanates from them and envelops all of them negates the illusion of separateness. It is a common trait of Rūmi that he first uses logical and philosophical arguments and then invariably tries to enlighten the mind of the reader by similes and analogies, but at the end finding the intellect incurably bound by spatial visualization and fettered by

the logic of identity and contradiction, refers invariably to ultra-rational spiritual experience which realizes reality as unity and conceives diversity as mere phenomenal appearance. Talking of a group of divinized souls, he says that they feel themselves as the waves of the self-same sea whose diversity is created by wind. He relates a spiritual experience in which the spirit transcends our spatially interlinked serial time and enters a dimension of Being wherein the mutually exclusive diversity of psychological processes is negated and a man's causal thinking, with the problems that it creates and attempts to solve, exists no more. As it is a spaceless reality that manifests itself into extended and divisible spaces, creating the illusion of separated things and events, so it is a timeless spirit that creates the categories of serial time with the illusory division of past, present, and future. It is possible for the human spirit to enter this non-dimensional dimension of consciousness and reality. Such an experience does not give one knowledge in the ordinary sense; it is a consciousness of wonder.

D

LOVE

As we have remarked already, two lines of intellectual and moral and spiritual development running their course independently for more than a millennium had converged in Hellenized Christianity, of which the first unmistakable evidence is the Gospel of John which identified Jesus with Logos. But after this amalgamation the distinctive features of the message of Jesus were not lost and remained recognizably different. Jesus identified God with love, while Hellenism had made reason the ground of reality. Islam too was an heir to Israelite prophetic outlook and grappled with the Hellenistic thought incorporating some of its elements and repudiating others which were antagonistic to the fundamentals of its ideology. Islam attempted a synthesis of reason, love, and law, and an integration of the higher and the lower aspects, not sacrificing the lower and annihilating it altogether but transmuting the lower into the higher. It means surrender to the will of God which is not a passive attitude of submission but a continued volitional effort to attune oneself to eternal realities of which the focus is God. Whatever Islam took over as its heritage, it transformed it in the process of synthesis and assimilation, until the product became qualitatively different. In the opening chapter of the Qur'ān we find God neither as the self-thinking thought of Aristotle nor the top point of the Platonic pyramid of ideas but a conscious and eternally creative will. The basic attributes of God given in this sūrah are: (1) *Rabb al-'ālamīn* (the Nourisher of all realms and beings), (2) *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm* (Creative Love and Forgiving Love), and (3) *Mālik Yaum al-Dīn* (the Master of the Day of Judgment). We see here that love is prior to law and justice and hence is more basic to the nature of God, who is the Ultimate Reality. The Western critics of Islam are wont to take original Islam as concerned more with unconditional obedience to the revealed will of God than with an attitude

¹ Qur'ān, vi, 99.

of love towards Him. They forget that this obedience is to be rendered to a being who is essentially a lover; as *Raḥmān*, He creates out of love, as *Rabb* He sustains out of love, and as *Raḥīm* He forgives out of love. It is a misrepresentation of Islam to assert that the concept of love is foreign to it and was adopted from Christianity and philosophies of Sufis and mystical metaphysicians. The fact is that what mystics and thinkers like Rūmī did was to elaborate the meaning of love, not only making it basic to religious and ethical life but giving it a cosmic significance as a creative, ameliorative, and evolutionary urge in all creatures and at all strata of existence. It is stated in the Qur'ān that God has enjoined love (*raḥmah*) on Himself² and that it encompasses everything.³ In another verse the extent of paradise is given as the extent of the heavens and the earth, which means entire existence. The Prophet was asked by a non-Muslim where hell would be located if paradise covered all existence. He said, "Where is the night when the day dawns?" meaning thereby that when the love of God becomes manifest it shall be revealed as covering entire existence.

The cosmic significance of love could be derived from the Qur'ānic teaching but it required acquaintance with other ideologies to help Muslim thought in its elaboration. So far as theories and speculations are concerned, we can discover distinctively pre-Islamic concepts in Rūmī. Here a passage may be quoted from Khalifah Abdul Hakim's book, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*: "So far as the theories of love are concerned, a part of his arguments and views can be directly traced back to Plato who has had a decisive influence on all mysticism, both Islamic and Christian, by his conception of a supersensuous Reality, as well as Eros [love] as a cosmical power. Rūmī's Love as an experience was not a product of any theory; as something intimately personal, it cannot be a subject of criticism. But the conceptual apparatus that he employs to philosophise about love requires to be understood in its historical connections. The contents of [Plato's two Dialogues] *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* . . . were not unknown to the thinkers of Islam. Ibn Sinā's *Fragment on Love*⁴ is mostly a reproduction of the dialogue in [Plato's] *Symposium*. . . Love as the movement towards Beauty which being identical with Goodness and Truth represents Perfection and the Highest Idea, and Love, as the inherent desire of the individual for immortality; . . . given by Avicenna is a simple repetition of the Platonic theory of Love. The processes of Assimilation, Growth, [and] Reproduction are so many manifestations of Love. All things are moving towards Eternal Beauty and the worth of a thing is proportionate to its realisation [or assimilation] of that beauty."⁵

