
DEBORDERING THE BORDERS OF SELF AND OTHER, AND MATTER AND SPIRIT IN MYSTICISM

S h i v a H e m m a t i

Introduction

The aim of this study is to argue debordering the borders and boundaries of inner and outer, spirit and matter, self and other through appreciating the universal divine love which is within all human beings. For too many centuries, humans have been caught in the myth of separation, until they have become isolated from each other and from the energies of creation that sustain them. But now there is a growing light that carries the knowing of oneness; the oneness that is alive with the imprint of the divine. This is what is being given back to all human beings. This awakening light of oneness is a reflection of the divine oneness of life, and humankind is a direct expression of this oneness. And this oneness is not a metaphysical idea but it is in every breath. This oneness is a life which is no longer experienced solely through the fragmented vision of the ego, but known within the heart, felt in the soul. This oneness is the heartbeat of life. It is creation's recognition of its Creator. In this oneness, life celebrates itself and its divine origin. The recognition of divine within humankind is a way to deborder the borders of self and other, and matter and spirit, to move beyond all that creates the separation, competition and domination, and to embrace all that creates interconnection, flow, oneness, the melting of boundaries.

Union of Dualities in Mysticism

Mysticism moves freely between the borders and realms of the invisible and the visible. The smooth flow and intercommunication between

en these two levels, inner and outer, self and other allows human beings to both access the full potential of their own being and to transform the outer world from the inner. The inner orientation of mysticism is dynamic, expansive, and powerfully transformative. Mysticism unifies the spirit and matter, the transcendent and the immanent, and in the process making transparent the oneness of all creation in the Divine. It can be said that human beings with the "Same Self" cannot be divided or separated by any external religion. It is the energy of the Primal Source, the flowing Light, and pure Being that has not yet manifested the inner aspect of things. An understanding of the organic, creative, and harmonious life enables human beings to combine the science of the mind and the senses with inner knowing.

Humans have been exiled from their real home, their soul, their sacred life, and the divine presence that is within all. Everyone longs for a life that unites the inner and outer worlds, which will be different and unique. The relationship between the inner and outer as well as the spirit and matter can be restored. Only then a new earth can emerge, the reflection in its true meaning be lived, and the responsibility will become a living force. As the Divine Reality is inaccessible in respect of the Essence, and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in his creatures is the most intense and the most perfect. The various aspects of nature of the cosmic pole suggest receptivity, fertility, and becoming. In other words, nature symbolizes microcosmically that very principle of the cosmic image which reflects to the Divine Subject the beauty of His Own Infinite possibility to become. Ibn Arabi makes an interesting analogy of the term "Rahma" which is the Creative Mercy to "Rahm" an Arabic term for the womb. The Creative Mercy is that which brought creation into existence giving the creaturely existence an opportunity to Know and to be Known.

Mary¹ in Christianity gave birth to a child who was the direct incarnation of the Divine Spirit. Maria, Greek form, takes its etymological root from the Latin "Mare" meaning Sea, which is understood to be the Sea of Divinity that holds the forms of Knowledge within itself. She became the living conduit of the Essence of God as symbolically

¹ Miryam in Hebrew, and Mariam or Maryam in Arabic language.

it is through her that the Divine was born into manifestation. Mary is the symbol of the Great Soul that carries a creation in its womb. The essence of creation being the Divine Spirit, symbolized as Christ.²

Divinity is not a distant god in heaven, but a presence that is within all human beings. Every one enters the womb on a tide of powerful and deeply creative feminine energy. Yet because humans are rewarded for developing an externalized sense of value based on what they do instead of who they are, this early feminine connection is often forgotten while she is always a part of everyone. Now she needs to be known again, not just as a myth or a spiritual image, but as something that belongs to the blood and the breath. She can awaken human beings to an expectancy in the air, to an ancient memory coming alive in a new way. She can help all to give birth to the divine that is within everyone, to the oneness that is around all. She can help humans to remember their real nature.

The Qurān says that from water is the creation of every living thing. Jesus is that blessed current that emerges from the Pure Sea “Mare” of Creativity. The image of reflection for humans came as the image of the surface of water, the source of life without which they cannot live, that when clear allows the reflection of whatever is near and above to reflect on it. By its nature it connects human beings to the mystery of life. All creatures’ existence is from water as the source of life, regeneration, and the foundation of all life, therefore, one has to return to the core, to the home, to the essence, to that reality on all levels. This natural consciousness, that is feminine sacredness, is the consciousness of life itself that is what needs to be restored. It is feminine power within which embodies the flow of energy which nourishes everyone’s true needs and inner happiness, joy, and peace. It holds the secret of creation, which is the light hidden in matter, and humans need to reawaken this aspect in life and to return to the realization that they are a soul, that the earth is a living being, that the rich soil is sacred, to the fact that water is the source of life and that they are also water, to this knowledge, which is held naturally within the woman’s body as a sacred space. Only then,

² Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1983).

all feminine qualities will rise as a natural follow-up from a sacred space and can be implemented in the outer world as a service to humanity, as an agent of change in consciousness, a revitalizing force of a new life.

