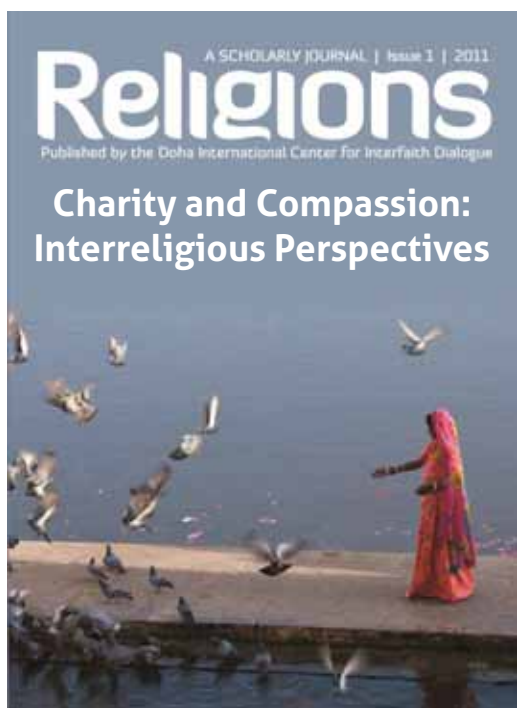


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## RELIGIONS / ADYĀN

*A Scholarly Journal Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue*

*Religions/Adyān is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relations between Islam and other faiths.*

*In a world of religious misunderstandings, violence, and hijacking of religious faiths by political ideologies, Religions/Adyān intends to provide a welcome space of encounter and reflection upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the journal suggests religious diversity while suggesting the need to explore this diversity in order to develop keys to both a deepening of one's own faith and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Qur'ān suggests a commonality of faith and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:*

***"To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute."* (The Table Spread 5:48, version of Yusuf Ali)**

*As a refereed international publication published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Religions/Adyān finds its inspiration in the universal message of monotheism broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broadly defined context.*

*Religions/Adyān encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present and potentially future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.*

*In addition, Religions/Adyān wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationships between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also a way to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.*

*The essays published in Religions/Adyān exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the DICID. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organization.*

A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL | Issue 1 | 2011

# Religions

Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

## Charity and Compassion: Interreligious Perspectives



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## EDITORIAL

One year ago, the launch issue of *Religions-Adyān* was published. This first output was met with a high degree of interest and enthusiasm both in Qatar and around the world. Taking stock of these promising beginnings, the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue and its Chairman Dr. Ibrahim Al-Naimi have supported the conception and realization of the first numbered issue that will be, so we hope, a major landmark in providing our journal with a wider diffusion.

Our initial issue was centred upon the common grounds shared by the world's religions, as a foundation for further inquiries and exchanges. When faced with the consideration of a theme for the current issue, none seemed more appropriate than the virtues of charity and compassion. There is no religion that does not teach that the Supreme Reality involves goodness and love, and does not call mankind to reach perfection by treating other human beings with compassion and charity. This is the golden rule upon which all religious ethics are based.

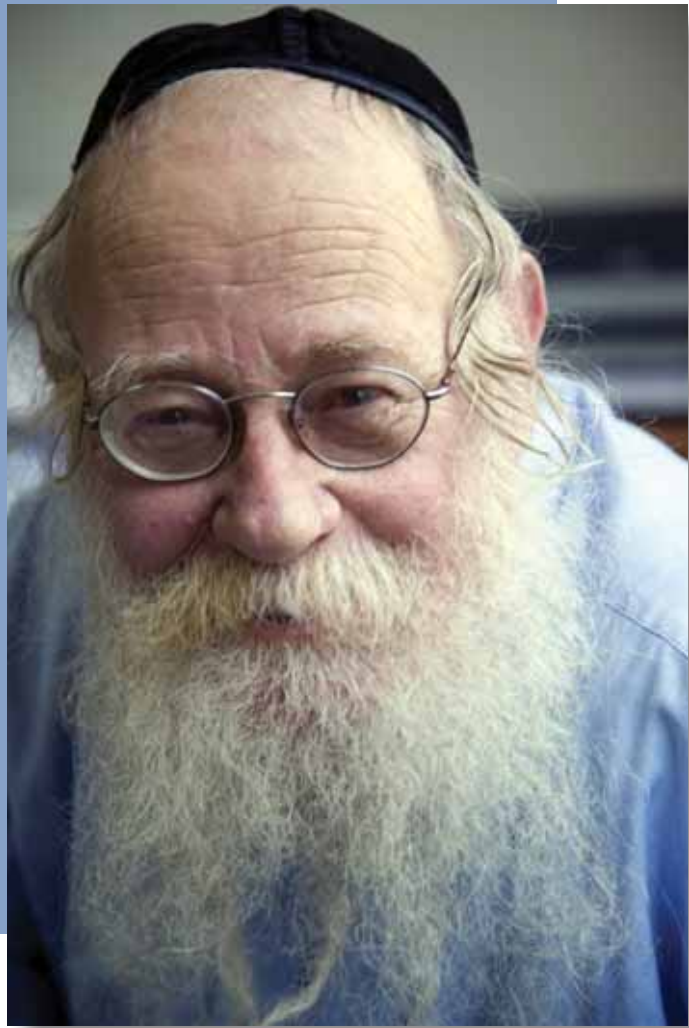
Now, it must be recognized that the notions of charity, compassion and love are not without some elements of diffusiveness or ambiguity, and sometimes may even refer to realities that are not necessarily contingent upon, nor consonant with, religious principles. After all, everybody "loves love," but in what ways do religiously informed compassion and charity differ, in their understanding and practice, from the basic human, and even secular, forms of benevolence? Moreover, the words love, charity and compassion may be translated in different ways in various languages, while human love covers a whole spectrum of manifestations, from motherly love to the love of God.

Finally, as much as religion is about love and charity, it is also about law, fear, knowledge, and many other dimensions. Attention must be paid, therefore, to the ways in which these manifold aspects relate to, and sometimes intersect with compassion. The goal of this issue is to explore some of these matters and show that the notions of charity and compassion have much richer and deeper layers of meaning than may appear at first sight.

While mercy, charity and compassion are indeed common principles among believers of all traditional faiths, they are also the very conditions for the possibility of a meaningful dialogue across faiths. Through a richer understanding of the meaning of loving bonds between mankind and God and among mankind, we enable ourselves to engage in a more fertile encounter with other faiths.

**Patrick Laude**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

## A Conversation *with* Rabbi Steinsaltz



**Patrick Laude: What are the Hebrew words that would best encapsulate the meanings of love and compassion in religion? What do these words suggest?**

Rabbi Steinsaltz: The Hebrew words for love – *ahavah* – and compassion – *rahamim* – are used in the language in a general way, namely, there is no linguistic distinction between the use of the words in a religious sense and in a secular sense; moreover, the terms are not always confined to humans but sometimes are used even in regard to animals.

