LANGUAGE, PEDAGOGY & SOCIAL DISCOURSE

In Honour of Professor Tunde Ajiboye at 70

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CHAPTER TWENTY

"RUIN THE BODY": A DISCOURSE ON DEATH AND ANNIHILATION IN RŪMĪ'S *MATHNAWĪ*

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"For lovers, there is a dying at every moment: verily, the dying of lovers is not of one sort. –Rūmī".

Introduction

Sūfism is a very complex difficult concept to define. The terms "Sūfī" or "*Taṣawwuf*" in Arabic are said to have originated from the word *ṣūf* (wool) which early practitioners of Sūfism used to wear as a practical manifestation of their aversion for ostentation and the pursuit of earthly pleasures. But the two terms, namely "Sūfism" or "*Taṣawwuf*", have however continued to occasion scholarly interest and attention largely because reference to the wearing of wool by Sufi devotees is deemed to be inadequate as a marker for the whole idea of mysticism (Davis, 2009). Thus, classical Islamic scholars (of Sūfism) have proposed different definitions for the concept. For example, Sūfism has been described as "freedom and generosity and absence of self-constraint" (Schimmel, 1975: p. 15), in the devotee or Sufi practitioner; it is "to sacrifice one's soul" and annihilate oneself in the cause of the Divine (Ad-Daylamī, 1955). It has further been suggested that "Sūfism is not (achieved) by much praying and fasting. Rather, it is attained through "the security of the heart and generosity of the soul" (Schimmel, 1975: p. 14); it is "to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing" (Schimmel, 1975: p. 15).

This definition describes the irrelevance of worldly materials to a Sūfī. In addition, Massignon (1913) also made a poignant remark about what Sufism aims at when he noted that the mystic call is a rule of an inward rebellion of the conscience against social injustices, not only those of others but primarily and particularly against one's own deficiencies with a longing strengthened by internal refinement to discover God at any cost.

However, without prejudice to the above and other themes in Sūfī epistemology, if as such they may be described, the inevitability and certainty of death appears to be the most important. Early Ṣūfī literature, which is largely circumscribed by the idea of death in Islam, is full of interesting discussions on the experience of dying and annihilation. Preoccupation with death is so deep that all references to the experience is not usually to physical death, but to a transformation that gives "real life" and supports "real living". That is, one can begin to experience the essence of life and will be able to maintain a purposeful living. In other words, the idea of death or dying in Sūfism is an experience

that gives life. But despite this huge patronage of the idea of death and dying in Sufi thought and practices, there seems to be a dearth of scholarly works on Rūmī's position on this subject. This paper therefore provides an intervention. It re-reads Rumi's *magnus opus*, the *Mathnawi*, which is seen as probably the best exemplification of the whole idea of Sufism in general and notions of death and dying in Sufi thought and practice in particular. In doing this rereading however, this paper situates Rumi's thought within the general Sufi intellectual tradition in which notion of death and dying find patronage. It is my argument that whatever might be the identifiable strength in Rumi's approach to the subject; such is a product of an antecedent which must be explored for this analysis to be valid.

This paper explores the idea of death and annihilation in Rumi's thought more closely as probably the best exemplification of such trends in Sufi thought. It argues that annihilation as expressed through death in the *Mathnawi* can help one emerge stronger and be better equipped in one's determination to arrive at a higher spiritual state. It brings to the fore many noteworthy views of Rūmī on the idea of annihilation based on the concept of dying in the *Mathnawi* through the explication of selected couplets and lines. It is also important to state here that Ṣūfīs' understanding and thoughts on this idea are deeply steeped in the Qur'ān which has further led them to develop the doctrines of spiritual stations and stages that culminate in Death.

