6
A Donkey's Tail with Angel's Wings

> Man's situation is like this: an angel's wing was brought and tied to a donkey's tail so that the donkey perchance might also become an angel, thanks to the radiance of the angel's company.
>
> (*Fīhi mā fīhi*, chap. 26)

THIS IS AN IMPRESSIVE IMAGE, for it portrays the human condition, the fact that the only creature with a certain amount of free will is situated between beast and angel, between the world of pure matter and that of pure spirit. If he follows his lower instincts, he will fall deeper than any animal, for the animals are constrained in their actions and have no choice. If, however, he purifies himself and develops his God-given spiritual qualities, he will reach a station higher than the angels, for angels, too, cannot act according to their own inclination; their role of constant worship and obedience is once and for all prescribed. Humans, however, have to wander along an extremely narrow path as they choose between good and evil, matter and spirit; they are, as Maulana says, like ducks, which belong to both water and earth; or else they are half honeybee, half snake, capable of producing both honey and venom. Did not the angels cry out in horror when the Lord told them at the beginning of time that He would place a vice-regent on earth,

whereupon they foresaw that the new creature would be "bloodshedding and ignorant" (Sura 2/31)? But God knew better what He was planning, and so the angels had to prostrate themselves before the newly created Adam, who thus became *masjūd al-malā'ika,* "the one before whom the angels fell down." He was singled out by the Divine Word in the Koran: *karamnā,* "We have honored the children of Adam" (Sura 17/70). Maulana reminds his listeners time and again of this Divine Word, and he sees the greatest danger to humanity in the risk of their forgetting the high position allotted to them by God. God "taught Adam the names" (Sura 2/32). Neither angel nor beast but only human beings are aware of the names of the created things, so that they can address them and rule over them (for to know someone's name means to have power over him). What is even more important—so the Sufis say—human beings were also taught the mystery of the Divine Names that they may call upon God, who can be approached through His ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names.

But alas, we all too easily forget the high rank to which we were assigned! Maulana exemplifies this with a story (M V 2547ff.) taken from the panegyrist Anwari and which he elaborates: A man was seen running fearfully through the streets; another asked him the reason for his strange behavior. "But," replied the first, "have you not heard that the king is hunting asses today?" "But you are no ass," said the neighbor. Whereupon the first man answered that one could never know—and perhaps the king would not know either! In reply, the neighbor reminded him that he was not a donkey but a Jesus, a fully spiritual being that has only its material body, the "husk," in common with an animal. The contrasting images *Jesus/donkey, spirit/matter*—favorites of Maulana's—are cleverly presented in this story. For Maulana never tires of repeating (especially in *Fīhi mā fīhi*) that the greatest danger and in a sense also the greatest sin for the human being lies in the tendency to neglect his spiritual part, to forget that he is "honored by God." Is he not like a stupid person who owns a beautiful,

gem-studded Indian sword or precious dagger, but rather than using it nobly as it was meant to be used, cuts rotten meat with it or hammers it into the wall like a nail to hang an old broken gourd on it? Or he resembles someone who uses a golden pot to boil turnips, when he could have bought hundreds of common pots for a tiny part of that gold. But alas, that is what most people do: they are so busy with their worldly occupations that they forget to cultivate their real self, that part that was given as a special gift from God, who "breathed into him from His own breath" (Sura 15/29), as the Koran states several times. It is the Divine *amāna,* the "entrusted good" that is the most important and at the same time the most endangered element in human beings, as Sura 33/72 says: "Verily We offered the *amāna* to mountains and heaven and earth and they did not accept it, but man accepted it, and verily he is ignorant, cruel." For man did not know what he was receiving, or how heavy the burden would be (and indeed, Muslim theologians and mystics have pondered through the ages what exactly this "entrusted good" might have been). For Rumi the *amāna* is the gift of responsibility, of free choice, of a human being's ability to recognize the spiritual aspects of his being and develop them. Those who forget or neglect the *amāna* are in a dangerous position; they may run about in hundreds of different pursuits, but so long as they do not care for the precious divine gift they carry within themselves, hidden like a golden goblet in a bag filled with straw, or a jewel in a dungheap—so long as they neglect it or are not even aware of it, nothing is of avail.

Maulana explains this in a story in *Fīhi mā fīhi*: A king had a somewhat imbecile son whom he entrusted to the masters of all crafts, including astrology and magic. After the son had completed his schooling, the king sent for him and, hiding a golden ring in his fist, asked, "What do I keep in my hand?" The boy answered correctly, "It is round, hollow, and yellow." "Bravo!" exclaimed the king. "Now that you know all the particulars, tell me what it

is!" And the prince answered, "It must be a millstone!" Most humans resemble this foolish prince, says Maulana. One knows all the external signs of things but is unaware of the essence of life: thinking of our particularities, we do not remember our immortal individual soul, the *khudī,* by which we would be able to go toward the Divine Presence.