There is a general distinction between love and compassion, although the root

of the word *rahamim*, compassion – *rhm* – also carries the meaning of love (a similar word is found in other Semitic languages too). In many cases, the difference between the words is that the term “love” is used towards one who is of equal or higher status, while “compassion” is connected with whoever is of equal or lower standing. In the broadest sense, there is a certain linguistic and intrinsic difference between the two words: love contains an element of wanting something, while compassion is mostly connected with the notion of giving. There are, however, other distinguishing features between the two words when used in a purely religious sense, vis-à-vis God (and in Biblical and post-Biblical thinking this love is mutual and expressed both

ways – from God to man and from man to God), as it assumed that the human ability to love God is, in itself, a mark of Divine grace, of God loving this person; while when used in the human sense they may as well be one-sided.

**PL. What is the specifically Judaic perspective on human love, i.e. conjugal love, but also friendship?**

RB. As stated before, the meaning of the word “love” is very general, and therefore the main distinction between love in the religious sense and in the general sense is not the power and depth of the emotion, but in its subject.

In common usages the word “love” may sometimes be downgraded to mere liking or plain desire; but the general meaning of love contains two elements: the wish to be closer to the subject of love, and the wish to give more and more to this subject. In this sense, love in the human context may be more specific, or more confined, than Divine love, but essentially is not different from it. In fact, in many Jewish sources the love relationship goes both ways: on the one hand, love between human beings is seen as derived from Divine love; and on the other, human love is often used as a symbol for Divine love.

Friendship, in a fullest sense, is not considered different from love, even though in practice it expresses itself in different forms and ways than conjugal love, for instance. On a deeper level, friendship that does not contain the element of love is not considered true friendship, but only a mutual agreement to work together, or at least not to harm each other.

**PL. What are the main lessons about love and compassion to**

**be found in the Talmud?**

RB. In the Talmud – which is a compilation of the Oral Law and is much more detailed and elaborate than the Scriptures – love and compassion are treated in a very detailed way. In fact, in Talmudic or even pre-Talmudic times a new term was coined: *Gemilut Hasadim*. This term has no adequate translation into any other languages, and its various loose translations are not very enlightening. On the whole, *Gemilut Hasadim* is a very generalized notion of charity. But while charity is connected with giving financial help to the destitute, *Gemilut Hasadim* is the general admonition to help other people in every sphere of life and give them every kind of help they might need. Unlike charity, which is mostly to poor people, *Gemilut Hasadim* is for everybody who needs assistance, even temporarily or subjectively, regardless of whether the receiver is poor or rich.

In this sense, *Gemilut Hasadim* bears the fullest meaning and is the actual expression of the term “compassion”, which literally means “to feel with somebody else,” whenever that person has any problem. *Gemilut Hasadim* involves a very large set of instructions and advice, and the important place that this set of instruction occupies in Jewish life is reflected in the Talmudic saying, that *Gemilut Hasadim* is one of the three pillars upon which the world stands (*Pirkei Avot – Ethics of Our Fathers* 1:2).

On a more theological level, all acts of *Gemilut Hasadim* are a part of the very general notion of *imitatio Dei*. Indeed, in many cases it says that a certain deed is not just a good deed which is beneficial for society, and that a certain intention is not only right in the sense that it is a positive mindset and a state of spiritual devotion, but that according to Scripture it is the way in which God Himself acts.



The importance of *Gemilut Hasadim* is such, that sometimes not only whatever is directly connected with “good deeds,” but practically the entire body of commandments and instructions that deal with our world (not necessarily those of direct worship) is seen as included within *Gemilut Hasadim*, since any good deed that is done by people (including some rituals) is seen as a way in which people give something in order to make the very structure of the world higher and nobler. Doing all these deeds it is part of sanctifying the universe. In this sense doing good deeds, giving and helping others, saying pleasant things etc., goes beyond the realm of human needs and is part of the general notion that doing positive acts toward everything – animals, plants, and even inanimate objects – is also an act of *Gemilut Hasadim*. According to this view, the act of doing anything positive, whatever its object, is considered a display of mercy and compassion, and therefore has an aspect of Divine worship.

**PL. Has Kabbalah something specific to teach us about love?**

RS. In the world of Kabbalah there is a further distinction between love and mercy. The basic idea is that love, on any level, stems from within and is fundamentally non-judgmental. Very broadly speaking, love – or its outward manifestation as *Chesed*, which is the attribute of goodness as well as showing goodness – can be seen as defining one of the main powers in the world, which is an emotion or deed that flows from within out unto the world in general, to specific objects within it, and most specifically to people. This force may be seen as the centrifugal power of the universe, whereby things go from the center (or the self, in human terms) to the periphery: giving, embracing, sharing, keeping the world in balance. Parallel to it is the

centripetal power of constraint, *Gevurah*, the power that works from the periphery inwards and which keeps a certain equilibrium in existence.

According to this view, Mercy, *Rahamim* (or *Tifereth*, in Kabbalistic terminology), is seen as a combination of the centrifugal and centripetal powers, because Mercy is not only an outburst of an inner feeling, but also a reaction to the outside existence. The object of love may be anything and anybody, and a gift of love is not meant to fulfill any lack in the object; rather, it is an expression of the innermost drive: to love, to give. Mercy, on the other hand, although it too contains the notion of giving and sharing, is judgmental, because it starts with the notion that somebody or something is in need, is lacking. Fulfilling such a need is an act of mercy, but mercy is invariably a response or reaction to something which is seen as a lack or a blemish. Whereas love is based on an inner drive to give, to be closer, regardless of whether the recipient actually needs anything, Mercy starts out from the recipient, from the object, and is an attempt to fulfill a want. In this sense, Mercy is more defined and more “objective” than love; that is why it is seen as a very central power: judgment treated with love.

In fact, some Jewish sources say that the name of the Lord (Y-H-W-H) is the name of the attribute of Mercy, which is the centre point, that combines both the inner self and the outer existence. Human beings may feel mercy most strongly when they encounter pain and suffering; but in the eyes of the Lord the whole world, being intrinsically confined and incomplete, deserves mercy. This is how the verse “and His mercy is on all His deeds” (Psalms 145) is understood: all creatures, even the Archangels, deserve this kind of mercy. Mercy in people can be felt towards anybody (or

anything) that is suffering for whatever reason. Love has in it a certain amount of respect for and appreciation of the beloved, while mercy does not have this limitation; the farthest and the lowest can equally be objects of mercy.

**PL. Considering the ternary of “Abrahamic religions”, some writers have associated hope to Judaism, charity to Christianity and faith to Islam. How do you see the specificity of Judaism in relation to these three “virtues,” and particularly in relation to charity, or more broadly to love?**

RS. If I were to make such a succinct definition of these three religions, I would do it very differently – namely, by relating more to the core ideas and self-understanding of these religions, rather than by attaching a slogan to each. I think that even linguistically, and surely historically, Islam is the religion of acceptance of yoke and subjection to God (as far as I know, this was how Muslims and Islam defined themselves in the beginning); Christianity is mostly about Divine redemption, and Judaism is overwhelmingly theocentric, as it concerns itself mainly with being connected to God and doing His will. In this context, charity is a very broad view of everything. The general aim of life is to fill gaps, to give, to mend whatever exists, from the inanimate to the human beings. Nobody and nothing is complete, and making things better is our way of continuing God’s creation. Charity towards human beings, then, is basically the same thing: it is the attempt to fulfill the lacunae of existence in whatever way; sometimes it can be done with a coin, sometimes with a compliment.