Death and Annihilation in Pre-Rumi Thought

The idea of dying in Sūfī ideology is synonymous with the concept of annihilation (*fanā*). *Fanā'* in Arabic is derived from the verb *faniya* which means annihilation or passing away. It is an extinction of individual consciousness, recedence of the ego and obliteration of the self. According to Imam Qushayri, annihilation refers to that station of the mystic in which "the glory of reality overwhelms to such an extent that he observes neither in itself, nor in its effects, nor in the form of its traces and tracks, anything other than reality, is described as one who has achieved annihilation (*fanā'*), in respect of things created" (Hamiduddin, 1963: p. 332). Qushayri explains further that:

> So far as his evil actions and conditions are concerned, *fanā'* of the mortal self means he is getting rid of all traces of these as completely as possible; while in respect of his own self and other persons and things, *fanā'* means just the loss by him of his consciousness of his own self and that of other persons and things as the frame of reference for his actions.....for when he said to have achieved *fanā'* with regard to his self and other persons and things, it is still recognized that his self exists and other persons and things too; only he has lost consciousness of his self, on the one hand, and of the other persons and things on the other.

Al-Kalabadhi expounds further on Qushayri's position on the notion of passing-away and persistence, when he says:

> Passing-away is a state in which all passions pass away [we find it quite interesting that in English language a tongue in cheek manner of describing someone that has just died is to say "he or she passed away"], so that the mystic experiences no feelings towards anything whatsoever, and loses all sense of discrimination: he has passed away from all things, and is wholly absorbed with that through which he has passed away (Arberry, p. 120).

It is clear from this statement that the idea of dying to the Sūfīs is not a physical death, but yet it is something that one has to experience.What makes it even more interesting is the fact that this kind of dying leads to something noble. This can be seen in the station that subsequently follows that of passing away, which is that of persistence (*Baqā*). Kalabadhi describes "the state of persistence" thus: "Persistence, which follows passing-away, means that the mystic passes away from what belongs to himself, and persists through what is God's" (Arberry, 1977: p. 120).

In furthering his explanation on this persistence, he calls it the passing away of the self because the Sūfī "does what he does not to derive personal advantage or to ward off from himself any harm, but simply without any intention by his act either to derive advantage or to ward off harm" (Arberry, 1977: p. 121).

Kalabadhi also mentions other examples of passing away and persistence. The "passing away from the very consciousness of disaccord (with God), and from all motions deliberately aimed at disaccord, and in persisting consciously in accord (with God), deliberately and actually aiming at this in all motions." And, "a passing-away from respecting what is other than God, and persistence in respecting God" (Arberry, 1977: p. 121).

Also, Kalabadhi points out that some Sūfīs regard this state of passing away and persistence as a single state which also involves concentration and separation, absence and presence, intoxication and sobriety, all of which he discusses in the book (Arberry, 1977: pp. 125-126). Many Sūfī scholars who have discussed the idea of death according to the way of the Sūfīs often speak of annihilation and persistence. *Fanā'* is taken to mean "passing away", or annihilation, and "*Baqā*" is defined as "persistence".

Al-Junayd, another early Sūfī scholar and mystic, also supports the idea that the goal of the mystical journey is the passing away or annihilation of the self, but he also added that the survival or subsistence, in God (*baqā*) is of great importance. Al-Junayd and his supporters discussed both annihilation and subsistence as complimentary and antithetical to one another (Knysh, 2000: p. 309); this is why they easily relate these terms to other pairs of the "dialectic of the mystical vision of God and world" (Knysh, 2000: p. 309), such as intoxication (*sukr*) and sobriety (*saḥw*), unity (*jam'*) and separation (*tafriqa*), negation (*nafy*) and affirmation (*ithbāt*), amongst others. It can be said that the treatment of the issues of annihilation and subsistence by al-Junayd were the result of the ecstatic

utterances of Abu Yazid al-Bīsṭāmī and al-Ḥallāj, both of whom emphasized the importance of annihilation rather than subsistence.

After al-Junayd, later Sūfī scholars, such as Farid al-Dīn Muhammad ʿAṭṭār, have attempted to show that the identification of the human self with God is but a transient state that can be suppressed by a more noble experience that involves the vision of God and the world as well (Knysh, 2000: p. 309). Farid al-Dīn Muhammad ʿAṭṭār's (1976: p. 2017) works in particular have dealt with a number of Sūfī topics and motifs such as "the underlying unity of all being, the knowledge of one's self as the key to vital mysteries of God and of the universe" (Knysh, 2000: p. 309). Some of his works where these thoughts are prominent are *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds), *Ilāhī-nāma* (The Book of God) and *Muṣībatnāma* (The Book of the Mystical Goal).