² *Ibid.*, vi, 12, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, vii, 156.

⁴ This fragment on love forms part of his collected works preserved in the British Museum Library and has been edited by N. A. F. Mehren (Leiden, 1894).

⁵ Khalifah Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1959, pp. 44-45.

Newton explained the movement of heavenly bodies by physical gravitational pull and Kant promulgated the nebular hypothesis to explain the origin of heavenly bodies out of incandescent vapour. Hegel explained the ever-progressing dynamism of Nature and Mind as the dialectical unfolding in time of the Eternal Absolute. Darwin presented a biological view of the creation of higher species by the blind urges of the struggle for existence and life's adaptation with the environment. Rūmī's evolutionary concept comprehends all these partial and fragmentary theories, taking them up in a grand synthesis. Like Hegel he is a believer in the Eternal Absolute, but to explain the dynamism of all life and history he resorts to cosmic love instead of the dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Similarly, Rūmī has an intuition of the gravitational pull of atoms and masses of matter but, instead of explaining it by mechanical dynamics, he resorts to love as the fundamental urge which creates attractions and affinities. "All atoms in the cosmos are attracted to one another like lovers, everyone is drawn towards its mate by the magnetic pull of love. Heavenly bodies draw the earth towards them in a welcoming embrace. It is on account of this cosmic pull of love that earth remains suspended in space like a lamp, the forces from all directions pulling it by equilibrated attraction not allowing it to fly away or drop down in space, as if the stellar dome of heaven were a magnetic dome inside which a piece of iron is suspended without visible cords." According to Rūmī, the same force that creates heavenly bodies out of nebulae resulting in stars and planets and systems proceeds further and generates life because love by its essence is creative. As atoms by their affinities conglomerate in molecules so in a further evolutionary urge they emerge as life cells which first appear in vegetation and then advance towards animality. Hegel said that creation proceeds through a synthesis of the opposites, but Rūmī says that these apparent opposites were already akin by the affinity of love. Love originates in God and moves towards God who is essentially a creator: therefore, love as it advances from phase to phase in the upward movement of creation brings into being new forms of existence at every step.

We have already stated that Rūmī is a monadologist and when he talks of atoms and their mutual attractions he is really talking of egos that are in the process of realizing their divinely-rooted self-consciousness. It is this urge for self-realization that makes the egos act as they do. As their source is God, so their goal is also God, and the process of moving towards this goal creates new perfections at every stage. Everywhere there is life and life is essentially a goal-seeking activity. The lower merges into the higher; it is not a process of progressive annihilation but assimilation. Rūmī says that the heavenly movements are not blindly mechanical but are waves in an infinite ocean of love. If cosmic love were not there, all existence would get frozen and shrink into nothingness. The inorganic would refuse to merge and emerge into vegetation and vegetation would not be lifted up into animal life nor would life ascend towards the mind and spirit. The egos like infinite swarms of

locusts are flying towards the harvest of life. Without love, nothing would move.

The religion of a mystic philosopher like Rūmi is a universal religion which could not be enclosed within any orthodox or dogmatic boundaries. His religion is not the creed of any one particular religious community but being the religion of the universe is a universal religion. It is the religion of glowing stars, of flowing streams, and of growing trees. Whose belief, intuition, and practice accord with this outlook, he has attained the truth. Religion if it is genuine is not a blind faith about the understandable unknown; it is an ever-present reality perceived and lived. It is the alchemy of life which through the magic of love transforms the lower into the higher. We see in ourselves that bread is transubstantiated into life and mind. Could any narrow scientific intellect explain this miraculous transmutation? In the Aristotelian logic of identity everything remains what it is, and in mechanistic materialism there is no way of explaining the goal-seeking tendency of life from non-purposeive aimless atoms. Life has an infinite assimilative power; there is nothing that could remain eternally foreign to it. As fire burns even a dross and converts it into a pure flame, so every happening in life is capable of being converted into light and life.