**PL. It has also been written that Judaism is more centered on fear of God than on love and knowledge of God. How would you respond to this view? How do you see the relationship between fear and love, knowledge and love in Judaism?**

RS. Judaism deals both with love of God and with fear of God; however, in order to define it properly it should be stated that Judaism as a living religion is unique among world religions in that it is very much concerned with the knowledge of God. There is a huge drive in Judaism to attain more and more of this knowledge. Furthermore, in Judaism there has never been a defined group or caste of “the knowledgeable ones”; on the contrary: everybody – young or old, rich or poor, scholarly or ignorant – is expected to be knowledgeable, although there always will, of course, be differences between individuals, and there will always be those who are more capable of studying and gaining knowledge, and others who for many reasons cannot do that to an equal degree. In fact, the Messianic dream of Judaism, which is also the very last and summarizing sentence in Maimonides’ Code of Law, is: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isalah 11:9). The act of attaining this knowledge is considered not only the fulfillment of a wish, but an act of worship.

**PL. Is there a universality of Judaism, and how would you define or suggest it?**

RS. In Judaism, there are two aspects. One is the particular duties and commandments that are pertinent only to Jews,

while the other is a very clear view of a universal religion which is the dream and desire of Judaism to share with the world. The commandments of this universal religion are formalized as the Seven Noahide commandments (those which pertain to all of Noah's descendants – namely, every human being). They are general precepts about faith and behavior which are the common human heritage: belief in God, prohibition of murder, adultery and incest, creating a just society, and caring for the well-being of all other creatures. This "religion of Adam," of humanity, is seen as the ideal way of life for humanity in general, and therefore spreading it (but not the commandments that pertain particularly to Jews) is seen as an ideal.

**PL. How do you understand interfaith dialogue from a Jewish perspective? What is/are its goal(s)? What are its prerequisites? What are its pitfalls and limits? What can Jews bring to interfaith dialogue?**

RS. Interfaith dialogue can be a positive deed, if it is done with care, understanding and sensitivity. Its main goal is, mostly, listening and getting to know each other. The pitfall of such interfaith dialogue may be in all kinds of missionary attempts, in which the other is seen as lacking something essential that does not make it possible for him to attain fulfillment and redemption. Judaism can share some of the many treasures it has accumulated in its more than 3000 years of existence, some of which can surely be useful and helpful for others. In its essence, Judaism is not a missionary religion, and this fact can surely contribute to creating a better, saner relationship with other religions.

**PL. Some important intellectual figures in Judaism defined the relationship of Jews with other communities as a "confrontation" (not in the negative sense of the term but in the general sense of "being confronted" by alterity); what do you think of this assessment?**

RS. The confrontation of Judaism with other communities stems from the assumption that the Jews shouldn't be different. However, difference does not necessarily mean animosity or hatred; it is just the acknowledgment of the fact that religions, like individuals, are different. Love between man and woman begins with the acknowledgment of difference. Difference, then, may be one of the main forces that create love. But the desire to enforce uniformity – by force, by laws, by temptation – creates a negative response. Confrontation is sometimes just the natural reaction to an invitation such as "You have to join us." In those places where the notion of difference was accepted (e.g., India), there was also no feeling of confrontation.

**PL. Given the highly politicized and sensitive context that surrounds the relationship between Abrahamic faiths, and particularly Muslims and Jews in the modern world, what would you say to a Muslim about your faith that may help him or her understand the Jewish point of view?**

RS. It is a great pity that the relationship between the Abrahamic religions is connected to politics. In the long run – as can

be seen from any examination of the existing problems between Muslims and Jews – these problems are based on misunderstandings and on creating justifications for hatred. The modern combination of nationalism and religion can be lethal, both psychologically and literally. The first and obvious results appear at first in hating and fighting a real or imaginary enemy. But in a very consistent way it develops into a toxic mixture which destroys both nation and religion. Hopefully, this phenomenon will subside, even though many people with short-sighted views try to fan the fires instead of quenching them. The main thing to say to Muslims about Judaism is to offer them to gain a better, more comprehensive view of the Jewish faith. Hatred is so often based on ignorance and prejudice, both of which can be cured by trying to know more, to understand better.





On Love , Passion  
and  
Fidelity

*By Archbishop George Khodr*

Is it not strange – or at least conspicuous – that Christ does not utter a single word on the kind of love which man and woman feel towards each other? By the same token, he does not say a word about beauty, and there is not a single letter in the New Testament about natural infatuation. When he says: “Look at the lilies of the field” then it is not to call to mind their magnificence, but to draw attention to God’s care for them.<sup>1</sup> And when Paul commands the love between the sexes, he does so by drawing an allegory to Christ’s love for the Church.<sup>2</sup> There is thus no allusion to anything akin to the throbbing of hearts and mutual (sexual) attraction, and the latter is not stipulated as a precondition for marriage in the Holy Scripture.

Likewise in Islam, the Qur’ān does not mention the term “love” [*hubb*] in its human meaning. The Qur’an does employ the verb “love” several times, but in a different context. The descended scripture elaborates on the role of men and women in marriage, its contract, conditions and ethics; the closest it comes to speaking of intimacy between the spouses is the verse: “Truly your women are garments unto you, and you are garments unto them” (Al-Baqira, 187). Yet there is no allusion to love as we know it in the modern age. Yet modern man, since the Arab age of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) - which contains and prefigures a lot of modernity – has not only written a lot about love but also come to regard it as the very node of modern life.

It seems certain to me that the “sexual revolution” which first erupted in the West has reached and intruded us so that talk about infidelity has now become commonplace in our media, whether it be in films, books or print magazines. Our entire civilization is turning towards an aggrandizement of sex, fomenting its “freedom” to the degree of questioning the family, whether

as an institution or as a state of consciousness. The essential element of this (multi-faceted) “revolution” is that it has severed sex from love even as it isolated it from the marital bond. This may be likened to a puerile regression, as the adolescent who fancies sex to be everything – and indeed many an adult - may live his whole life as a hostage to an instinct which, stripped from love, will end in the dead end of monotony and a self-consuming boredom.

It seems to me that in absence of religious convictions we are bound to stray, not only in this perishable body, but also in denial of the sovereignty of God over it. If you follow the course of history, you will know that periods of decadence and debauchery have not been alien to this, or any other, region. Likewise, a myriad of sexual deviations have always been practiced. Yet in my estimate these were practiced without being codified as legitimate vices, whereas today you have some people who seek to enshrine deviation as a guiding concept.

