

Who is the Lover and who is the Beloved?



The Sufi path is a constant revelation of the inexhaustible mysteries of the relationship between the soul and her creator, and the creator and his soul. In Sufi understanding, the soul is not a mere devotee of god; she is his friend and he is her companion. They walk together on the path of life as lovers. The soul is seeking the divine and the divine is seeking the soul; neither of them is higher or lower in the hierarchy of existence. The soul is indeed the child of god, but she is also god incarnated. They are two different aspects of totality, different ways of looking at the wonder of creation. Creation is a never-ending dance between individuality and universality, totality and the one who is in a relationship of love and intelligence with that totality – the soul.

The goal of the Sufi path is not to disappear in the divine, for this would be end of that ultimate love affair, the death of love. The goal is rather to keep disappearing and yet not allow this disappearance ever to end; our dissolution in god is never meant to be consummated. As long as there is life, there is both the lover and the beloved. Sufi enlightenment honors duality as the very prerequisite for reaching unity with the divine. It is a very fine path, razor-edged, between the extremes of separation from and dissolution into the divine. Sufism is the path of the soul.

No one has expressed the mystery of the soul better than Rumi, a 13th Century poet and Sufi master:

A lover asked his beloved,

"Do you love yourself more than you love me?"



Beloved replied, "I have died to myself and I live for you.

I've disappeared from myself and my attributes,

I am present only for you.

I've forgotten all my learnings,

but from knowing you I've become a scholar.

I've lost all my strength, but from your power I am able.

I love myself...I love you.

I love you...I love myself."

When we first read this poem, we are not really sure whether Rumi refers to himself as the lover or as the beloved; the distinction seems to disappear. Only after a more careful reading can we infer that it is god who is the lover in this poem. God is asking a question, which is almost like a Sufi koan, "Do you love yourself more than you love me?" Rumi cannot reply, "I love you more than myself," because that would be to fail the test behind the question. It would show that he still sees god as outside of his own existence, and furthermore that he does not love himself enough as god's creation, as the one who is made from the creator's very light. Rumi replies that he has died to himself in order to live for god, meaning he has died to his false self, to that self which experiences its existence as separate from the creator. He has given up everything that he was, all that he possessed internally, to become a new being who lives only through the divine. God's question cannot be directly answered because it lies outside the realm of loving more or loving less.

At the end of the poem he says, "I love myself...I love you. I love you...I love myself." What does this mean? Does it mean that only god is, and that this is true love? No. What it truly means is that while to reach freedom from our false self we must merge with the divine, in that merging we finally embody the light of our individual existence. Therefore, through loving god we realize true self-love, and through true self-love we can finally experience real love for the divine. We cannot separate our true being from constant surrender to our universal self, and we cannot know that universal self without embodying our own divinity. At the culmination of one's journey, there is no difference between loving oneself and loving god – and yet they are not the same. This is the true samadhi of the soul in existence – the extraordinary unity at the heart of the paradoxical duality of knowing oneself and knowing the divine as love.

In this poem, it is the soul who speaks as the lover:



In love...nothing is eternal, but drinking your wine.

There is no reason for bringing my life to you,

other than losing it. I said, I just want to know you,

and then disappear. She said, knowing me does not mean dying.

The Sufi path is a path of total surrender; there is no compromise with god. One is not looking for liberation, or redemption, or freedom from incarnations, or the bliss of heaven. In the path of the heart, one only has one wish, which is to disappear in the divine, losing one's own life in him. And yet god says, "Knowing me does not mean dying." The lover lives to know the beloved, and through the power of this knowing, he does not die.

Here the beloved speaks again:

I am your lover, come to my side, I will open the gate to your love.

Come settle with me, let us be neighbors to the stars.

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.

It is interesting how the words "concealed, revealed, in the unknown, in the un-manifest" are being used here. These words are usually used to describe the true nature of reality, but here they are expressing how the creator himself perceives our soul. For him, the soul is un-manifest and concealed before she is self-realized. However, while concealed, she has always been connected to him, even in ignorance. Most devotional poems express how we relate to the divine, but the beauty of this poem is that it shows how god relates to us, how he sees our soul through his own eyes. He is conscious of our existence even if we have so far failed to actualize our true self. He knows us before we know ourselves, and is speaking to our soul before she has even become conscious of her own existence. He is patient and impatient, compassionate and demanding, indulging and admonishing. He is "the turbulent flood," the ocean of life itself, and he waits



unwearyingly for us to come to him. He waits for us to choose, from our own free will, to leave the world of ignorance at last. By being with him, he will open the gate of our love, because we can love neither god nor our own self when we live in separation from him.

Hundreds have looked for you, and died searching in this garden,

where you hide behind the scenes.

But this pain is not for those who come as lovers.

You are easy to find here.

You are in the breeze and in this river of wine.

How many souls have failed on the path? How many became lost in the wilderness of the spiritual dimension? They sought true life, but they withered away instead, and the pain of the spiritual search was wasted. Rumi says, "This pain is not for those who come as lovers." Why? When we enter the path from the right place, from our heart and very beingness, honoring the true longing of the soul, how can we fail? All of existence will support our cause, because it is the cause of life itself. The beloved will only reveal himself to those who are his lovers. To be a true lover is to have the capacity for intimacy with the nature of reality, the heart of which is pure subjectivity. The light of I am and me, me and the light of I am – they are two and one, one and two, forever.

In the early morning hour,

just before dawn, lover and beloved wake

and take a drink of water.

She asks, "Do you love me or yourself more?"

Really, tell the absolute truth."

He says, "There is nothing left of me.

I'm like a ruby held up to the sunrise.