The universe, according to Rūmi, is a realm of love. In comparison with love, law and reason are secondary phenomena. It is love that creates to fulfil itself and reason steps in later to look at it retrospectively, discovering laws and uniformities to seek the threads of unity in the diversities of manifested life. Language was not created by any preconceived grammar, nor do the flowers blossom by any conscious planning or according to the laws of botany or aesthetics. Rational thinking follows creation but does not precede it. Rationalization, being a secondary phenomenon, is not by itself a creative force. As Hegel has said, philosophy always comes too late only to contemplate retrospectively what the dynamism of history has already created and completed. Cosmic love transcends all creeds and all philosophies and so the religion of love could never be completely identified with any orthodoxy, dogmatism, or speculative theory. Rūmi says that there is no contradiction between universal love and universal reason, but when the human intellect narrows itself, it begins to take a part for a whole, making the mistake of identifying a fragmentary phenomenon with the whole of reality. Human intellect, divorced from universal reason, remains at the biological and utilitarian level, and language which is the outward garb of the intellect possesses no vocabulary for the description of the intuition of cosmic love. Human consciousness remains generally at the biological level and its perceptions, affections, and conations are governed directly or indirectly by biological needs. This biological instrument Rūmi calls *khirad* or particular reason (*'aql-i juz'wi*) to distinguish it from universal reason, which is an ally of the intuition of life. The particular reason which exultingly calls itself scientific reason, capable of explaining all reality and solving the riddle of the universe, proves to be utterly useless

when faced with the intuition of life and love, and, instead of gracefully accepting its inadequacy, begins foolishly to deny the reality that it cannot comprehend.

The deep impress of Rūmi which has continued to develop through the centuries in modern times produced a disciple of the intellectual calibre and poetic genius of Iqbāl. The reasons for this influence may be briefly summed up as follows. Here was a man who, like the great prophets and saints, did not accept religious faith at second hand; for him it was a personal experience more convincing than either logical argument or sense-perception. But religious experience, if it rests in its subjectivity, cannot be communicated; it cannot induce conviction in others who do not have it. Rūmi deplores the inadequacy of human speech to convey it and also points to the limitations of sense-experience as well as inductive or deductive reasoning of what he calls the particular intellect which deals with reality piecemeal. But side by side with his ultra-sensuous and ultra-rational mystic experience of the all-enveloping spirit in which every ego lives and moves and has its being, he presents himself to us as an acute logician and a skilled metaphysician. When you add his lyrical fervour and poetic genius to his remarkable capacities, he begins to tower above all those who are either mere mystics or mere philosophers or mere poets. One finds in him anticipations of Kant who tried to prove phenomenalism or subjectivity of time, space, and causality; anticipations of Bergson in his criticism of the intellect and in his conception of *élan vital* and creative evolution; and anticipations of Nietzsche in his conviction that present humanity must be superseded in a further advance towards new dimensions of being. He is an idealist and spiritualist of the highest order. He is fundamentally an evolutionary thinker who conceived of existence not in static but dynamic terms. The unconscious urge to rise to higher levels is implicit in all existence; the inorganic is always ready for being assimilated by the organic; in every entity there is an upward surge from within and a pull from above. The inertia of matter on which Newton based his physics and astronomy is declared to be an illusion, the reality of which is infinite motion or restlessness of what Democritus and the thirteenth/nineteenth-century physicists call atoms but Rūmi calls egos. Rūmi re-establishes the reality of the world and the dignity of all life, particularly of human life which has become self-conscious and conscious of its divine origin and goal. All movement is from God unto God. Rūmi performs the admirable task of ridding mysticism of quietism and irrationalism. He establishes with all the force of his genius the reality of free-will which is vouchsafed to man to identify itself freely with the cosmic will. He has brought out the essence of universal religion as creative love. He preaches the infinite potentialities of life because all egos have their origin in the Infinite Self and are restless and nostalgic in order to realize their infinity. Many creeds and philosophies had declared life to be an illusion, but Rūmi declares life at all grades to be an Eternal Reality; it is not life but death which is an illusion. The purpose of life is more life, higher and better.