In order to understand marital love we must know that the Greek language encompasses two different words, *Eros*, which is love in the sense of a desire for a thing or a person, and *Agápē*, which signifies the love of God for man and man for God, as well as fraternal love. *Agápē* is derived from Hebrew or Arabic.<sup>3</sup> If you say in Greek “*Agapáō*” or “I love” it becomes clear that the Greek and the Arabic expression are one voice. *Eros* is the natural attraction of the two sexes to each other. It is not restricted to the carnal force but it usually has a connotation of some form of arousal. It is mentioned peripherally in the Old Testament to indicate the emotive force which unified the spouses, reaching its utmost expression in the Song of Songs and in the Book of Hosea. Yet passion or lust – with which I translate the word

*Eros/Ishq* – do not appear a single time in the New Testament; as if the Gospel implicitly places it within the context of the natural man (or the psychological man in the literal meaning of the Greek word). When the New Testament speaks about marriage, it says that it is an eternal contract predicated on the love which does not differ from what the Lord said in this regard: “Love your neighbor like yourself”: we are to love another human being in devoting our attention towards him and offering our service to him.

You must understand that it is not forbidden for you to marry a woman with which you share no natural, physical love. If the latter is provided, then this is natural, and Christianity takes account of the innate state you find yourself in without turning it into a fundament of theology. What is more, there are civilizations such as the Indian civilization which are replete with examples of passion between the deities as illustrated by the statues in the temples carrying an overt sexual connotation; yet they too do not speak about love as a precondition for marriage. Denis de Rougemont claims in his famous book *L'Amour et l'Occident (Love in the West)* that the West learned about such passionate love from the Andalusian troubadour bards and that romantic, chivalric love is essentially an Arab invention.<sup>4</sup> If we were to amend this thesis we might say that this *amour-passion* is Oriental in origin, and perhaps the Song of Songs made its way into Hebrew from the Sumerians or the like. Likewise, the Qur'ān does not seem to mention love as a precondition for the contract of marriage. What it has to say about the relationship of the spouses is: “They are garments unto you and you are garments unto them (Surat Al-Baqira, 187) as well as: “And He created love and compassion between you” (Surat al-Rum, 21). Yet

there is no trace here of any ardent emotion as a prerequisite for the contract.

Within the Oriental Christian environment, it was commonplace for the kin of the man to select a young girl for him which he would only see in the Church after her entrustment to him by the family. In some circles this tradition might well continue until the present day. In this regard, the famed French poet Paul Claudel said: “Marriage is not a product of love but of mutual agreement.”<sup>5</sup> If the passion is preserved beyond the phase of the honeymoon, this is wonderful. But the same flame might not endure, or it may not remain in the same form once married life has become drudgery, or empty through the routine of sex, or overshadowed by the task of the upbringing of children.

In Christianity, we do not come across any infatuation with, or aggrandizement of, passionate love, nor did we find it is a central notion upon which the endurance of the marital bond is predicated. As for what Hollywood, the media and advertising industry have to say about the lifestyle of homosexuals and lesbians, that is another matter. It bears no relation whatsoever to the spiritual heritage of the monotheistic religions, nor to the faith traditions of the Far East. The question may then be formulated as follows: “How do you sanctify this element of our nature so that it does not jeopardize your integrity of being and soul? How do you prevent the love which is in you from becoming a destructive force? How do you not fall into a totally bodily state, into an isolated fixation with sex, into an introversion and preoccupation with the ego, and, conversely, a desire for domination over the other, by means of power and money? How do you preserve the humanity of the relationship, that is to say its completeness, including its sexual aspect; how do you tame and do-

mesticate it without “turning neither into an angel nor a devil” to paraphrase Pascal: “He who wants to pose as an angel, acts as the brute.”<sup>6</sup>

Christianity does not claim that married life will automatically guarantee you this wholesome, humane mode of life, even though it does maintain that marriage is the natural setting for your humanity to reach its fulfillment due to the framing of love within the covenant which God has concluded. For if God has dwelled in your presence and in the presence of your spouse, then it is He who has bestowed on both of you that serene purity by which you stave off the supremacy of one over the other, as well as the self-enjoyment by means of the other, without compassion and charity.

I repeat that Christianity does not teach man anything about a love desire innately residing in him, even as it does not teach him about food or drink. Christianity prods man starting from the state in which he or she is, and bestows on him what ushers from on high. It does indeed accept the beautiful [bodily] desires as long as these are wedded to love. This by way of principle. The Lord said: “He who looks at a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her in his heart” [Matthew 28:5]. Notice the choice of words in his expression: “the lust for her.” The text did not prohibit lust but it does censure raw lust in so far as you are not to look at your wife as if she were a mere “good”, for she is a person, that is to say a full and equal being.<sup>7</sup> In your request for her complete personality in the marital union lust is set aside, dissolving in the full being. That is why there is no sense to the talk of the ill-informed purporting that Christianity is antagonistic towards the physical body. Some of the patristic fathers have said that the body was created by God in his liking

and image. Likewise, we shall arise on the Day of Resurrection in bodily form, and we shall remain in it, giving light and praise in the Kingdom forever. Christianity is not to be confounded with corporal asceticism. What it does denote is an emancipation from the all-consuming fixation with the body, even as she is an emancipation from the total devotion to the bare intellect unenlightened by God. We do not suppress the body even as we do not suppress the mind. Rather, we are to monitor them and to call the Lord to ward over them so that we may remain true to our divine image, that is to say loyal to our unifying, integrating code of living. And the means to achieve this integration of life is love.

Paul the Apostle had this to say: “Oh ye men, love your women as Christ loved the Church, and submit yourself for their sake (Ephesus 25:5).<sup>8</sup> The love referred to here is the charity (*Agápē/mahabba*) bequeathed to us by God. If the intent here had been the natural arousal or emotional attraction then the apostle would have had no reason to utter any injunction. One does call for an already existing or pre-supposed emotion or desire. One calls for an obligation. As the famous philosopher Kierkegaard mentioned: To love your neighbor as yourself means that it is your duty to love him. The apostle exhorted man to love his wife until death, and this is not something which comes from mere nature. Passion [*‘ishq*] does not suffice as it is bound to “wither like the desert flower” in the words of Isaiah.<sup>9</sup> It is in need of the love [*mahabba*] which descends from your Lord.

Paul goes further in his contemplation on the matter, saying: “He who loves his wife loves himself.” This complete correspondence and identification of the two individuals cannot occur unless God bestows on them his great favor and kindness so that all aversion - stemming from dif-



ferences in character - dissipates between them. By necessity, the relationship of love has its moments of mutual attraction and repulsion. This is why there is this repeated clash between the two lovers. The state of the lover does not save man, and does not make him one with the other as the divine word wants: "For this reason, man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one body."<sup>10</sup> In fact, the two beings are susceptible to hate. Shared tastes, affinities of minds, intelligence, and beauty may prepare the way for union, but these are not inevitable guarantees. The flesh, sentiments and lust are places of possible meeting, yet anything from the earth is no more than an energy or a possibility. There is no union between man and woman until and unless the divine care [*'atf*] descends on them. At that point, the two are part of the body of Christ.

