

Professor Gholamreza Aavani

The Theo-Poetics of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) in the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī

In this lecture, I examine the teachings of the renowned Sufi thinker Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) and argue that Rumi presents a view of *tawḥīd* in which one truly knows the meaning of Divine Unity only after undergoing spiritual training and self-cultivation which culminates in the state of the annihilation of the carnal ego in God (*fanāʾ*). Rūmī refers to a verse in the Qurʾān according to which most of believers do not believe in God but they associate other gods with Him (Q12:106). This means that there are two kinds of idolatry, hidden and manifest. I then demonstrate how through stories and parables Rūmī's shows us all the varieties of hidden idolatry in the soul and how it should be cured.

According to Rūmī, one becomes a sculptor of idols when one is intoxicated with the phenomenal forms, and he describes this point by comparing to the case of the individual who sees the foam (phenomenal existence) and not the sea or of one who beholds the waves but is not aware that they are outward manifestations and determinations of the ocean of being. In another allegory Mawlānā, taking the sunlight as the symbol of the immutable Divine Light, emphasizes the fact that the sunlight in itself is colourless and without hue but when it is reflected it takes the colour of different glasses. A viewer of the different glasses thinks that light in itself has different colours and he will be lost because from the glasses arise dualism and plurality. But one can be delivered from perplexity only if he has his gaze fixed on the Ever-resplendent Source of light. God has given all human beings two eyes to see things. The two eyes when synchronized see each object as one. A squint-eyed on the other hand sees everything as double.

Rūmī then turns to the realization of *tawḥīd*. The Islamic formula of *tawḥīd* (*lā ilāha illa llāh*) is comprised of two parts: one part beginning with *lā* (not=negation) and the other with *illa* (except=affirmation). This signifies that one should start with negating the reality of everything other than God and then affirm His Absolute Reality. The formula of *tawḥīd* has other versions: "there is no divinity but I" which implicitly means that there cannot be two real "I"s in existence and one should totally surrender one's "I" to its origin through the act of annihilation. Man is made in the image of God which means that he is a theophany of Divine Names and Attributes. Through undergoing the two stations of *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence) according to the sacred tradition (*ḥadīth qudsī*), God becomes one's hearing, seeing and other perfect attributes. This according to Mawlānā is the true meaning of *tawḥīd*.



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