Maulana, father of three sons and one daughter, liked to draw comparisons from the life of children, or rather from the very beginning of their life in the mother's womb. The sperm loses its individuality to grow into a much higher being, and the embryo—so he repeatedly states—is perfectly happy in its prison of blood. If someone were to tell it that a world of colors and scents, of wide gardens and vast meadows lay outside its dark, warm prison, it would disbelieve him. It is exactly the same with human beings: they are so bound to the world of colors and forms, to the "house of clay and water," that they cannot imagine another world beyond this one, a world of spiritual bliss, of subtlety and beauty beyond description, a world in which the present actions of humanity will become visible just as flowers and grass grow in spring once the winter of the material world has passed away.

When a child is born, his behavior at first is worse than that of an animal; he is unable even to keep clean—and yet God helps him to grow into a beautiful human being. The baby is swaddled and placed in the cradle—and anyone who has seen the narrow cradles in Konya, hanging from the ceiling, will agree with Maulana that only a very small child could feel at ease there (how would a grown person live bound and swaddled in such a small prison?). Thus the moment the spirit grows more mature, it will flee from the bondage of material forms. As for the cradle, it has to be moved gently, and Maulana sometimes sees his heart, longing for the Beloved, being constantly rocked to silence its longing. For in the beginning the baby knows only his mother's milk (just as the lover knows only his beloved's presence) and cries to be fed so that the milk begins to flow—just exactly as the grown lover of

God cries and pleads in the hope that the milk of Divine Kindness may flow from "teats of grace" (a favorite expression in the *Mathnawī*).

The infant can digest only milk; if one tried to feed him bread or meat, he would die. Thus the beginner on the mystical path, or the externalist, should be given very simple spiritual food, because the teaching of higher mysteries would be dangerous for him. Only when the "teeth of reason" have grown sufficiently strong can one offer him more substantial nourishment.

Now comes the time when the child has to enter school, and Maulana Rumi knows very well that children are never particularly fond of going to school. The *Mathnawī* contains a highly naturalistic scene in which a father and mother quarrel over sending their little boy to school. The mother wants the tender child to stay home for a while longer because she pities him, whereas the father insists that he begin his education. The mother symbolizes the *nafs,* the lower soul, the base human qualities that impel us to seek comfort and pleasure at the cost of our spiritual education. The father—in this as in all stories—represents the Intellect, that power which leads human beings toward the right path, instructing them in religious duties and obedience to the God-given law. But the father's order does not preclude the possibility that the child still refuses to go to school: much as Intellect may admonish him, school is not to his liking. Therefore one must cajole him with promises—"I'll buy you a birdie, I'll give you cookies or some pistachio nuts"—to persuade him to obey, just as Divine Wisdom holds the joys of Paradise out to human beings in order to lead them onto the right path. And Maulana does not hesitate to tell the lively story of some naughty boys who all morning long repeat to their teacher that he looks so miserable that he had better go to bed; finally the poor teacher believes it and the triumphant children have a day off—that happens when one imitates others without investigating the situation with one's own reasoning.

However, the school can also serve as a model of life: Maulana

knew that an educator has to be patient and slow, and must try to encourage the pupil. And although Maulana himself had been removed from the "normal" way of life and had experienced a rapture unknown to those around him, he was fully aware that normally spiritual education and guidance on the path toward Reality is a long and time-consuming process. In *Fīhi mā fīhi* he tells of a child learning to write; as he fills his slate with letters, one more shapeless than the next, the teacher points to the one letter that looks approximately correct, praises the child's skill, and encourages him by saying, "This was very good, and look, that one could be a bit better, and over here you just have to change a stroke," and so on. Thus in the course of time the child will learn how to write a decent, perhaps even flawless line. Such is the wisdom of the spiritual guide. The real school, however, the School of Love, is a school of fire in which the pupil is slowly "cooked" and matures. And if the parents first present a doll to their little girl and a wooden sword to their boy to teach them "by metaphors," the time will come when the children will be confronted with reality: the girl will become a mother, the boy a fighter. In the same way, the mysteries of Divine Love cannot be openly told to humankind; one needs symbols and metaphors, stories and "covers." Would a child understand how sweet the union of a loving couple is? No, one has to explain that "it is like sugar. . . ."