Is it still a stone, or a world



*made of redness? It has no resistance
to sunlight."*

*This is how Hallaj said, I am God,
and told the truth!*

*The ruby and the sunrise are one.
Be courageous and discipline yourself.*

*Completely become hearing and ear,
and wear this sun-ruby as an earring.*

*Work. Keep digging your well.
Don't think about getting off from work.
Water is there somewhere.*

*Submit to a daily practice.
Your loyalty to that
is a ring on the door.*

*Keep knocking, and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.*

Sufism was often frowned upon with suspicion by orthodox Islam, and some even considered it heresy. When the well-known Sufi saint Hallaj, exclaimed "I am God," he was beheaded for blasphemy. But what did he mean by it? Is it the same as the Advaitic proclamation "I am That?"



Not really. The Sufi view of unity with god can be understood only through having grasped the mystery of love and its inherent duality. "I am That" is more of a dry, non-dual elucidation, which is saying that 'atman' (the soul) and 'brahman' (universal existence) are identical. But Hallaj's "I am God" does not mean that "I" and "God" are the same. To interpret it in this way would actually go against the very spirit of the Sufi realization. To feel the true meaning behind Hallaj's words, one has to deeply contemplate god's 'koan', "Do you love me or yourself more?"

"Just before the dawn, lover and beloved wake..."

Before the dawn of creation, the original duality between I am and me is created. Without this duality, there would be no creation at all. When me at last becomes conscious of I am, not only god knows the soul, but also the soul begins to know god. Growing into this knowing becomes her very path into illumination and wholeness.

"Do you love me or yourself more?"

God asks this question again. And again, the answer is neither yes or no, for this would be to fall into a trap and fail god's test.

"There is nothing left of me. I am like a ruby held up to the sunrise...It has no resistance to sunlight."

There is no resistance in surrender, and one of the direct results of embodying our pure nature is reaching the condition of translucency. Translucency is not the same as emptiness or non-existence. It is still our existence, but in the absence of resistance to the light of creation, which can now freely pass through. This non-resistance reflects the culmination of the process of going beyond the separation between the individual and universal planes of our identity. Rumi says, "The ruby and the sunrise are one," but he also knows that they are not the same.

"Work. Keep digging your well. Don't think of getting off from work. Water is there somewhere."

The path into oneness of the lover and the beloved is not easy. At the end of the poem Rumi changes his tone, becoming less poetic and more practical. He knows that beauty can be deceiving, and even distract one from doing the hard work of digging a deep well into the source of reality.

So, who, then, is the lover and who is the beloved? Sufism has correctly intuited the co-existence of duality and unity in the relationship between the soul and the ultimate. However, it lacks the conceptual tools with which to grasp the subtle dimensions of this relationship. As it is a path of love, it tends to be overly poetic, which can open the well of emotions but simultaneously cloud the



mind. To quote *Tao Te Ching*, “True words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not true.” Here, Lao Tzu was not speaking against poeticism and beauty of expression per se; his own words were, after all, very artful and exquisite. He was just warning us not to confuse beauty with truth, because truth is beyond beauty. Even in Sufism itself, this is recognized. They say that beauty, and even love, are veils that conceal the beloved. Many people enjoy reading Rumi, enchanted by the beauty of his poetry, but afterwards nothing has really changed. They have not transformed. To really read Rumi, one has to look beyond the deceptive allure of his words and start the true spiritual work.

Even though there is an essential element of practice, meditation, and inner work in Sufism, it is still predominantly a path of grace. Practicing to fully open the heart to the creator allows one to become a vessel that can receive deliverance from the dimension of ignorance. However, grace is unpredictable, and unless we come very, very close to its source, it may never reach out to us.

In addition, overly relying on an external power prevents us from clearly identifying all the steps that we need to make on the inner journey. These steps are in essence a gradual movement through the stages of awakening and surrender. As we grow into awakening, we are growing into our own self, and in the process, we become ready to surrender and merge with the ultimate reality. Who we are is not so easy to grasp, not only because we are multidimensional, but also because we are in the process of becoming our new self, our future self. So from the standpoint of our initial, ordinary self, who we really are is very much unknown. As our spiritual potential unfolds and we metamorphose into our higher being, we must simultaneously evolve in our intelligence and inner sensitivity in order to truly understand the subtle nature of our ancient self.

While Sufism is primarily a path of surrender, it does not describe the process of reaching samadhi, meaning how samadhi is actually attained and the stages we pass through on the way. Moreover, its concept of surrender pertains only to the heart, and as such lacks the element of verticality. So Sufism is not a path of being, but it is not merely a path of the heart either, because it does include work with awareness. Perhaps for a Sufi dervish, the dimension of being is too dry or too impersonal (something that is true only on the surface), and certainly, those who are overly attached to the emotional intensity of devotion might resist letting go into being.

As such, the Sufi path shows us how a path of devotion can become a trap for the soul, blocking her final surrender to the source. Without awakening to the dimension of being and reaching unity with the unmanifested, one can never arrive at perfect samadhi in the heart either. That perfect



samadhi is an immaculate unity with both the being and heart of the beloved. The divine is indeed reached through the heart, but only fully when that heart is merged with the absolute. To realize the beloved, we have to merge with the heart, and then the heart itself has to merge with the void of the original isness, the primordial ground upon which the temple of the beloved stands.

Me is the lover and I am is the beloved. Me is the beloved and I am is the lover. Their intricate relationship of love, surrender, consciousness, and intelligence reflects the nature of the inner path of self-actualization. Hence, to really understand what the spiritual path is about, we must know completely, and without any doubt, who the lover is and who the beloved is.

So, who is the lover and who is the beloved?

Blessings,

Anadi

For a full glossary of terminology please visit our website www.anaditeaching.com/glossary