The Qurān states that God molded Adam out of clay and breathed his spirit into him.³ God's longing for the human is none other than a longing for his own self, this spirit that is in the human, for the human is created in his external aspect and is divine in his internal aspect. Therefore, God made the human according to his own image. Since the divine essence is transcendent and inaccessible, human beings can only see God as he is reflected in creation and nature.

Divine Love and Unity of Being in Mysticism

The goal of Sufi mysticism is the "annihilation" and destruction of the ego (*Nafs*), and the return to the source of "Divine vibration" (*Neda*) which results in the mystic sounds of the Eternal, the cosmic sound from which all other sound derives and which can be heard during deep meditation. It is from this vibration, mystics say, that all life emanates. "God most High created the world from a Word, for He said, 'Be!' and it is."⁴ At the heart of Islam, there is God's Word, the Qurān which has a great deal to say about oneness of divinity.

The unity of being or oneness of existence is at the core of Sufi mysticism, as Ibn Arabi defines the Oneness of Being (*Wahdatal Wujud*) beyond dualities. Since there is no room for duality here, there is no divide between male and female either. There is only the yearning amongst everyone to journey towards the one and only "truth". Sufis of all ages, and Rūmī more than any other, have expressed three aspects which they have identified in all things as love, lover and beloved while Ibn Arabi interprets them as knowing, the knower and the known. According to Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), the Sufi path is a path of knowledge of which love is the consort. William Chittick expands on *The Sufi Path of Love*, based on the work of Rūmī, in his *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989), an in-depth study of the doctrine of unity (*tawhid*) and the concept of

³ Arthur John Arberry, *The Qurān Interpreted* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 32:9.

⁴ Ibid., 2:17.

mystical knowledge (*Ma'rifa*). Chittick's books are invaluable in making these Persian and Arabic texts, especially Jalaluddin Rūmī's works, accessible to readers.⁵

Jalaluddin Rūmī, the great thirteenth century Persian Sufi mystic and poet, born in Balkh in present-day Afghanistan in the year 1207, began studying the exoteric sciences including Arabic, Shariah law, the Qurān, *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet), theology, philosophy and mathematics at an early age. Rūmī's *Mathnawi* in five volumes, first published in 1930, is called "the roots of the roots of the roots of the (Islamic) Faith",⁶ emanating directly from God; the essence of the Qurān. The general theme of Rūmī's thought, like that of other mystic and Sufi poets of Persian literature, is essentially that of the concept of *tawhid*, union with his beloved, his soul's search for the Beloved (the primal root), from whom he has been cut off and become aloof – and his longing and desire to restore it. Rūmī says in *Mathnawi*:

I am not from east or west
not up from the ground
or out of the ocean
my place is placeless
my trace is the traceless
'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.
I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;
One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.
Is it really so that the one I love is everywhere?⁷

Rūmī introduces the divine voice that resonates in all things; the One which gives meaning to life. He called the universal feminine a precious jewel which enhanced every aspect of individuals' life:

⁵ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY press, 1989); William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, SUNY series in Islamic spirituality (Albany: SUNY press, 1983).

⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rūmī*, trans. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, 5 vols., 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2003), book 1, 3.

⁷ Rumi, *Collected Poetical Works*, Delphi Poets Series 58 (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2015), xxxi.

There is a force within
 Which gives you life – Seek that.
 In your body
 Lies a priceless gem – Seek that.
 O wandering Sufi,
 If you want to find The greatest treasure
 Don't look outside,
 Look inside, and seek That.⁸

Rūmī's "deliberate evolution" theory is expressed so clearly in the following lines of *Mathnawi* from his thirteenth-century "Couplets of Inner Meaning":

He came, at first, into the inert world, and from minerality developed into the realm of vegetation. Years he lived thus. Then he passed into an animal state, bereft of memory of his having been vegetable (...) From realm to realm man went, reaching his present reasoning, knowledgeable, robust state – forgetting earlier forms of intelligence. So too shall he pass beyond the current form of perception. (...) There are a thousand other forms of Mind. (...) Because of necessity, man acquires organs. So, necessitous one, increase your need.⁹