Maulana was a child of his time when he depicted women as somewhat deficient in intellect and indulged in a lengthy description in *Fīhi mā fīhi* of the difficulties of married life: marriage, he claims, serves man to learn patience with the absurdities of women and to put up with their nonsensical talk; by doing so he develops his own virtues, just as if one were rubbing off one's impurities on a towel. Marriage, he concludes, is something for the strong, and therefore Islam has no monkery: to flee from the realities of normal life, to avoid contact with the other sex seemed to him easier than the day-to-day struggle with one's wife. One can

interpret the very matter-of-fact description in *Fīhi mā fīhi* as a parable, for in traditional literature woman stands for the *nafs,* the principle of the lower soul, the base instincts, and the duty of the believer is to constantly battle against and educate his *nafs.* This constant battle is the "greater Holy War," as a *ḥadīth* claims. Although Islamic tradition never mentions Eve's share in Adam's fall—a scene that is unknown in the Koranic passage concerning the Fall—yet Maulana, like so many other ascetically minded writers and thinkers of every persuasion in the medieval world, still makes one of his heroes sigh: "First and last my fall was through woman" (M VI 2799).

Woman seems to draw him backward, but—as is implied by the remark about rubbing off one's impurities—such an experience has its advantages as well: in the *Mathnawī* one reads the story of Kharaqani, a famous Persian Sufi of the early eleventh century, whom a disciple once wanted to visit. The visitor encountered only the Sufi's wife at home, who told him in spiteful words what a good-for-nothing, lazy idiot her husband was (one is somewhat reminded of Socrates and his Xanthippe!). The disciple, deeply disappointed, and hurt in his feeling toward the master, proceeded to the forest to overcome his worries. There he saw Kharaqani mounted on a lion, on whose back he had also loaded kindling wood, while a snake served him as a whip. The disciple, greatly astounded, told the master what his wife had said, but the saint only smiled and consoled him: for all the patience he had shown toward his terrible wife, God had recompensed him with such grace that even lions and snakes now served him willingly.

The negative attitude toward women that can be seen in Maulana's work has its origin in the traditional ascetic beliefs prevalent not only in early Sufism but even more sharply in Christian and Buddhist monasticism: woman is the seducer, Satan's instrument. For the Muslims this view—which stands in stark contrast to the Prophet's own words and practice—was facilitated by the fact that the Arabic word *nafs,* which was usually under-

stood as the *nafs ammāra,* "the soul inciting to evil" (Sura 12/53), is grammatically feminine and thus could be associated with any number of images and metaphors. This negative attitude was strengthened by another grammatically feminine word, *dunyā,* "this world," "the world of matter" (as contrasted with *al-ākhira,* the "other world"). Representations of the material world as a dangerous woman occur in Islamic literature as they do in Christian texts as well as in Manichaean and gnostic writings. Thus, "Mistress World," the *Frau Welt* of German poets, appears in Maulana's work as well, and he describes this little old hag, who reeks like a little garlic, in a memorable diatribe (D 2776). In the *Mathnawī,* he goes even more into detail: the old strumpet World tries to entice young men, and to conceal her wrinkles and her hideous face tears apart the beautifully illuminated pages of a Koran and pastes them on her cheeks. The ghastly harlot must be assiduously avoided, for she devours her own children.

However, it would be surprising if Maulana had seen women only in a negative light. His marriages were happy, as far as we can see, and his second wife, Kira Khatun, was a remarkable woman, praised for her deep spirituality. Thus, toward the end of the above-mentioned chapter in *Fīhi mā fīhi* that deals with the challenges of married life, he acknowledges that there is no need to keep good women secluded, because they know what to do and how to behave, while a bad woman will always find a ruse to escape and misbehaves in proportion to the attempt to keep her secluded.

But even more: in the *Mathnawī* (M I 2433f.), in the midst of commenting upon the Prophet's word that "many a woman prevails over the intelligent," Maulana suddenly turns from the critical approach to a praise of woman:

> She is a ray of God, she is not that "sweetheart"—
> She is a creator, one would almost say: she is not created!

There is no doubt that men and women have to go the same way,

and that both must strive to fulfill the duties that the Koran prescribes for believers. For one important aspect of Maulana's teaching is human responsibility. It may be difficult to understand how he was able to combine this emphasis on human responsibility with his firm belief in God's all-embracing power and in God as the sole author of all acts: He creates without secondary causes, and "the whole Koran is the cutting off of secondary causes." However, as the Koran reminds us again and again that every act, nay every thought in this life will become visible in the other world at the Day of Resurrection, Maulana turns to this aspect of the Koranic teaching. Man, he feels, is a camel on which the packsaddle "free will" has been placed, and it is up to him to use this saddle correctly—that is, to load it with obedience and good works, not with the straw and rubbish of harmful and unnecessary actions. For the belief in absolute predestination means to ascribe the responsibility for one's own sins to God.