Nietzsche criticizes bitterly all creeds that say "No" to life and says that there are only two kinds of creeds: those that say "Yes" to life and those that say "No" to it. Rūmī's is a life-embracing creed. Although one of the greatest mystics of all time, he was not a body-torturing and self-annihilating mystic. In a verse he talks of great souls as great hunters of life trying to capture and assimilate the spirituality of angels, saints, and prophets, finally aiming at capturing the cosmic spirit itself for perpetual and eternal enrichment of the self, actualizing its infinite potentialities. He wants you not to gather your garments to prevent them from getting wet but to plunge a thousand times in the sea of life. Fight for spiritual conquest, and not flight from life's challenges, is the way of life that he preaches and practises. Only for a sleeping soul life is an empty dream; creeds of illusion are the products of lovers of sleep and worshippers of the night. About the infinity of life and its restlessness he says, "Human egos have experienced the shaping of universe after universe; could you say which of them mirrors the essence of your self? Is it not that the seven heavens are below the empyrean but our flight is beyond the empyrean? Neither the heavens nor the empyrean could be our goal; we have to fly towards the rose-garden of union with the divine."

For Rūmī life is an alchemy perpetually engaged in transformation and transubstantiation. You see before your eyes earth, water, light, and air being transformed into plant life, plant life turning into animal life by assimilation, and animal life, ascending to mind; why couldn't mind be transformed into a divinized spirit? "They say, copper turns into gold by alchemy, but the copper of our life converts itself not only into gold but becomes an alchemy itself with the quality of spiritualizing whatever it touches."

The space at our disposal compels us to finish this brief survey of Rūmī's outlook on life with two of his lyrics: in one he gives the characteristics of the "Man of God" and in the other depicts a mystic's search for God through the emblems of various creeds, ending in finding God within himself. "The 'Man of God' is intoxicated without wine and full without meat; he is struck with wonder and cares not about food and sleep. He is a king in a dervish's cloak; he is a treasure found in a ruin. The constituents of a man of God are not the four elements—earth, air, water, and fire. He is a boundless ocean of the spirit containing countless pearls. The heaven within him contains numerous suns and moons. He gains the truth by knowledge from God and not from books. He stands above creeds and heresies, and he is beyond right and wrong. He has ridden away from Non-Being in glory and majesty. He is hidden, O Candle of Faith! such a 'Man of God' do you seek and find."

Rūmī is talking here of the ideal man or the ideal of humanity. He is hidden in the nature of every man. The purpose of life is to reach this perfection. In another verse he has repeated the story of Diogenes moving about in the market-place of Athens with a lamp in his hand in broad daylight seeking Man in a crowd of men who according to him were only counterfeiting humanity.

When he is told that no such being could be found, he replies, "I am craving to find him who is not found."

Religion has been aptly defined by Hoffding as faith in the conservation of values. According to Rūmī's mystical metaphysics, the spirit is the origin and locus of all intrinsic and abiding values. The Real which is manifested in the human spirit is eternal and immortal. He exhorts human beings not to lament the transitoriness of phenomenal life because that which is real can never perish. Things in space emerge and disappear; forms and shapes come and go. The streams of phenomenal life continue to flow and pass away; lament not their vanishing because the inexhaustible eternal source remains undiminished and shall continue to issue in many more streams.

We must note that here we have no blank qualities, no transcendent infinity of a static Absolute, but a perpetually gushing fountain of eternal life, from which all egos quaff as much as they can. Mortality belongs to appearances alone; not life but death is an illusion. Every ego is destined to be immortal by participation in life eternal. The purpose of life is self-perpetuation and self-enrichment not only through the reproduction of the species but by the upward and forward urge of every ego. Life moves by a series of negations and assertions; self-realization cannot proceed without self-abnegation. Every stage reached by an ego has to be negated and transcended so that "on their dead selves' stepping stones men may rise to higher things." Rūmī says that from the very outset life has placed a ladder before you so that you may rise step by step. After this he reiterates his fundamental hypothesis that life has advanced from the inorganic to the organic, traversing the vegetable and the animal kingdom, reaching the stage of reason, knowledge, and faith, until man, with his body which was only a part of the earth, evolves a mind and spirit and becomes a whole. But even after having become conscious of infinity, the voyage of discovery through the infinite continues. For a long time it was a journey towards God, but now it will be a journey in God's infinity, from earth to heaven, from humanity to angelhood till the finite embraces the Infinite: man the Son of God becomes one with the Father. It is the bodies that become old and decrepit; life remains eternally youthful.