There is no way for lust [*'ishq*] to be transformed into the divine love [*mahabba ilahiyya*] bestowed on the husband or wife, or both of them together. In writing these lines I did not deny the great importance of desire in marriage and its beneficial role for its perpetuation, but rather I did not deem it an essential component in the formation of Christian matrimony. God alone, in his unending love, is the creating element in whose absence there is no meaning to the sacred mystery of marriage. These lines are a rejoinder to all the modern movements claiming, in a nutshell: "If there is nothing left of love, there is nothing left of marriage." You may expend your entire energy for a spouse you desire or on one you do not desire. The most odious thing in my mind is for a marriage to be dissolved because it appeared to the court that there was a lack of harmony between the two parties. "Scientific books" may speak in this manner about the lack of sexual com-

patibility. This is a shallow and ludicrous expression. You will find "hearts whose love reviles each other," as the poet says. In times of discord, there is then a call for reconciliation which comes about amongst us [Christians] by ways of Jesus Christ. He who wants something else apart from this has chosen hell for himself, moving from divorce to divorce. Such a person may choose to immerse himself in the flame of the flesh, blood and agitation without partaking in a marriage like the wonderful wedding of Cana which Jesus and his disciples were invited to.

Jesus transformed water into wine, a symbol for divine ecstasy and the last supper. There is no human being, whatever his allure and attraction, who can immerse you in his being forever since none of us is overfilled with the same abundant tenderness, understanding, solicitude and warmth night and day. Conversely, it is impossible for you to consistently inspire admiration in your counterpart with the same energy day in and day out. For this reason, it was seen as indispensable for the groom to show a capacity for spiritual giving prior to his entering a nuptial union. If he is an immature adolescent he will confuse marriage and lust in his mind and (falsely) suppose that the latter contains the power of perpetuation.

To be sure, my counsel to a man is not to marry a woman who does not attract him, relying solely on the divine blessing. This would be a big gamble since we are of flesh and blood. However: maybe the lust and infatuation will not be an overflowing river, nor a blazing flame, but perhaps, on the level of your natural dispositions, there is a kind of mutual attraction and understanding. There is a minimum level of shared characteristics making cohabitation under one roof possible. The upshot of what I said is simply: do not think that lust



is everything and that marriage will endure with it. I additionally stated that the divine love manifested in the spousal union is what sanctifies the house, and allows marriage to ascend from a mere co-existence to an abode for God's presence.

The Lord teaches us from where we are. Should we be in a married state, he will rear us from and in it. Should we be at work, he will do the same there. Your Lord does not eliminate anything existing but sanctifies and impels everything to communicate with the Divine so that this creation can assume its full meaning. Marital love is but the implementation of the command to love your neighbor, yet it is also in emotional accord with our natural instincts which it transmutes from their natural state to one in which you are in harmony with God, as if, in married life, we have tasted something of heaven.

Marriage then begins in the natural realm, and endures through divine blessing. Any relation devoid of the latter amounts

to a mere registration in the archives of the state and church. At first, the unification of the spouses is an oath and a contract; to the degree that the vow is realized, the family becomes a small church and an image prefiguring our life in the Kingdom of God. As man struggles to bring his life in unison with God, the struggle for the unity of his house and family proceeds in lock-step. Everything else is merely an alignment of body to body, or wealth to wealth. For this reason I am not a believer in teaching what is called the "preparation for married life" or the "approaches to sex" since there is no sex apart from emotions, and no emotions outside of the entire being, and no being, at depth, without God. May each of us seek to be at one with the Lord, may one cleanse oneself in seeking this communion, for this is what enables one to meet the other in a balanced and healthy state of mind. As for the man who fancies that his money or prestige may safeguard the loyalty of his woman, he is deceiving

himself. And the woman who calculates that her charms shall retain her husband is equally foolish. Nothing external can truly summon the other. The problem is that we do not seek the inner essence of the other, but his body or what is in his possession. Once we learn how to enter into matrimony while each of us is in our God-given splendor, then we will have married in the true sense and become initiated to the secret.

*Translated by Mark Farba*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?” (Matthew 6: 28-30)

<sup>2</sup> “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the possibly Semitic etymology of *Agapé*, see the supplement with Semitic, largely trilateral roots in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), pp. 2056-2066. and the groundbreaking studies by Theo Vennemann, *Europa Vasconica - Europa Semitica*. Trends in linguistics. Studies and monographs, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, Livre II, « Les Mystiques Arabes » (Paris : Libraire Plon, 1972), p.111.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Claudel, *L'Otage suivi de Le Pain Dur et Le Père humilié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> « *L'homme n'est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur veut que qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête.* » Blaise Pascal, *Les Pensées*, (Paris: Guillaume Desprez et Jean Desessartz, 1714), VI, 358.

<sup>7</sup> “Once she is man’s equal, woman cannot be ‘man’s goal’ as Novalis supposed, thus reviving courtly mysticism. Yet at the same time, she escapes the bestial abasement that sooner or later must be the price of divinizing a creature. But this equality is not to be in a modern sense of revindication of rights. It emanates from the mystery of love. It is but the sign and proof of the victory of Agape over Eros. For the truly reciprocal love exacts and creates the equality between the lovers. God manifests his love for man in exacting that man be holy as God is holy. And man evidences his love for a woman by treating her as a fully human person, not as a fairy from some legend – half-divine, half-bacchante, a fantasy of reverie and sex.” *“La femme étant l’égale de l’homme, elle ne peut donc être ‘le but de l’homme’ comme le croira cependant Novalis, renouvelant la mystique courtoise et les vieilles traditions celtiques. En même temps, elle échappe à l’abaissement bestial qui tôt ou tard est la rançon d’une divinisation de la créature. Mais cette égalité ne doit pas être entendue au sens moderne et revendicateur. Elle procède du mystère de l’amour. Elle n’est que le signe et la démonstration du triomphe d’Agapè sur éros. Car l’amour réellement réciproque exige et crée l’égalité de ceux qui s’aiment. Dieu manifeste son amour pour l’homme en exigeant que l’homme soit saint comme Dieu est saint. Et l’homme témoigne de son amour pour une femme en la traitant comme une personne humaine totale – non comme une fée de la légende, mi-déesse mi-Bacchante, rêve et sexe.* » Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, p. 338.

<sup>8</sup> The imperative “love” invoked by Paul corresponds to the Greek “*agapáo*” referred to in the preface of this essay.

<sup>9</sup> (Isaiah 40:8)

<sup>10</sup> (Genesis 2: 24), (Matthew 19:6).



## A Charter for Compassion

*By Karen Armstrong*

As a religious historian, it has long been frustrating to me that religion, which should be making a major contribution to one of the chief tasks of our time — to build a global community where people of all persuasions can live together in harmony — is often seen as part of the problem. All too often the voices of extremism and hatred drown the more moderate voices that speak of respect for every single human being. As a result, religion is often seen as inherently intolerant and the religious traditions are widely assumed to be locked in sterile rivalry. This of course is not correct. The great traditions are profoundly different; each has its particular genius and

each its unique insights. But on one point they agree. They all insist that compassion lies at the heart of the spiritual and ethical life; that it is the test of true religiosity; and that it helps to bring us into relation with what is called God, Nirvana, Brahman or Dao. It is an ideal that has a direct bearing on our polarized world.