This point is made quite clear in a story that appears both in a late poem of the *Dīwān* and in *Fīhi mā fīhi*:

> A man entered an orchard, climbed a tree, and ate the fruits. When the gardener discovered him, he claimed to be eating God's fruits with God's permission. The gardener made him descend, called the servants, and gave him a sound thrashing "with the stick of God" until the man confessed that he had stolen the fruits by his own will, not following the Divine will. . . .

In this approach to the problem of free will and predestination, Maulana seems to follow his father's theological stance, but the danger of ascribing one's own sins to God by accepting absolute predestination was also known to other Muslim thinkers, in particular when they dealt with Satan's disobedience. However, Maulana has formulated the secret of free will and its application in a beautiful verse in the *Mathnawī*:

> Free will is the endeavor to thank God for His Beneficence.
>
> (M I 929)

But what about the formula *inshā Allāh,* "if God willeth," which is implicitly recommended in the Koran (Sura 68/18)? Does it not incite people to laziness and lack of enterprise? On the contrary, says Maulana, to say "So God willeth," *Deo volente,* does not mean to throw all responsibility upon God, but rather should instigate man to work harder in order to reach ever higher echelons on the spiritual path. One is responsible for one's actions, for as the Prophet says, "This world is the seedbed for the other world"—an adage repeated frequently by Maulana. It is clear for him: "When you plant colocynth, you cannot expect sugarcane!" And thus he admonishes his listeners:

> Eat the fruit that you yourself have planted,
> Dress in the garment that you yourself have spun!

Here is the ancient idea that actions and thoughts constitute, as it were, a garment for one's soul. In both the *Dīwān* and the *Mathnawī,* Maulana teaches his audience the importance of proper actions—sometimes in medical terminology:

> Look at the vial of the urine of actions! (D 1134)

for the physician can easily diagnose the soul's ailments from this "vial," and when "a worm has fallen into one's tooth," one ought to extract the tooth lest its poison permeate the whole body (M V 3181).

One might question Maulana's optimism concerning the "recompense" of one's actions: if the world is only "like the dream of a sleeper," as a tradition claims, how can one's acts bear fruit? But Maulana takes the related words of the Prophet, "People are asleep, and when they die they awaken," and tells his audience that in the morning light of Eternity one will see what one has done in one's dream state, and the dreams will be interpreted properly. Is not this life like winter, when the seed lies under the soil and snow but will bear fruit in the spring, when the sun of

eternity shines? Here again Maulana is in full harmony with the Koranic argumentation, for in the Koran resurrection was explained to the unbelieving Meccans through the image of the dead earth that sprouts plants and green shoots when the spring rains quicken it.

But—so predestinarians may object to Maulana's arguments—is not everything ordered and ordained from the beginning of time? Is not everything that will happen and should happen written on the *lauḥ maḥfūẓ,* the Well-Preserved Tablet? There is even a *ḥadīth* to this effect: *qad jaffa'l-qalam,* "The Pen has dried up," that is, what has been written on the Tablet of Destiny cannot be changed. For Maulana, however, this word assumes a different meaning: it means only that it is written that every good action will be recompensed and every evil act will be punished. This one basic truth is inscribed on the Tablet and can never be changed.

Still, Rumi is pragmatic enough to know that every creature can act only in the framework of his, her, or its abilities. Human beings differ like the letters between *A* and *Z,* and therefore their possibilities and capacities are different; hence they will be judged according to how they make use of their capacities.

> One beats the ox because he refuses to carry the yoke,
> One does not beat him because he does not sprout wings!
>
> (M V 3102)

Every human being, like every other creature, has his or her place in the great, wonderful world. Maulana describes the unity that underlies everything in a beautiful image: the world is like a tent, and all of us are needed to make this tent. Everyone's work is his or her praise of God: when the weaver who prepares the fabric does it well in the hope of serving the perfect completion of the tent, he praises God in his way; there is the ropemaker and there are those who fix the ropes, and all strive to perform their duties as well and as carefully as possible. Each one is (or, we may add, should be) happy and content, as all know that they are working

for the tent of the lovely King who one day will sit in the center, surrounded by those who serve Him in silence and in love. But this leads to another question: would it not be wonderful if everyone would concentrate exclusively upon his or her duties toward God? Is this not the true goal of Creation? No, says Maulana, and here again he follows his father's argumentation; for if everyone were occupied solely with adoration and worship, the world would not continue. But since God has created the world as a mirror for His beauty, He wants it to continue, and therefore He has blessed many people with negligence so that they are busy with their worldly occupations: they get married, have children, build houses, look after agriculture, or write books. All these things in one way or another also serve the glorification of God or the fulfillment of His will. Maulana makes this quite clear in his advice to the powerful minister Mu'inuddin Parwana, who complained that his constant political occupation and uninterrupted warfare did not allow him to devote himself to the study of God's word or the Prophet's traditions as much as he wished. Maulana replied:

> These works too are work done for God, since they are means to procure peace and security for the realm of the Muslims.