Rumi's *Mathnawī* and His Engagement with Death and Annihilation

The *Mathnawī* was written in verse. One of the first insights into the idea of death and annihilation of the body are evident in the following lines:

> The spiritual way ruins the body and after having ruined it, restores it to prosperity: Ruined the house for the sake of the golden treasure, and with the same treasure builds it better (than before); Cut off the water and cleansed the river-bed, then caused drinking water to flow in the river-bed; Cleft the skin and drew out the iron point (of the arrow or spear)- then fresh skin grew over it (the wound); Razed the fortress and took it from the infidel, then reared thereon a hundred towers and ramparts (p. 29).

The idea of ruining the body in order to gain a higher spiritual state which can only be bestowed by the Beloved (God) is the main point behind the above quotation, but beyond that we also see the point that death is life-giving and resuscitating. It is life-giving because after the body has been ruined you gain a treasure that lasts forever. The attainment of the 'spiritual sense' demands sacrifice, just like destroying a house to gain access to a treasure hidden beneath it, or cutting off a water source in order to cleanse the river-bed, or clefting the skin to remove the arrow that pierced it. The images that Rūmī brings to mind in order to explain his point is the genius of Rūmī. Elsewhere, Rūmī describes the person who has "ruined the body" as "the shadow of God" who is "dead to this world and living through God" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 38).

The idea of the body being seen as a house is also mentioned by Rūmī in his *Mathnawī*. It emphasizes the fact that it (the body) should not just be seen as a house but as a house that needs to be ruined in order to uncover the treasure. He urges that we should, "take a pick-axe and smite upon the house without any care" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1203). This is because the 'house' is a barrier to the treasure that we seek, just like, a single grain becoming an obstacle to a hundred corn stacks (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1203). He further urges that this grain that is becoming a big hindrance should be cast into the fire or destroyed,

so that the individual can "adopt the (only) profession that is worthy of a man" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1203). According to Nicholson, what Rūmī means by the word 'profession' was the "practice of the faith as taught by the prophets and saints" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1203).

Rūmī also compares the body to a carcass, when he says "when the Spirit displays its beauty without this carcass, I cannot express the loveliness of that union" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1341). He goes further to describe the loveliness of such a display as radiance of the Moon without the clouds or a kitchen full of honey and sugar of which world monarchs are like platters (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1341). This is to show that even monarchs who are proud and do not invite ordinary people to join them at their dining tables will readily submit to the person who has gone beyond 'body' or detached himself from the body.

It is important to mention here that the use of things from daily life has no boundary in Rumi's poetry. Rūmī does not hesitate to talk of kitchen and stable, onions and garlic, urine and a donkey's back-side. This is because he was able to perceive a symbolic aspect in every noticeable thing, and also because he knows that the lofty and the transcendent need their contraries in order to appear all (Schimmel, 1993). Furthermore, Rūmī speaks the language of the masses, and quite a number of his nominal terminologies can be said to have been derived from everyday discourse. Therefore, there is no need for any special educational or intellectual training to appreciate his message (Bürgel, 1994).

Rūmī further emphasised the idea of detaching ourselves from the pleasures of the body. He says: "do not make your home in (other) men's land..." (p. 342). The body does not belong to the individual sooner or later it will be left here on earth, of what benefit will it be if one assert oneself to it more than necessary. That is why the issue of a stranger is raised. Who is the stranger? Rūmī informed us that it is the "earthen body" which brings along with itself all sorrows:

> So long as you are giving your body greasy (rich) and sweet (food), you will not see fatness in your (spiritual) essence. If the body be set in the midst of musk, (yet) on the day of death its stench will become manifest. Do not put musk on your body, rub it on your heart. What is musk? The Holy Name of the Glorious (God). The hypocrite puts musk on his body and puts his spirit at the bottom of ash-pit. On his tongue the Name of God, and in his soul stenches (arising) from his infidel thought (pp. 265-269).

Here, Rūmī makes an explicit comparison of the body to the earth, due to its (the body) ephemeral nature. It is this nature of the body that should not allow us to focus on it alone but we should give more consideration to our spiritual essence and "rub musk on it". Since musk is used to enhance the beauty and attraction of a particular thing, what is needed to be beautified and enhanced is our spiritual being rather than our bodily being. How should we rub musk to the spiritual being? Rūmī informed us it is by dedication, devotion and mentioning the holy name of the Glorious God. If we can do this we will

have been delivered from the "idol within" (p. 350), for our "currish (fleshly) soul" is the enemy of our spirit since the creation of human (p. 358).