Every single one of the world faiths has developed its own version of what has been called the Golden Rule: “Do not treat others as you would not like to be treated yourself” — or, in its positive form: “Always treat others as you wish to be treated.” One of the first to insist that religion was inseparable from altruism was Confucius (551—479 BCE). When his disciples asked him: What is the thread

that runs through all your teaching? What can we put into practice all day and every day? Confucius replied: “Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”<sup>1</sup> The Golden Rule required you — “all day and every day” — to look into your own heart, discover what gives you pain, and then refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else. A story attributed to the Rabbi Hillel, the older contemporary of Jesus says that one day Hillel was approached by a pagan, who promised to convert to Judaism if he could recite the whole of Jewish teaching while he stood on one leg. Hillel replied: “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the Torah and everything else is only commentary; Go and study it!”<sup>2</sup> It was an extraordinary and deliberately provocative statement: there was no mention of the existence of God, the creation of the world, the Exodus from Egypt or the 613 commandments of the Law of Moses. This was all merely “commentary,” a “gloss” on the Golden Rule.

In the same spirit, H. H. the Dalai Lama has said: “My religion is kindness.” For Jesus, like Hillel, the meaning of the Law and the Prophets could be summed up in the command: “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you.”<sup>3</sup> In an oft-quoted *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said: “Not one of you can be a believer if he does not desire for his neighbour what he desires for himself.” This did not, of course, imply that all the other rituals, beliefs and practices were worthless or irrelevant. Rather, it suggests that if religious enthusiasm issues in hatred, intolerance, or unkindness instead of compassion, something is gravely amiss. St Paul expressed this memorably:

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without charity, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal

clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but am without charity, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without charity, it will do me no good whatever.<sup>4</sup>

Compassion is not an attitude of sloppy, uncritical benevolence. It is not solely about pity. The English word comes from the Latin *patior* and the Greek *pathein*, which means to “suffer or endure.” The Golden Rule requires a disciplined effort to “experience with” the other. “All day and every day” you have to make a deliberate intellectual and imaginative attempt to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes.

All the traditions also make it clear that you cannot confine your benevolence to your own ideological, national, familial or religious group. You must have what the Chinese sage Mozi (480—390 BCE) called *jian ai*, “concern for everybody.”<sup>5</sup> It was incumbent upon you to honour the foreigner. “If a stranger lives with you in your land,” says the biblical book of Leviticus, “do not molest him. You must count him as one of your fellow-countrymen and love him as yourself — for you were once strangers in Egypt.”<sup>6</sup> Here again we see the fundamental dynamic of the Golden Rule. Remember the suffering you experienced in the past, and refuse to inflict it on the stranger in your midst. In the Qur’an, which in its entirety can be seen as a call to compassion, God tells humanity: “Behold we have created you all out of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another.”<sup>7</sup> The experience of living compassionately in your own community, which is bound to include some people

do not find congenial, prepares you for the more challenging task of becoming acquainted with the foreigner and the alien. The purpose of a nation or a tribe is not to kill, occupy, colonise, dominate, conquer or exploit other peoples to all.

Jesus took the teaching of Leviticus a step further.

You have heard how it was said: *You must love your neighbour* (Leviticus 19:18) and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>8</sup>

The written Torah does not include the teaching "hate your enemy." Jesus was using a contemporary Aramaic idiom, which meant "you do not have to love your enemy." But Jesus insisted that we do. The word "love" needs commentary. Neither Jesus nor Leviticus, which he was quoting, required emotional tenderness towards the enemy. Leviticus is a legal text and talk about feelings would be as inappropriate as they would be in a Supreme Court ruling. "Love" was a legal term, used in the ancient Near East in international treaties. Two kings would promise to "love" each other, which did not mean they would become best friends, but that they undertook to give their allies practical help and loyalty. You would come to his aid and seek his best interests, even if this went against your own. This kind of "love" is practical

and attainable. Indeed, it is essential; we have witnessed too many exploitative, self-interested and short-term policies which have lamentably failed to treat other nations with the respect they deserve. Many of our current problems can be traced back to such behaviour.

The compassionate ideal is not a sentimental or romantic dream. The great teachers and prophets who preached the Golden Rule were living in times like our own in which violence and warfare had reached unprecedented heights. They were also living in a nascent market economy, which brought benefits but also problems. This is particularly clear in the case of the Prophet Muhammad, who brought the Qur'an to his people when Mecca had reached the zenith of its commercial power and at a time when tribal warfare had reached a crescendo. In this climate of aggression and greed, the Qur'an's compassionate message asserted that this was the sustainable way forward.

Today in a dramatically shrunken world, we are all neighbours. We have never been so tightly meshed together. When the value of stocks falls in one country, there is a ripple, domino effect throughout the markets of the world. What happens in Afghanistan, Iraq or Gaza today can have repercussions in New York or London tomorrow. The entire human race faces the terrible possibility of environmental catastrophe. We cannot live without the other; our fates are tightly bound together, and we have become aware of our deep interdependence. And yet we are dangerously divided. In an age where, increasingly, small groups will have powers of destruction that hitherto belonged only to the nation state, it is clear that unless we learn to apply the Golden Rule globally, treating all peoples, all nations as we would wish to be treated ourselves, we are unlikely to



have a viable world to hand on to the next generation. We have to “love” each other in the practical sense prescribed by Leviticus. We need a global democracy, where all voices are heard and where everybody’s aspirations and fears are taken seriously — not simply those of the rich and the powerful. Any ideology that preaches hatred, suspicion or exclusion is failing the test of our time.

Even though the world faith traditions are uniquely positioned to make a major contribution to the creation of a peaceful and just world order, we do not hear this compassionate voice. But I was also aware from my travels that in people all over the world — in the East and the West — there was a hunger for a more compassionate expression of religion. Then in 2008 I heard that I had won the TED Prize. Every year, TED Conferences ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) awards

prizes to people they think have made a difference but who, with their help, could make even more of an impact. They give you some money, but more importantly they give you a wish for a better world, which they will try to make true. Other winners have included former President Bill Clinton, the scientist E. O. Wilson and the British chef Jamie Oliver. I asked TED to help me to create, propagate and launch a Charter for Compassion, which would be composed by leading thinkers and activists in all the major faiths and would restore the Golden Rule to the centre of religion and morality. At a time when the world faiths are seen to

be at loggerheads, this would be an act of cooperation, demonstrating that despite our differences we could work together for a more peaceful world.

I cannot praise the energy and creativity of TED highly enough. First they created a multilingual website and people were invited to comment, week by week, in Arabic, Hebrew, Urdu, English and Spanish on a draft charter which I had drawn up. This was to be a grassroots document to which people had a sense of ownership. Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world responded and their comments were collated and presented to the Council of Conscience, a panel of thinkers from six major religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism), which met in Switzerland in February 2009. Council members included H.E. Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt, Archbishop

Desmond Tutu, the Reverend John Chane, Bishop of Washington, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Centre of Reform Judaism, and the Reverend Peter Storey, who had worked alongside Tutu and Nelson Mandela in the struggle against apartheid. In Switzerland we began to put the Charter together and continued our discussions by email. This was the final draft on which we all agreed.