The political activities of the minister by which the Muslim community is protected are as important in God's plan as are devotions and study. Here Rumi seems to develop a working ethic that sounds quite modern and acceptable. He knows that those who are matured on the way to God, or on the path of Love, are like ripe wheat:

> The world is like amber [*kahrubā,* "straw robber"] and
> attracts the straw—
> When the wheat bears fruit, it does not bother about the
> amber [because it can no longer be attracted by it]
>
> (D *Tarji'band* NO. 25)

Maulana admonishes the reader to keep in mind an important saying: "The believer is the believer's mirror." One can see one's own faults better in others, and if one dislikes something in another person, one should first try to purify oneself of that very quality. Is it not so that we do not mind dipping our own hands in a soup pot even though there may be scars or wounds on them, while we shudder when we see others do the same? The constant observation of others in order to learn how to behave is highly important, and the rules of *ṣuḥbat,* "company," have always played a central role in Sufism. Only by using every chance to learn from one's neighbors what may and may not be acceptable can one proceed on the spiritual path.

The goal of the human being in this world is to become a true man, *mard.* The word *man* here stands in contrast to those who are described in the Koran as being "like animals, nay, even more erring" (Sura 7/179). To be sure, "not everyone who has a human face is a human being," as Maulana learned from Sana'i, but he, like all Sufis, dreamt of the Man of God and has described the quest for such a spiritual hero in one of his most famous poems (D 411), which became a kind of motto for modern thinkers such as Muhammad Iqbal in Pakistan. Taking up the story of Diogenes, who went around the town with a lantern in search of a true human being, Rumi has his seeker, who "went around the city last night with a lantern," exclaim:

> I am sick of beasts and animals; my wish is for a human being, *insānam ārzūst!*

The use of this image occurs three times in Maulana's work, which shows how important the quest for the "true human being" was. The term *mard,* "man," had long been common to the Persian Sufi poets, and it was customary to consider human beings as classified in three stages, as is expressed in an Arabic saying coined in India at about the time Maulana wrote in Anatolia:

The seeker of the world is a female,
The seeker of the other world is a hermaphrodite,
The seeker of the Lord is a male.

This does not, however, preclude the possibility that a woman may also be a "man" in this sense. The "man of God" has nothing to do with biological gender:

If one could become a "man" by virtue of beard and
testicles,
Every buck would have sufficient hair and beard! (M V 3345)

Nor has outward asceticism or any outward form to do with the true "man," for, as Maulana says, in an allusion to the pretenders to Sufism:

If every naked person were a "man,"
Then garlic would also be a man! (D 1069)

The *mukhannath,* however, the hermaphrodite, appears time and again in Maulana's stories as a model of those unreliable, hypocritical ones who belong neither to this world nor to the other, and he cannot help telling of such a person who met a shepherd and then complained that the buck in his herd had given him a funny look and laughed at him.

Maulana seeks the true devotee, the lover of God, and like Sana'i, he too uses the rhyme *mard-dard,* "man"-"pain," for only through pain, through patient suffering, can the human being grow into a veritable "man." It should, however, be noted that the term *insān-i kāmil,* "the Perfect Man," in the technical sense as used by Ibn 'Arabi and even more by the latter's followers, never occurs in Maulana's work: his ideal man was the one perfected in love and suffering, not someone who had attained a certain stage in a gnostic system.

Once the human being has grown and has tried to fulfill his

duties as well as possible, he is ready for death. Using the traditional contrast of the "white, beautiful, strong Turk" and the "black, ugly, weak Hindu," which was in use since the early eleventh century in Persian writing, he explains that death is indeed the true mirror for everyone: to the lovely Turk it will appear beautiful, to the black person, black. All of life is a preparation for the moment when we throw off our colorful garb to receive the single-colored garment of spirituality, and Maulana has often sung of the beatitude of the state of dying "in the lap of God's grace." He calls his friends to die before the Beloved, to die with a smile like a rose.

It may therefore seem surprising when he also devotes a number of poems to physical death with all its terror and to bodily resurrection as it is described in the Koran. In *Fīhi mā fīhi* he speaks at length of how the individual limbs of man will witness against him in case he denies any of his sins, and among his poems are dramatic visions of the confusion that people will experience on the day when the trumpet is blown. But perhaps his finest poem on individual death is one that utilizes the ancient Iranian idea of the *daena,* the spirit who encounters the dead in the other world and who appears as either a beautiful maiden or an ugly hag, depending upon the soul's former actions, an idea that Rumi cleverly interweaves with Koranic expressions concerning the "faithful Muslim women." Thus he tells the pious listener:

> Your fine ethical qualities will run before you after your death—
> Like moon-faced ladies do these qualities proudly walk. . . .
> When you have divorced the body, you will see *houris* in rows,
> "Muslim ladies, faithful women, devout and repenting ladies" (Sura 66/5)
> Without number will your characteristics run before your bier . . .