Intrinsically, matter and spirit or form and meaning have the same composition, the difference is the degree of fineness of vibration: "Nothing rests; everything moves; everything vibrates".¹⁰ It can be said that the whole universe is a manifestation of the One; all things have a divine aspect. Therefore, when the Sufi mystic speaks of "the sacred manuscript of nature", nature should be understood in the broadest sense, as a collective which includes all natures – mineral, vegetable, animal, human and divine, the latter manifesting in the former. Hence, the Sufi saying that God sleeps in the rocks, slumbers in the plants, awakens in the animals and is fully conscious in humanity.¹¹ Rūmī's belief in Oneness is mentioned in many parts of his *Mathnawi* when he says: "All things are included in one all-embracing consciousness in a manner which displays itself as their containment within a single spa-

⁸ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 1, 21.

⁹ See Indries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi* (London: Octagon Press, 1968), 226.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 4, 231.

tiotemporal system”.¹² In another part, he addresses Universal Reality’s all-inclusiveness:

“Nature”, i.e. the cosmos as a whole, or “every real thing” in respect of the Universal Reality’s all-inclusiveness is everywhere, and the more one communicates with life, the more one feels that even the rock is not without life, that through it pulses the blood of the universe. And when we look at life from this point of view, we see that there is no place, no object which is not sacred; that even in a rock one may find the source and goal of all things in that particular form.¹³

Rūmī called the body “dust on the mirror spirit”, dust that veils the radiant spirit found beneath it. He also referred to the body as a “vessel for the wine soul”. The other component of the human being is the “*naḥs*”, usually referred to the lower instinct of human beings, but which can be educated and refined. “The spirit cannot function without the body, and the body without the spirit is withered and cold. God made the body the locus of manifestation for the spirit”.¹⁴ Rūmī points out to the mystery of the self, divine love, and the body as the location of spirituality and divinity:

Where the lips are silent the heart has a thousand tongues.
Reason is powerless in the expression of Love.
Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise,
so I am changing myself.
Both light and shadow are the dance of Love.
You are a volume in the divine book
A mirror to the power that created the universe
Whatever you’re looking for can only be found
Inside of you.¹⁵

Rūmī emphasizes self-love as the basis of love of God and others. He urges people to awaken the love of self through love of God. He longs the union with God and the love of God:

¹² Ibid., book 2, 28.

¹³ Ibid., book 2, 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

You have been hiding so long, endlessly drifting in the sea of my love.
 Even so, you have always been connected to me.
 Concealed, revealed, in the unknown, in the un-manifest.
 I am life itself. You have been a prisoner of a little pond,
 I am the ocean and its turbulent flood. Come merge with me,
 leave this world of ignorance. Be with me, I will open the gate to your
 love.¹⁶

Rūmī believes that the light of God is within us which springs from the sacred depths of the soul. He encourages human beings to love themselves and find God within themselves:

Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself.
 Do you know what you are?
 You are a manuscript of a divine letter.
 You are a mirror reflecting a noble face.
 This universe is not outside of you.
 Look inside yourself;
 everything that you want,
 you are already that.¹⁷

For Rūmī, the essence of God is within all of us, therefore, human beings share the same divinity. In other words, the borders of self and other are debordered by finding God within self. Rūmī points out to the divinity within self in *Mathnawi*:

I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God.¹⁸

Rūmī describes the love of God as a way of finding self and the enlightenment:

You are the Essence of the Essence,
 The intoxication of Love.
 I long to sing Your Praises
 but stand mute
 with the agony of wishing in my heart!

¹⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Love Poems of Rumi*, ed. Deepak Chopra, trans. Deepak Chopra and Fereydoun Kia (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), 32.

¹⁷ Rumi, *A Garden beyond Paradise: The Mystical Poetry of Rumi*, trans. Jonathan Star and Shahram Shiva (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 29.

¹⁸ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 2, 71.

If Light Is In Your Heart
You Will Find Your Way Home.¹⁹

For Rūmī, love of God connects human beings and deborders the borders of self and other through sharing the same breath:

Your breath touched my soul and I saw beyond all limits.
Seek us in love itself,
Seek love in us ourselves.
Sometimes I venerate love,
Sometimes it venerates me.²⁰

Rūmī addresses the shared breath and motion of love within human beings which are acknowledged through love of God:

There is little one can say about love. It has to be lived, and it's always in motion.