**The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.**

**Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of the world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.**

**It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently, out of spite, chauvinism or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic human rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others — even our enemies — is a denial of our common humanity.**

**We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.**

**We therefore call upon all men and women:**

**To restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion.**

**To return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate.**

**To ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures**

**To encourage an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings — even those regarded as enemies**

**We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries.**

**Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.**

We were all convinced that the Charter must essentially be a summons to action. It could not simply be a statement of intent; like any religious teaching, it should issue in dedicated practice.

The Charter implies that we have a choice. We can either emphasize those aspects of our tradition — religious or secular — which are aggressive, exclusive, and intolerant, or we can stress those that advocate respect for the inviolable rights of others. This will require a creative effort. It means that we have to study our scriptures to bring their compassionate ethos to the fore; it also requires us to look seriously at those texts that are often abused or tak-



en out of context by extremists to justify atrocity. How should they be understood in our troubled world? We need to take great care about the way we educate the young about other nations and different religious traditions. We need to raise consciousness about bigoted, uncompassionate speech in the same way as feminists and civil rights activists made people aware of the bias in their language on matters of gender and race. This reminds us that it is possible to change habits of heart and mind. We can change our world, if we make a deliberate, concerted effort, working together across the religious, political and economic divides.

The Charter was launched in sixty different locations throughout the world on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009. On plaques, designed *pro bono* by a member of the TED community, the Charter, now translated into several different languages, was put up in religious houses of worship across the road as well as in such locations as the Karachi Press Club and Sydney Opera House. That weekend hundreds of sermons in various religious traditions were preached on the Charter and thousands affirmed the Charter on [www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org) on the day of the launch, including HH the Dalai Lama, Queen Rania of Jordan and Richard Branson. We need a lot of signatures if the Charter is to have "teeth" and we shall shortly be starting a big promotional campaign to encourage more people to affirm. We now have nearly 200 partners located in almost every region of the globe and the numbers are growing almost daily. These are institutions that have long been working in the field but now have the opportunity to work together. They have their own website and we are planning virtual conferences every few weeks so that partners can share ideas and projects.

One of the most exciting developments since the launch is that people clearly do feel that they own the Charter. Instead of waiting for directives from on high, they have taken the Charter and are running with it. Only today I learned that one of our partners has adapted the Charter for the use of children and is working to have it included in primary school curricula. Our Ethiopian partners declared April 5<sup>th</sup> Golden Rule Day and on that date the first Golden Rule Ceremony was held in the United Nations Building in New York. We hope to make this an annual opportunity for the media, educators, and religious leaders to focus on the importance of compassion, bringing it to the forefront of people's minds. Our Australian partners will present the Charter in the Parliament in Canberra on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2010, and are working with two major universities to get students involved. In Singapore, parliamentarians are working to integrate the Charter with public policies. In Malaysia, partners erected a Wall of Compassion in Kuala Lumpur and founded an organization dedicated to promoting the Charter. On April 24, 2010, Seattle declared itself the first City of Compassion and invited other cities to do the same.

We are fortunate that the Fetzer Institute, which has long been working to advance Compassion and Forgiveness, has taken the Charter under its wing. The Fetzer team are especially keen to promote an international Youth Movement for compassion. Education is crucial. I have become acutely aware that many people are confused about the meaning of compassion. The word seems to have fallen out of the public domain so that it is often equated with feeling sorry for somebody. This mistaken idea is both widespread and engrained. I recently gave a lecture in the Netherlands in which I explicitly said that

compassion did not consist solely in that kind of sympathy. But when the text of my lecture was published in Dutch in the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, on every single occasion, English word “compassion” was translated with the Dutch word for “pity.” I have therefore just completed work on a “Vook” ([www.vook.com](http://www.vook.com)). This is a new technology, a cross between a book and a video; people will be able to download it onto the I-pads and other electronic devices. My vook is entitled “Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life,” and I hope it will enhance people’s understanding of what compassion involves. It will also appear in several languages as a short book.

In April 2010, I visited the United Arab Emirates to promote the Charter there. Some months before the launch, TEDster Badr Jafar, Executive Director of the Crescent Petroleum Group of companies, undertook to promote the Charter in the Middle East and, despite his massive business obligations, has been a heroic ambassador of compassion in the region. As soon as Badr presented the Charter to H.H. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed al-Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah, he immediately saw its relevance, became the first Arab leader to affirm the Charter, and warmly invited me to the UAE. During my visit, I spoke about the Charter at the American University of Sharjah as well as the neighbouring University of Sharjah and was enormously impressed by the intelligent interest of the students. Somebody told me that after one of my lectures she had come across a large group of students, passionately discussing how best they could live a compassionate life. They were quick to grasp the global implications of the Charter, not only because Sharjah’s University City welcomes students from over 45 different countries, but also because many of the students take part in a project called Global Vision, work-

ing practically in impoverished regions in East Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and returning with new insight about the pain and problems of the wider world.

On the last day of my visit, I was privileged to meet H.E. Sheikh Nahyan ibn Mubarak al-Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research at his Majlis in Abu Dhabi. He too gave the Charter his wholehearted support. Badr and I then left for Dubai, where I addressed members of the local chapter of the Young Presidents’ Organization. At the end of the evening, one of them promised that his company would become the Compassionate Company. It was an inspiring visit and I very much look forward to returning. The Charter is now enshrined in all the buildings of Crescent Petroleum, it will be installed throughout University City in Sharjah; and both H. H. Sheikh Sultan and H. E. Sheikh Nahyan have undertaken to put plaques up in all the buildings they control — which is a lot of buildings. The UAE could well become a global leader in the work to create a more compassionate world.

The task before us is immense. As I said on November 9<sup>th</sup> when I unveiled the Charter in Washington DC, the launch is only the beginning of a voyage. The challenge is to translate the Charter into creative action that will make compassion an effective force in the world. That will not be easy. Compassion is a human quality; it is what makes a mother get up every night to tend her child, no matter how exhausted she feels. It is what makes us stay with our dying relatives, instead of walking away when they are approaching the end of their lives, as other species do. We have to cultivate compassion as assiduously as a dancer enhances her natural ability to run and jump and, after years of disciplined practice, finds that she is able to move with unearthly grace and perform feats that are

impossible for an untrained body. The great sages of the past tell us that the disciplined practice of compassion enables us to develop new capacities of mind and heart. Those who practice the Golden Rule assiduously have found it personally transformative. But we must not forget that greed, selfishness and aggression are also human characteristics — and that they characterise a good deal of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first decade of our century has been a decade of war and terror. To make the second a decade of compassion will require a mighty effort.