In likening the body to earth, Rūmī develops a beautiful image when he says, "If thou art a man, dig earth, like a well-digger, from this earthen body, that thou mayst reach some water" (p. 1478). He further says that "...keep scraping away the earth of the (bodily) well little by little" (p. 2046). The body needs to be scratched repeatedly so it can be cleansed from all scum, and by scum we mean all sensual and material affections. It clears the body of all obscurity and rubbish and leaves in it a praiseworthy character.

Rūmī further observes that a sensual man who is in the habit of pampering his body may at times suspect someone else of hatred and enmity towards him, where, in fact, the real foe and envious one is that body of his. That is to say that the first and one of the most dangerous enemies of a human being is the body (p. 2046). Rūmī emphasizes that: "That mother of bad character, whose wickedness is in every quarter, is your fleshly soul. Come, kill it, for on account of that vile (creature) you are every moment assailing one who is venerable" (p. 380).

This is a clear statement of the need to kill the body in order to save oneself from the trouble that emanates thereof, such as the persistent striving that occurs between one and one's fellow human and between one and one's God. If one takes Rūmī's advice he will have freed himself from making unnecessary excuses and will be free from his enemies or become 'enemy-less'. Rūmī also went a bit further to describe what he meant by the word enemy. He states that an enemy "is one who attempts (another's) life" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 381), but "he that is himself destroying his own life is not an enemy (to others)". Then he went on to give the similitude of abat: "is not an enemy to the sun: it is an enemy to itself in the veil (of its own blindness). The glow of the sun kills it; how should the sun ever suffer annoyance from it?" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 381).

Detachment from the Body

Even though Rūmī views plotting, imagination, cunning or contriving in a bad light, when it comes to detaching oneself from the body, contriving is alright. Rūmī states, "contrive that you may become the meanest slave (of God): if you enter into (the state of) meanness (self-abasement), you will become lordly' (p. 1349). What is understood from Rūmī's urgings and promptings about the body is that we should be a devoted slave of God who is willing to give himself to the bounteous and munificent God (p. 1350).

In addressing the issue of the detachment from the body, a call was madeto the 'devotee of the heart' to scorn the world and the 'devotee of the body' to not eat sugar but taste poison. Rūmī believes that one should punish rather than pamper the body, since the body is fuel for Hell what is the point of placing emphasis upon it. If the body is weakened, Rūmī explained, "It produce[s] a (new) growth of fuel" (p. 1400). Therefore, we are urged to go ahead and destroy it.

Rūmī also narrated the story of a slave who wrote to the king complaining about the reduction of his allowance. He notes that "The body is (like) a letter: look into it (and see) whether it is worthy of the king; then take it (to Him)" (p. 1125). However, he cautions that "...do not think it is easy to open the letter which is the body; otherwise everyone would plainly see the secret of the heart" (p. 1567). Rūmī in comparing the body to a letter explains to us that to open the body and see the heart clearly, is not like opening a letter and reading its contents. Opening the body is not the job of children but rather it is the job of men, as Rūmī informs us (p. 1126).

Death of the Body

In another verse in his *Mathnawī,* Rūmī mentions that the death of the body is something welcomed by the adepts of the mystery. This is because they know the value and mysteries contained in it. In order to deepen our understanding, he gave an illustration of how the amount of damage that a scissors can make on pure gold has no effect on the purity of the gold; so also, the effect of "death" on the body has no negative effects on the Spiritual adepts (p. 1135). In some places, the body is likened to the carnal soul and an enemy that should not be given candy so it does not become like Pharaoh, "blind and blind-hearted: complaisant to your enemy and treating the guiltless with ignominy" (p. 1154). This is why Dabashi observes that Rūmī appears to have generated and sustained three logically connected normative ideas, directly related to the problems of theodicy: there are inner realities, or numina, that differ from their outer appearance, or phenomena; the reason one is blind to the inner realities of things is that mortal beings are prey to their own carnal souls, which are the origins of evil; and it is only by a final annihilation of this carnal soul or self, and a total resurrection in the divinely bestowed spirit, which is the origin of good, that salvation in this and the other world is attainable (Dabashi, 1994: pp. 120-121).