The minute I heard my first love story, I started looking for you, not knowing how blind that was. Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.²¹

Rūmī urges human beings to meditate and love God through sharing breath:

It is tears of longing that clean the mirror of the heart.
Pray! Pray always!
Meditation and adoration are your breath!
And if your breathing stops a moment
Your life will end!²²

Rūmī longs the annihilation in God and wants His love to overcome him and to take him away from belongings of the world:

Oh my Beloved!
Take me, Liberate my soul,
Fill me with your love,
And release me from both worlds.
If I set my heart on anything but you,
Oh fire, burn me from inside!

¹⁹ Rūmī, *The Love Poems of Rumi*, 16.

²⁰ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 2, 701.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Oh my Beloved
 Take away what I want,
 Take away what I do,
 Take away everything that takes me from you.²³

Rūmī emphasizes the unity of being and sees love of God in everything which belongs to Him:

Love came and it filled me with the Beloved.
 It became the blood in my body,
 It became my arms and my legs,
 It became everything!
 Now all I have is a name,
 The rest belongs to the Beloved.²⁴

It is simply a statement of the Oneness of all things, from inanimate to Godhood is One Life, one Ocean of Being, on which lives and other entities are but the bubbles in the foam at the surface. Like Rūmī, Ibn Arabi, one of the greatest mystics, in *Fusus Al-Hikam* proposes “Oneness of Being” and says:

God is not understood to be a Being, or even the Supreme Being above and beyond the universe, for both conceptions imply that there are other beings outside Him. What is meant by God is simply Being as such. This cannot ever become an object of knowledge or contemplation or thought; it can only be known as unknowable, but simultaneously it presents itself as both the knower and the known, the contemplator and the contemplated, the lover and the beloved.²⁵

Ibn Arabi focuses on the path of knowledge, love of God, and the world which is the manifestation of God and it is for this reason that everything is nothing other than God who has been conditioned in the station of that being. He puts it as follows:

The existence attributed to the created thing is the Being of God, since the possible has no existence. However, the essences of the possible are receptacles

²³ Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlāna Jalāluddīn Rumi*, ed. Kabir Helminski, introd. Andrew Harvey (Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 2005), 617.

²⁴ Rumi, *A Garden beyond Paradise*, 77.

²⁵ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, trans. Ralph Austin, Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist, 1980), 61.

for the manifestation of this Being. (...) For the verifiers it has been established that there is nothing in Being but God.²⁶

It can be said that the fundamental insight is that ultimately the ground of all things, in whatever sphere, is one; and “things”, be they the largest mass or the tiniest subatomic particle, are a perpetual state of becoming of that One. There is immediate contact between each thing and its reality, so that each receives Being according to its degree of preparedness. According to Ibn Arabi, creation and manifestation is something that takes place within the Absolute Himself and is not a process that lies outside of Him.

He who created things within Himself,
You include within Yourself all the things that You have created,
You create things that are infinite within You,
So You are full and at the same time extensive.²⁷

Every life, whether consciously or not, is a voyage of discovery of what this unity of being really means. Rūmī in *Mathnawī* says the following about the union of God with other creatures:

The moment I heard of His love, I thought,
To find the Beloved
I must search with body, mind and soul.
But no – to find the Beloved
you must become the Beloved.
Tonight we go to that place of eternity.
This is the wedding night –
a never-ending union
of lover and Beloved.
We whisper gentle secrets to each other
and the child of the universe
takes its first breath.
Escape from this cage
and breathe the scented air of His garden.
Your thoughts will take you
wherever they please –
don't follow them!

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ Ibid., 88.

Follow your destiny
 and become the Self, become the Self.
 Everything you want and need
 is inside you.
 For the Lovers in us, nothing less than this love-strike makes us happy.²⁸

According to Rūmī, human beings need to achieve self-knowledge to be closer to God. When we are able to feel the depths of what has been internalized within our own beings through the generational oppression, our hearts will move into an awakened state of love for ourselves, for other women, for men, for all of life. And, when we come to embody this love fully, for ourselves, and for others, every cell of our being will be filled with Grace. Rūmī's *Mathnawi* is an almost inexhaustible description of his vision of unity, his Beloved inseparable from any part of the whole. He urges human beings to go beyond the belongings of the world which takes them away from the love of God: "Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."²⁹ Rūmī addresses the richness of divinity within human beings through the love of God:

My eyes see only the face of the Beloved.
 What a glorious sight
 For that sight is beloved
 Why speak of two? –
 The Beloved is in the sight
 And the sight is in the Beloved.³⁰

Rūmī urges human beings to search God within themselves to find enlightenment: "What else do you search for outside, when within yourself you possess your riches, delights, satisfaction and kingdom – your beloved whom you desire and seek?"³¹ He emphasizes the union of beings and God. To the Sufi, matter, as manifestation of the One, is sacred, and the attribute of divinity is from matter. Recognizing mentality alone does not enable us to imagine the innerness of things. Rūmī

²⁸ Rumi, *A Garden beyond Paradise*, 59.