In the coffin these pure qualities will become your
companions,
They will cling to you like sons and daughters,
And you will don garments from the warp and woof of your
works of obedience. . . . (D 385)

Thus, each of us will see the results of our works in one way or another, and it is up to us to do whatever we can to achieve a happy life thereafter. The elect, however, those who have lost themselves in God and in Love—will find their own recompense in eternal flight.

Maulana was not a systematic thinker, and therefore it is not easy to find out how he imagined the human being and the relationships between the different parts of body, soul, spirit, and heart. One thing is clear, however: like his predecessors, Maulana knows that the human person consists of several layers, beginning with the body, which consists of the four elements and manifests the traditional four temperaments. But the body is merely a husk that surrounds the spirit; it is like a guest house in which new guests constantly come and go. The outward body essentially is unimportant for men; were not the Prophet and his uncle Abu Jahl of the same family, hence similar in appearance? And yet how vast was the distance between the two! The one was destined to be the final prophet for humanity; the other remained an accursed infidel to the very end. This body is rather like a thornbush that hides the beautiful spirit; or it is like a rope tied to the foot of the soul. Maulana illustrates this situation by way of the story of the mouse who fell in love with a frog and tied him by a rope to her foot; understandably, both perished, as will readily happen if the body overpowers the spirit. It should therefore be educated by fasting lest it become too disobedient. Maulana once called the body "dust on the mirror Spirit"—a dust that hides the radiant spiritual substance that is found beneath it. Elsewhere he sees it as a "vessel for the wine Soul," imagery that at least invests the body

with a certain value. For after all, without the body not much can be achieved. In keeping with traditional physiology, Maulana speaks of the five senses, but he is quick to remind the listener that each of the five senses corresponds to an inner sense by which man can understand the higher realities. The senses as they appear to us are like horses; they need an intelligent rider (generally, Reason or Intellect) who can guide them to the right path, direct them on the way of obedience.

A second component of the human being is the *nafs,* the soul, which, understood absolutely, usually refers to the lower instincts or base faculties. However, the *nafs* can be educated, as becomes clear from the three references in the Koran: the *nafs ammāra bi's-sū,* "that which incites to evil" (Sura 12/53); the *nafs lawwāma,* the "blaming soul" (Sura 75/2), which by and large corresponds to our concept of conscience; and finally the stage of *nafs muṭma'inna,* "the soul at peace" (Sura 89/27), the stage from which it can return to its Lord. Maulana, like most Sufi authors, uses the term generally, in an unqualified sense, to represent the lower faculties, and the imagery he uses to describe this dangerous thing is quite colorful: it can be a dog or a wolf, a cow or (often) a woman; it is equated with Pharaoh, since it wants to act as the "highest Lord" (Sura 79/24). Sometimes it is a black Hindu (as contrasting with the white Turk, the higher principle), or a serpent or dragon that can be blinded by the emerald, which represents Love or the spiritual master's glance, conferring his blessing. Rumi's references to the *nafs* are often tempered with humor:

> When the *nafs* says "meow" like the cat,
> I put it in the bag like the cat! (D 1656)

One has, however, to remember that the *nafs,* especially when it appears as a dog or a camel, can be trained: even the *nafs* camel, if it undergoes spiritual education or is suddenly intoxicated by Love, can serve to carry its owner into the presence of the Beloved, and a *kalb mu'allam* (trained dog) can protect its owner and keep the

enemy at bay. But such education cannot be achieved by strict discipline and harsh asceticism alone. It is Love that is needed to transform man's "demon" into an angel, his base metal into gold.

Maulana dwells intensely upon the possibility of such a transformation, yet he is aware that constant vigilance is required:

> Once Solomon leaves, the demon becomes the emperor;
> When patience and intellect go, your *nafs* becomes "inciting to evil" (D 455)

And even if the *nafs* does not return to its evil behavior when one does observe it, it has other ruses as well. Maulana knows all too well that even works of obedience can be the result of the *nafs*'s activities, for many people are induced to spiritual pride by works of obedience. Hence:

> The *nafs* has a rosary and a Koran in its right hand
> And a sword and a dagger hidden in its sleeve.
>
> (M III 2554ff.)