The Qur'ān says about the creation of man that man's body was made of clay, but the material frame having been perfected, God breathed from His own spirit into him. Rūmī in his discourses collected in *Fīhi mā fīhi* has quoted a tradition of the Prophet wherein it is said that Adam's clay was kneaded in forty days. The Qur'ān says that God's day is an epoch of a hundred thousand years. This mode of expression is not meant to convey an exact mathematical figure but is an idiomatic or rhetorical expression for an immensely long period. Accordingly, God's forty days might mean hundreds of millions of years. Rūmī concludes from this that man's bodily organism too did not come into existence by the creative fiat of God in a moment but is a product of a long process of evolution. It was after the perfecting of the physical organism that the spirit of the Lord became manifest in man awakening the eternal

essence of the human ego. With the emergence of this consciousness the human ego realizes that it is not a product of this evolution but, in its essence, is prior to the phenomenal course of the universe. After this realization the universe with its diversity of objects is viewed not as a cause but as an effect, because the ego pours existence into its own moulds with the categories of time, space, and causation. Rūmi says that the body is not the cause of the mind but is created by the mind as its instrument for working on the material or phenomenal plane. What we consider to be the qualities of an independently existing matter exist only in relation to a perceiving mind. In a lyric, Rūmi describes his search for God after having realized the nature of his own ego. He moves from creed to creed and dogma to dogma. Not finding Him in temples, institutions, and symbols, he returns unto himself and discovers Him there in the sanctuary of his own heart. He is not satisfied with any creed until God is directly experienced by him. Here is one of the finest mystical lyrics of Rūmi:

"I existed at a time when there were neither the names nor the objects of which they were the names; the names and the objects named came into existence in relation to us at a time when egos were not yet individualized and there was not yet any question of 'I' and 'We.' I searched for God among the Christians and on the Cross but therein found Him not. I went into the ancient temples of idolatry; no trace of Him was there. I entered the mountain cave of Hira (where the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet) and then went as far as Qandhār but God found I not, neither in low nor in high places. With set purpose I fared to the summit of Mount Caucasus and found there only 'anqā's habitation. Then I directed my search to the Ka'bah, the resort of old and young; God was not there even. Turning to philosophy I inquired about Him from ibn Sīna but found Him not within his range. I fared then to the scene of the Prophet's experience of a great divine manifestation only a 'two bow-lengths' distance from him' but God was not there even in that exalted court. Finally, I looked into my own heart and there I saw Him; He was nowhere else."

This is the experience and language of the great mystics of all spiritual religions who were not satisfied with institutional religion, and who based their spiritual life on personal experiences and convictions not derived from theologies and philosophies. These experiences are the common heritage of all great souls and the common ground on which great religions meet, disregarding intellectual formulation of dogmas and diversities of modes of worship which have made religion a dividing instead of a unitive and harmonizing force. Rūmi is one of those rare saints and mystics whose intellectual fibre and creative moral and social effort is not weakened by subjective emotional experiences unrelated to the realities of everyday life. In him spirituality, rationality, and universal morality have found a healthy synthesis. God, universe, and humanity are embraced in a single all-encompassing vision, the vision of creative love. Tennyson ends his "In Memoriam" with a stanza which sums up Rūmi's vision and creed:

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

His appeal to the philosophers of religion, epistemologists, and metaphysicians is as great as his appeal to the mystics of all religions. Neither modern philosophy nor modern science has left him behind. For about a century now the entire philosophical and scientific thought has been dominated by the concept of evolution, and it is the evolutionary concept that has been mainly responsible for sabotaging ancient theologies and views of creation, resulting in almost universal scepticism and agnosticism. Theology everywhere has been making an attempt to save the abiding realities and values of religion by accepting universal evolution as an indubitable fact and recasting old beliefs and dogmas. Rūmi performed this task six centuries ago in a manner that can offer guidance to all who want to reconcile religion with philosophy and science.

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Chapter XLIII

MAḤMŪD SHABISTARI, AL-JĪLĪ, AND JĀMĪ

A

MAḤMŪD SHABISTARI

Maḥmūd Shabistari, so called after the name of Shabistar, a village near Tabriz in Ādharbāijān, was born about the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century and died about 720/1320. Little is known of his life. His *Gulshan-i Rāz* (The Garden of Mystery) is a poetical exposition of the doctrine of the Unity of Being. It was written in 710/1311 in response to certain questions about mystical philosophy asked by one Amīr Ḥusaini from Khurāsān.

The exposition of the doctrine of the Unity of Being in the book adds nothing to what had earlier been said by ibn 'Arabi. Maḥmūd, however, is much clearer and much more precise than his spiritual teacher. Being, by its very definition, he says, is existent, and Non-Being, non-existent. There is