²⁹ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 2, 702.

³⁰ Rumi, *A Garden beyond Paradise*, 6.

³¹ Ibid.

develops this mystical concept of concealment in numerous verses, referring to the veils covering the Beloved's face as "intermediaries", since their purpose is to shield the eyes from the "Heart-ravishing Beauty of the Face unveiled"³² – beauty of such magnitude that mortals cannot bear to look at it until they no longer look at life from the outside. Like Rūmī, Ibn Arabi believes in the union of God and other creatures:

Every atom of this universe, mental or material, is an outcome of that eternal source and cannot exist without having part of that heavenly radiance within it. Even a mote of dust has radiance behind it and if it were not for this radiance it would not have manifested to our view. We see it because it has light in it; it is its own light that shows it to us. That is its soul.³³

Ibn Arabi addresses divine energy within all creatures which is eternal and unlimited:

Energy is "the one". Because energy alone exists on the ultimate level, it is the single, unique root and source of all that exists. It is pure, unmixed and unadulterated. As the ultimate substance, energy pervades every corner of the cosmos. It is omnipresent, infinite and unlimited with respect to time and space. Energy is eternal.³⁴

Ibn Arabi explains the union of creatures with God: "God (Being) says 'Be!' and the thing receives coming to be. Its reception of coming to be is the fact that it becomes a locus of manifestation for the Real. This is the meaning of His words, 'Be! And it is'".³⁵ The Real therefore stands beyond the realm of appearances, but all things are signs (*ayat*) of its reality which they in turn, by virtue of their being, express and communicate. Corbin in his book brings from Ibn Arabi's *Book of Theophanies*:

Listen, O dearly beloved!
I am the reality of the world, the centre of the circumference,
I am the parts and the whole.
I am the will established between Heaven and Earth,
I have created perception in you only in order to be the

³² Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, book 2, 267.

³³ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, 41.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 90.

object of my perception.
 If then you perceive me, you perceive yourself.
 But you cannot perceive me through yourself,
 It is through my eyes that you see me and see yourself,
 Through your eyes you cannot see me.
 Dearly beloved!
 I have called you so often and you have not heard me
 I have shown myself to you so often and you have not
 seen me.
 I have made myself fragrance so often, and you have
 not smelled me.
 Savourous food, and you have not tasted me.
 Why can you not reach me through the object you touch
 Or breathe me through sweet perfumes?
 Why do you not see me? Why do you not hear me?
 Why? Why? Why?
 For you my delights surpass all other delights.
 And the pleasure I procure you surpasses all other pleasures.
 For you I am preferable to all other good things,
 I am Beauty. I am Grace.
 Love me, love me alone.
 Love yourself in me, in me alone.
 Attach yourself to me,
 No one is more inward than I.
 Others love you for their own sakes,
 I love you for yourself.
 And you, you flee from me.
 Dearly beloved!
 You cannot treat me fairly
 For if you approach me,
 It is because I have approached you.
 I am nearer to you than yourself,
 Than your soul than your breath.
 Who among creatures
 Would treat you as I do?
 I am jealous of you over you.
 I want you to belong to no other,
 Not even to yourself.
 Be mine, be for me as you are in me.
 Though you are not even aware of it.

Dearly beloved!
 Let us go toward Union.
 And if we find the road
 That leads to separation,
 We will destroy separation.
 Let us go hand in hand.
 Let us enter the presence of Truth.
 Let it be our judge
 And imprint its seal upon our union
 Forever.³⁶

Conclusion

The present study examines the highest level of mystical elevation in Sufi mysticism to emphasize the union of existence by debordering the borders of self and other, and spirit and matter. For discussing Sufi metaphysical concepts of spiritual union with the Absolute and divine love, the study focused on the mystical views of Rūmī and Ibn Arabi. Rūmī's divine love and Ibn Arabi's Oneness of Being refer to the level of spirituality that one attains after going through a journey in the search of the One. And the person who strives to find God is motivated by love for the Divine. The Divine Spirit is present in every human being, and he is just not aware of it. The seeker ascends the ladder of knowledge and self-recognition in order to achieve the level of Unity with the Real in which love plays a vital role. The human gains knowledge of God through self-knowledge and achieves unification with the Real Being and also gains some Divine attributes which unveil the secrets of the universe to him. It makes him look at the world beyond its limits through debordering the borders of matter and spirit, and self and other.

³⁶ Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 36.

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