On a somewhat different level, however, one should also mention here a saying that is regarded by many as one of the most important words of wisdom in Sufism. That is the alleged *ḥadīth* "*Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*": "Who knows himself [or: his *nafs*] knows his Lord." In other words, the one who has discovered the deepest secret of the self has found God in the "ocean of his soul." The word *nafs* is used here in the classical sense of "self," without the negative connotation that it usually carries in mystical texts. Maulana, who quotes this saying several times, invents a beautiful story to explain it that seems to me to reveal much of his own soul: he tells how Ayaz, the Turkish officer at the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna who was the king's favorite, was accused by people of going every morning to a secret chamber where, his adversaries suspected, he had hidden some special treasure. Mahmud sent someone to follow his friend, and

Ayaz was seen entering the room, in which he kept a pair of old, worn-out shoes and a tattered coat. Asked the reason for his daily visit, he replied that these objects reminded him of his previous poverty and destitution and made him grateful each day anew for the bounty he had received from the Sultan. Ayaz then cited the saying "Who knows himself knows his Lord"—explaining that by knowing and realizing his utter poverty, he was able to recognize the boundless greatness and kindness of his master. Maulana sees in Ayaz's attitude a model for the believer: knowing his own destitution, he gratefully acknowledges his Lord's eternal bounty; by recognizing his own limitations, he recognizes the unlimited grace of God. To my knowledge, this is a quite exceptional interpretation of the saying, but one that clearly demonstrates Maulana's deep faith and trust.

Let us return after this little excursion to the next element of which humans are made. Maulana once compared the *nafs* and lust to autumn, to the time when nature begins to die, to enter a state that is frozen and seemingly hopeless, while reason, *'aql,* is compared to spring. This reason, or intellect, is made of light and should be grounded in the Universal Intellect, the *'aql-i kull,* as Maulana sometimes remarks in the more philosophical verses and in *Fīhi mā fīhi*. In fact, the *'aql-i kull* illuminates the horizons, while partial reason "blackens the books of action" (M III 2532), because it may lead to unlawful acts, and this leads to a bad result on Doomsday, when the Books are opened: black books mean sinfulness. In one passage he considers the whole world to be the outward form of Universal Reason (M IV 3259). Normal partial reason gains its strength from there, and it is the solid guide to the door of the Beloved. *'Aql* appears under different guises, as does the *nafs*: it is the prerequisite of religiously valid acts and can therefore be the patient teacher; it is the king's faithful minister, the *mufti* who gives legal opinions, and at times it is also the market superintendent who curbs the destructive activities of the *nafs* when the latter, like a misbehaving villager, causes a riot in

the marketplace. Reason is also like the police officer who is able to guide the seeker to the king's gate but is not himself allowed inside. Or else Maulana sees a man on the way to the tailor with a bundle of cloth; Reason shows him the way, but as soon as the tailor has decided how he will cut the cloth, there is nothing further that *'aql* can do. For how would it know which pattern the tailor has chosen, and how to cut and stitch a coat or a cloak?

There are degrees of reason. Reason's role in checking the activities of the lower faculties may also be understood from Maulana's comparison of Intellect, even First Intellect, to a cat who ensures that the mice of infidelity do not become too powerful in the country. On the whole, *'aql* appears as something useful but pedestrian, a necessary guide and yet something that is not aware of the great mystery of Love, for intellect has to stay back, just as Gabriel had to stay back during the Prophet's night journey. The Prophet was allowed into the sanctuary of Love, while the archangel remained outside: so it is with intellect.

The relation between partial intellect (which can err) and Universal Intellect is not always clear, and as Maulana was no theoretician, he probably never intended to offer his listeners a closed system of relationships. Besides the *'aql* he also speaks of the soul, *jān,* "a candle burning with a divine flame," a window toward God. The Prophet, as Maulana sings more than once, is the *jān-i jān,* "the soul of the soul," and he knows, as Sufis before him knew, that the souls of the lovers are basically one. It is only the bodily husk that separates them in time and space; "when the grapes are pressed, the husks disappear and the unity of the wine of the spirit becomes evident" (D 1077).

The body is pregnant with the soul (D 2285), says Maulana in an allusion to Mary and Jesus, and he repeats this idea in the line saying that "the soul is like Christ in the cradle 'outward form' (D 2176). But the soul, lovely child in the cradle "body," is not only a Jesus-like child; it is also the lady who lives in the house of the

body, and once it goes away, the time of death has come, as Maulana says in a delightful image:

> When the soul goes, make room for me under the dust—
> Dust gathers in the house when the lady has gone away!
>
> (D 830)

It is difficult if not impossible to draw an exact line between the use Maulana makes of the terms *jān,* "soul," and *rūḥ,* "spirit," the spiritual principle that is given, according to the Koran "by order of my Lord" (Sura 17/85). Thus the relationships between intellect, spirit, soul, and heart are not always clear in Rumi's work and at times are even contradictory.