The message of Rūmī is to get rid of the body to attain a higher level of life in felicity. Rūmī told the story of a child thrown into fire by a tyrant Jewish King who wanted to convert people to idol worship by force. The child began to speak whilst in the fire, urging the mother as well as others to join in the banquet. This is a banquet because it appears to the child as what can be likened to a King spreading a festal table within the fire. The child called on those who truly believe, to come in and taste the sweetness of their faith. The child wanted the people to fill up the fire just like moths dancing around light, due to what Rūmī calls, "fortune which hath a hundred springtimes" (p. 67). The people later yield to the call of the child, as they were all witnesses to the miracle in front of them. They decided to cast themselves, both male and female, unwittingly into the fire without being forced, for love of the benefit they were about to rip. Since God is the one who puts sweetness to everything we humans might consider bitter (pp. 800-805).

The moral of this story seems to be that not all deaths should be seen in a bad light especially when the death is for a noble purpose; if the death is for the right cause people

should be willing to throw themselves into the fire. In the end, the king's guards began holding the people back from the fire, saying, "Do not enter the fire!" In describing these people who threw themselves into the fire and their states, Rūmī says, "the people grew more loving (ardent) in their faith and more firm in mortification (*fanā'*) of the body" and He who was busy rending the garment (honour and integrity) of the people-his own (garment) was rent, (while) they were unhurt" (p. 68).

This is to show clearly that there is an immense gain to be acquired by willingly giving up the body in order to attain a higher life; this is the reasoning for, "one must be dead in the presence of the decree of God, so that no blow may come from *the lord of the daybreak*" - The words in italics refer to *Surah Al-Falaq* (Chapter of Daybreak), chapter 113 of the Qur'ān (76). Since in our eyesight (foresight) there is much defect, there is need to let our sight pass away (*fanā'*) in the sight of the Friend (God). Using His sight for ours – will be a goodly recompense. This is because in His sight one will find the whole object of one's desire. Rumi explains this by giving the example of a child and his father. So long as the child could neither grasp (exert strength) nor run, he had nothing to ride on but his father's neck; but when he becomes somebody who can exert himself, the child will begin to fall into trouble and wretchedness (p. 77).

Useless Body

In another accusation levelled against the body in the *Mathnawī*, Rūmī calls the body 'wrong-thinking perversely-acting', and enjoined it (the body) to "abandon this guileful plotting for a time: live free a few moments ere thou die" (pp. 2010-2011). The deep spirituality couched in Rūmī's thoughts on death of the body or dying to self in *Mathnawī* is further illustrated in the following line: "Life depends on dying (to self) and on suffering tribulation: the Water of Life is in the (Land of) Darkness" (pp. 2002- 2039).

In furtherance to his discussion on the body, the body is addressed by Rūmī as 'O nut-like body'- this simile was used to show that the body is like the kernel and shell of a nut. The kernel and shell are at the end of the day useless. Rūmī also adds that the 'skin' of this 'nut' is nothing but fuel for the fire that is why Allah talks about *badalnākhūludan* (We will give them [other] skins in exchange) (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1469). Therefore, Rūmī advised, "Do not, then, increase (pamper) thy body; increase (cherish and cultivate) thy spiritual principle, in order that thou mayst be the fire's sovereign, like Malik" (p. 1937).

Abandoning Sensuality through the Body

This led us to the point that the idea of experiencing what Rūmī is saying is also important. The concept of getting rid of the body cannot be understood by words alone, "If your knowledge of fire has been turned to certainty by words (alone), seek to be cooked (by the fire itself), and do not abide in the certainty (of knowledge derived from others)" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 386). Rūmī asks us to burn; if we desire certainty, we need to be really burned and gain deliverance from this early body. In talking about the body he bade us to listen to his admonition: "...the body is a strong bond: put off the old, if you

have desire for newness. Shut the lips and open the palm filled with gold: leave off being a miser with the body, exhibit munificence" (p. 416).

