

October Sunday Tea Intro

If you don't mind, I'd like to start today's discussion with a joke. It's not the funniest I've ever heard, but I think it can help clarify a relationship between everyday people and a metaphor for the divine we come across in the writing of Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh (the previous master of this order). So:

One day, two young fish were swimming around. A much older fish swam up to them and asked, "how's the water today, boys?" He then continued on his way. Once he'd passed, one of the younger fish turned to his companion and asked, "What's water?"

I think that the young fish's question to his companion can tell us a lot about how God is to us most of the time: everything about our world completely depends upon him, but we can't really notice.

With that in mind, I'd like to read you a discourse by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh. It's available in his book *Discourses on the Sufi Path*. This particular part of that book is also available for free online under the "Dr. Nurbkahsh" tab at nimatullahi.org:

"From the Sufi's point of view, God is Absolute Being, and whatever exists is a determination or manifestation of Him. The Sufis maintain that all being exists through God's Being without which there would be nothing. As Rumi says:

We are nonexistence, displaying the illusion of existence;

You are Absolute Being and our only true existence.

In the words of the Koran: "All things are perishing but His Face" (XXVIII: 88), with the understanding that there is nothing but Him in the abode of existence.

The Sufis do not separate the realm of existence from God's existence. The Koranic verse, "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (XXIV: 35), has been interpreted by the traditional Islamic clergy to mean that God is the source of all illumination for the heavens and the earth. The Sufis, on the other hand, take this to mean that God is the very being, the reality of the heavens and the earth.

The insight that there is only one Absolute Being in the whole universe, and that whatever exists does so through His existence, has been called the philosophy of the "Unity of Being" (*wahdato'l-wojud*).

To be more precise, however, this is not a philosophy at all. A philosophy is something invented by the mind and hence subject to change. The awareness of the Unity of Being, though, is a perception of the heart and consequently everlasting and unchanging.

Philosophy pertains to the mind and discourse, whereas perception of the Unity of Being pertains to love, revelation and vision. Therefore, in our view, it is better to use the term 'the principle', rather than the philosophy, of the Unity of Being.

To illustrate what is meant by the principle of the 'Unity of Being', the Sufis have used many analogies. Three of them are particularly apt:

To begin with, if we liken Absolute Being to an ocean, then the waves of this ocean can be thought of as individual beings, the true reality of which is the water. The transitory form of each being is the individual wave, which lasts for but a moment and is then

obliterated, whereas the reality of the wave-that is, the water-is everlasting. Until one becomes aware of one's wave form, one can know nothing of the water. When the concept of the ocean as transitory waves disappears, one will then realize that there is in reality nothing but the water. Hence, the great Sufis have annihilated their wave-selves in the water of Absolute Being, crying from the depths of their souls expressions like "I am the Truth," "Glory be to My sublime station," and "There is nothing under this garment but God," expressions that leave people of the world astounded and amazed. In the words of Shah Nimatullah:

Wave, sea, and bubble

all three are one;

Though there may appear to be many and few,

in truth there is but One.

In another analogy, Absolute Being has been compared to light and individual beings to shadows. As long as the shadow remains a shadow, it can know nothing of the light.

If the light moves away from the shadow, the shadow will always follow it. Thus, if one attempts to pursue the Truth under one's own power-that is, as a shadow-one will never attain it. Such an action in fact indicates that the Truth is actually moving away from one. Only when the light moves toward the shadow, thereby relieving it of its 'shadow-ness', will the shadow become the light.

As Maghrebi has said:

*No one can journey towards God on his own feet;
To arrive at God's district, one must go with God's feet.*

In the third and final analogy, Absolute Being is conceived as a point, and individual beings as lines or patterns, springing into existence from this single point. Whatever form is displayed outwardly is, in reality, merely transitory. Whatever form we see is in truth no more than a point. In the *Golshan-e raz*, Shabestari has written:

*All these forms of `otherness'
are in reality but illusions from you.
What makes the point appear a circle
is but the speed with which it moves.*

As it says in the Koran, "Everything passes away; what remains is only the Face of your Lord, He of Majesty and Honor" (IV: 26-7).

Thus, according to the Sufi's point of view, the realm of individual existence, which is one of the levels of being, is imaginary from the perspective of `shadowness', while it is nothing but Being from the perspective of Reality. In the words of Shah Nimatullah:

*Throughout the world
and everything within it,
Whatever is seen is but a reflection of a ray
from the Face of the Friend."*

So, to put this in terms of meditative practice, I'll say that our basic method here is to sit and silently concentrate upon God and God alone. We achieve this concentration by letting our thoughts pass by us like so many fleeting waves, forgetting each wave but remembering the one ocean from which they and we come.