There is, however, one thing that is absolutely clear: the organ that is dearest to Maulana is the heart, *dil.* He sings of it frequently in tender, moving verses, often using the word *dil* as a recurring rhyme word, and it would be a worthwhile enterprise to collect all the lines in which he describes this heart, now as a timid little darling, now as a being of such power that it can squeeze the heavens like a kerchief, now crying to be rocked in its cradle, now encompassing within itself heaven and earth and their very Creator.

> His love took my painful heart in its palm and smelled it:
> If this heart is not nice, how can it be a nosegay for Him?
>
> (D 2130)

The heart is a house and a garden, it is a mosque, even the *masjid al-aqṣā,* the "farthest mosque" in Jerusalem; it is the Kaaba, the house of God, and it is also the Throne of God on which He seated himself. The little shivering heart, likened to a fish in the frying pan, is also a window through which one can see the Beloved, or it is a glass bottle inhabited by the beloved fairy, the *dulcis hospes animae,* the "sweet guest of the soul," as medieval Christian writers used to call the Divine indwelling in the heart.

But there are two further sets of images that are particularly essential to the understanding of Rumi's thought. According to the first, the heart is a mirror (an idea known to earlier Sufis) that must be polished (it is an age still of metal mirrors!); that is, it has to undergo a long period of hard asceticism. At last the radiant reflection of the Beloved will appear in the mirror, and lover and Beloved will become, as it were, mirrors for each other. The finest description of the constant polishing of the mirror heart is elaborated by Maulana in a story that he found in Ghazzali's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* and, somewhat later, in Nizami's *Iskandarnāma*. But it shows his ingenuity that he reversed the role of the protagonists and thus tells in the *Mathnawī* how the painters of China and Byzantium undertook a painting contest. In Persian literature, China was *the* country connected with painting, and the skill of Chinese painters was regarded as unsurpassable, especially that of Mani (the founder of Manicheism, who was transformed in Persian imagery into a Master Painter because the Muslims were aware of the lavishly illuminated Manichaean manuscripts). Thus the Chinese produced a stunningly colorful picture on the white marble walls of the palace. But when the Byzantines were asked to show their painting, they drew back the curtain and lo! they had polished the marble wall to such perfection that the Chinese painting was reflected in it and looked even more beautiful than the original. Such polishing is the task of the lover, so that the Divine Beloved may radiate in His full glory within the heart—for what can one offer to Yusuf, the Beloved, but a pure mirror so that He can see His own beauty?

The second major image complex is that related to the purification of the heart, the emptying of the house of all it may still contain. The Sufis—and thus Maulana—use the metaphor of the "sword" or "broom" of *lā,* ("no"), the first word of the profession of faith, *Lā ilāha illā'Llāh,* "There is no deity save God." Like a sword, the *la* cuts off everything that is not God; or else the house must be cleaned by this broom so that the Beloved alone can

reside in it. In this context, Maulana's story of the lover and the Beloved has been quoted again and again; in simple words it conveys the necessity of the devotee's annihilation in the Beloved.

A man knocked at the door of his beloved.
"Who are you, trusted one?" thus asked the friend.
He answered: "I!" The friend said: "Go away,
Here is no place for people raw and crude!"
What, then, could cook the raw and rescue him
But separation's fire and exile's flame?
The poor man went to travel a whole year
And burned in separation from his friend,
And he matured, was cooked and burnt, returned
And carefully approached the friend's abode.
He walked around it now in cautious fear
Lest from his lips unfitting words appear.
His friend called out: "Who is there at my door?"
The answer: "You, dear, *you* are at the door!"
He said: "Come in, now that you are all I—
There is no room in this house for two 'I's!" (M I 3056–63)

Only God has the right to say "I," and the heart must be emptied to receive Him. And Maulana never ceases to marvel at the fact that He who is not contained by heaven and earth can yet dwell within the tiny human heart, that He lovingly descends into our hearts, which are broken for His sake, there to dwell like a treasure in the ruins.

It is in these descriptions of the loving heart that Maulana reaches the heights of poetical imagination, for the heart is more important than all the other elements that together form a human being: the *nafs,* dangerous and yet willing to be tamed by Love; intellect, useful, even indispensable until the goal is almost at hand, but unable to enter the secret chamber of Love; the spirit *rūḥ,* or/and soul *jān*; and finally the heart, through which the Beloved can

be attained by serving as His mirror or His sacred house. But what is one to do when the lover has lost his heart, when the Beloved has carried it away?

> You say: "The house of the king [*khāqān*] is the heart of
> those who are yearning"—
> I have no heart, O my soul! So where would you find your
> house? (D 575)