Here, Rūmī links the body to sensuality, and the abandoning of sensuality is synonymous to abandoning the body; this Rūmī calls the *'uruwatulwuthqa*, the firmest handle that can liberate us just like Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) was freed by the rope that was thrown into the well by his brothers. For, according to him, a sincere worshipper (*mukhliṣ*) is in danger of the snare until he is completely purged of the self (p. 419). Further explanation was given on who a *mukhlis* is and his status. It was said, "if he has not become (selfless, like) a pure mirror, he is (no more than) mukhliṣ; (if) he has not caught the bird, he is (still) hunting" (p. 1310). The *mukhlis* become a *mukhlaṣ* when "he is delivered: he has reached the place of safety and has won the victory" (p. 419). When this *mukhlis* becomes a *mukhlas,* then he is a king because the slavery in him has been naughted through his escape from self (p. 1315). In addition, the *mukhliṣ* is said to be the person who worships devotedly, but regards his devotion as his own, while the *mukhlaṣ* is someone, whom God has purged of self and attributes all his actions to God.

In order to be straight and righteous like the *mukhlas*, Rumī informs us that sacrifice is the only way. He calls it creeping forward to the Presence of Him because "in the presence of Kings there can be danger to life, yet they that aspire cannot refrain from (presence with) Him" (p. 1365). This experience according to Rūmī is sweeter than sugar. Therefore, it is better that life should be sacrificed in order to taste this sweetness. One has gained a provision that gives everlasting life and bids death goodbye. Once the "gross body is killed, the essence that knows (spiritual) secrets is brought to life" (p. 428); because the bodily world is deceptive, there is the need to throw dust on the "sense-perceiving eye" or the "sensuous eye", for it is a clear enemy of intellect and religion. Rūmī declares that God Himself: "...has called the sensuous eye blind; He has said that it is an idolater and our foe, because it sees the foam and not the sea, because it sees the present and not to-morrow. The master of to-morrow and of the present (is) before it; (yet) of a (whole) treasure it sees not (even) a groat" (p. 440).

From this we can deduce that the sensuous eye is something we need to do away with in order to attain Reality. It is one of the ways of redeeming ourselves from the "filthy self" whose effect has reached our bone. Rūmī calls us to use a knife in beheading the fleshy soul in the holy (spiritual) war because it is always calling to earn that which "passeth away" and vile (p. 514). It is only those who have gotten rid of vain desires whose spiritual eye will be familiar with the secret. Furthermore, "fleshy soul" used above can be understood as a reference to the body as an expression of the soul. It can also be explained as something despicable, of the flesh rather than the spirit, or something lowly or not so noble.

The idea of shutting the 'sensual eye' is not uncommon in the *Mathnawī*. The 'sensual eye' is the eye of the body; in other words, the eye of the physical sense. This 'eye'

according to Rūmī cannot perceive reality, meaning, the way things truly are. In another verse, death of the body is seen as a way of attaining to reality: "that which has reality is made manifest (after death), and that which is rotten is put to shame. Go; strive after reality, O worshipper of form, in as much as reality is the wing on form's body" (pp. 709-710). By dying, we see everything in its true form and we see the uselessness of the body. The aim of man should be to experience the reality. Why should he waste his time with what will become rotten and then end up in disgrace. Rūmī asserts: "Consort with the followers of reality, that you may both win the gift and be generous (in giving yourself up to God). Beyond dispute, in this body the spirit devoid of reality is even as a wooden sword in the sheath: Whilst it remains in the sheath, it is (apparently) valuable, (but) when it came forth it is an implement (only fit) for burning" (pp. 60-61).

In the above quotation, Rūmī shows the numerous advantages of being in pursuit of reality. He gives the similitude of a body devoid of reality as a wooden sword which is useless during 'real battles'; he notes that such a body or wood is only fit for burning (again bringing up the idea of dying), in order to make it beneficial. He goes further by giving the example of a pomegranate - you know the good from the bad after it has been split open, which he referred to as 'laughing', to show the joy derived in splitting open or in the manner one opens his or her mouth when laughing. Rūmī is saying that even the pomegranate knows the advantage in the clefting of its body, or making sacrifices in order to show its pearl-like heart whose root is from the treasury of the spirit.

This was why Rūmī narrates the story of the Shaykh who excused himself for not weeping on the death of his sons. He (the shaykh) told his wife: "In as much as I see them distinct before me, for what reason should I rend my face as thou doest? Although they are outside of Time's revolution, they are with me and playing around me. Weeping is caused by severance or by parting; I am united with my dear ones and embracing them" (p. 758). This further shows the high status achieved by the Shaykh who has escaped from self. He becomes more heavenly and less earthly. He is able to shake off the attributes of sense-perception and physical perception. The Shaykhs can achieve this because their faith is held for the sake of doing God's will and not because they want Paradise and its fruits and streams. They also abandon all forbidden things not out of fear of Fire, but for God's sake only. Rūmī further clarifies that the death of the Shaykh and the death of his children is to the Shaykh like "sweet meat in the gullet" or like "honey-cakes to a destitute old man" (p. 766). Such a Shaykh has been able to painstakingly overcome the attributes that can bring him to the lowest of the low.

The Slaughter

Rūmī also comments on the four birds that Prophet Ibrahim was asked to kill in the Qur'ān, *khuz 'arba'atan mina l-ṭayrfaṣuruna 'ilayka* (Take four birds and turn them towards thee). Rūmī explains that this is because the four bodily qualities resemble the birds of Khalil (Prophet Ibrāhīm), by killing [actually the word is slaughter – saying

bismillah] the four bodily qualities, the soul makes ascension towards the heavens. This is a reference to the Prophet Ibrahim story in the Qur'an (*Al Baqarah* 2: 260).

The body is seen as the abode or nest of these four lowly dispositions, or better still, four mischief-seeking birds. It must be slaughtered to have an ever-lasting life. The four birds according to Rūmī are the duck, the peacock, the crow and the cock and each is used as a parable for the human soul. The duck represents greediness, the cock represents lust, the peacock represents eminence, and the crow represents worldly desire. Since these four qualities affect the body and makes it an impediment for the soul to rise towards heaven, Rūmī says that "the leafage (flourishing state) of the body is the leaflessness (unprovidedness) of the soul. Be quick! You must let this (body) dwindle and that (soul) increase". Therefore, Rūmī urges: "Lend unto God, give a loan of this leafage of the body, that in exchange a garden may grow in your heart" (pp. 145-146).

These four lowly qualities are like the dung of the body, when the body empties itself of dung, He (God) fills it with musk and glorious pearls (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1322). Such a person is giving of filth and gets purity in return. This is why Rūmī could talk of a mystic who was granted an inner light as a result of going beyond the paleness of the body and as such was filled with a radiance that is enough to illuminate the deserts and plains (p. 352).

To stay on the subject of birds, Rūmī observes that mystics are "neither birds of the air nor domestic (fowls)" because their "grain is the grain of grainlessness" (Rūmī, 2002: p. 1339), their substance is so ample because our stitching the coat (of bodily existence) has become the tearing (of it to pieces) (p. 353). Rūmī goes further by noting that death is a source of Life: "Ease is accompanied by difficulty: come, do not despair: through this death thou hast the way into Life. (If) thou desirest (spiritual) peace, rend thy jubba, O son, that immediately thou mayst emerge pure" (p. 1340).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the concept of annihilation through the idea of dying in the *Mathnawi* of Jalal ad-Din Rumi. The work focused on the insightful ways in which Rūmī expresses annihilation through death. It can be deduced that dying (physical, metaphorical or both) can be seen in a positive way. In addition, dying that leads to a higher or a more lofty state is desirable. Thus, the idea of death in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* can help with more depth and appreciative understanding of annihilation through dying. Rumi in his *Mathnawī* highlights the concept of annihilation through death when he charges us to "ruin the body", detach ourselves from the body, in "death of the body", in uselessness of the body, in "abandoning sensuality through the body", in "inconsequentiality of the bodily form", and finally to be "the slaughter". Therefore, it can be stated that by understanding Rūmī's approach to death, one can emerge stronger and be better equipped in one determination to arrive at a higher spiritual state. The idea of dying presents an

interesting way of living Life. It is our hope that this effort, which seeks to highlight Mawlanā Rūmī's teachings on the concept of death and annihilation, and the importance of this idea to spiritual development and self-purification, will enrich the existing materials on this great mystic as well as motivate people to increase their own spiritual awareness.

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