But we should not despair. Nor should we succumb to the voices of scepticism. The fact that so many people in so many different parts of the world have been excited by the Charter and are working so creatively with it shows that there is appetite for the task. I drew great encouragement from the wise words of Sheikh Nahyan. Speaking of the duty incumbent upon us all to do all we can to make the world a better place, he told me a story he had heard from an environmentalist. There was once a forest fire; all the animals gazed aghast, paralysed by the spectacle of the approaching inferno. But the elephant kept filling his trunk at a nearby stream and repeatedly, tirelessly attempted to extinguish the flames. When the more sceptical animals laughed at him, he simply replied: "At least I am doing *something* to ward off the conflagration."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Analects 15: 24 cf. 4:15 in Arthur Waley, trans. and ed., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York, 1992)

<sup>2</sup> B. Shabbat 31a

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7: 12. All quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 13:1—3

<sup>5</sup> The Book of Mozi 3.16

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 19:34

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an 49.13 in Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:43 —48



## Family, Nation, and the World

by Tu Weiming

An unintended consequence of Matteo Ricci's 'introduction' of Catholicism to China and the Jesuits' China experience in the seventeenth century was the Chinese intellectual contribution to the Enlightenment in Europe. Through missionary reports, intellectuals in France, England, Italy and Germany became aware of the humanistic splendor of Chinese civilization. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Quesnay, Diderot, the *philosophes*, the physiocrats, and the Deists were fascinated by Chinese world view, cosmological thinking, benevolent autocr-

racy, and secular ethics. While the vogue for things Chinese that overwhelmed Eighteenth-century Europe was more a craze for *chinoiserie* than a quest for philosophical insight, Confucian China was an intellectual challenge to the self-reflexivity of some of the most brilliant Western minds. Unfortunately, the effects of the Enlightenment mentality, especially in its nineteenth-century Eurocentric incarnation, on China and her self-perception as a developing modern state has been devastating.

The modern West's dichotomous mode of thinking (spirit/matter, mind/body, physical/mental, sacred/profane, creator/crea-

ture, God/man, subject/object) is diametrically opposed to the Chinese habits of the heart. Informed by Bacon's knowledge as power and Darwin's survival through competitiveness, the Enlightenment mentality is so radically different from any style of thought familiar to the Chinese mind that it challenges all dimensions of the Sinic world. The Enlightenment faith in instrumental rationality fueled by the Faustian drive to explore, know, subdue, and control made spectacular progress in science, technology, industrial capitalism, nation-building, democratic polity, legal system, educational institution, multinational cooperation, and military hardware.<sup>1</sup> As the international rules of the game, defined in terms of wealth and power, were superimposed on China by gunboat diplomacy, the Chinese intellectuals countenanced the inevitability of Westernization and acted accordingly.

The sense of urgency that prompted May Fourth (1919) generation Chinese thinkers to advocate wholesale westernization as a precondition for cultural survival was disorienting and self-defeating.<sup>2</sup> The deliberate choice to undermine rich spiritual resources and to embark on a materialist path to save the nation led to revolutionary romanticism and populist scientism. The demand for effective action and demonstrable results was so compelling that the life of the mind was marginalized. As a consequence, there was little room for reflection, let alone meditative thinking. For philosophy, the outcome was disastrous. In this regard, the modern fate of Chinese intellectuals was much worse than their Indian counterparts. While centuries of colonization did not break the backbone of Indian spirituality, the semi-colonial status prompted the Chinese intelligentsia to reject *in toto* and by choice all the spiritual traditions that defined China's soul. We

have only just begun to see indications that the Chinese thinkers are recovering from this externally imposed and internally inflicted malaise.

With all of its boundless energy and creative impulse, the Enlightenment mentality is incapable of reflecting on things at hand, oblivious to the "holy rite" of human-relatedness, and ignorant of self-cultivation as an art of living. The collapse of the former Soviet Union may have destroyed the Chinese Communist faith in the inevitable historical process precipitated by the revolutionary vanguard in the strategy of class struggle for universal equality. However, the assumption that human beings are rational animals endowed with inalienable rights and motivated by their self-interest to maximize profit in the market place is a persuasive, if not inspiring ideology in the People's Republic of China. Market economy, democratic polity, and individualism, perceived by Talcott Parsons as the three inseparable dimensions of modernity, are likely to loom large in China's intellectual discussion. The Enlightenment mentality is live and well in cultural China. Understandably, scholars like Vera Schwarcz and Li Zhehou have argued, in their reflection on the May Fourth movement, that the basic intellectual problem in the tragic history of China's modernization was that national sentiments to save the nation overshadowed the need for a deep understanding of the Enlightenment. This lamentable outcome made China's march toward modernity painfully tortuous. The assumption is that the concerted effort to learn from the West was frustrated by the burning desire for national survival. As a result, the time was too short and the space too limited for Enlightenment ideals such as liberty, equality, rationality, and due process of law to grow and flourish in the Chinese intellectual soil. It may have taken

centuries for science and democracy to become fully established in Western Europe and North America, but the Westernizers and, by implication, the modernizers had only a few decades to try to transform China in the spirit of science and democracy. However, some of the difficulties lay in the ambiguity of the Enlightenment mentality itself as well. The Chinese Westernizers and modernizers, seasoned in the Enlightenment mentality, were all committed political activists with a passion to save China from the dark history of backwardness, its own feudal past.

The ills of the Chinese family as characterized by the authoritarianism of the three bonds (domination of the father over the son, the ruler over the minister, and the husband over the wife) have been thoroughly critiqued by some of the most articulate and influential writers in modern China. Ba Jin's novel, *The Family*, representative of the iconoclastic ethos of the May Fourth generation, poignantly reminds us that the Confucian idea of "home," in the perspective of contemporary consciousness informed by Western liberal democratic ideas, is actually a "prison house" denying the basic rights of the individual and enslaving the creative energy of the young. Indeed, Confucian family ethics as depicted by the indignant pen of Lu Xun with telling effectiveness was no more than "ritual teaching." Such an outmoded education, instead of humanizing the world, contains the subtle message of cannibalism, or, in his graphic phrase: "Eat people!" The slogan, "Down with Confucius and Sons!" was directed against the feudal past in general and the Confucian family in particular. Understandably, even those who advocated the revival of Confucian humanism, acknowledged that the Confucian family ethic was the single most important cultural factor inhibiting the modernization

of the Sinic world. Both Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong propounded the destruction of family particularism as a precondition for the revitalization of inclusive Confucian humanism. Xiong Shili, the Confucian thinker, straightforwardly condemned the family as the source of all evils.

The rise of Maoism, as the ruling ideology for China's modernization in the 1950s, further intensified the critique of Confucian family ethics. As the confluence of several seemingly incompatible currents of thought, all under the disguise of the "Enlightenment mentality": positivistic scientism, romantic revolutionism, agrarianism, iconoclasm, industrial modernism, and nativistic spiritualism, the thought of Mao Zedong was incompatible with Confucian humanism in general and Confucian family ethics in particular. The belief that totalistic social transformation based on the universal laws of historical progress is possible, that continuous revolution as the development of consciousness as well as material goods will eventually eliminate China's backwardness, that the peasants are the motive force for China's march toward modernity, that the destruction of China's feudal legacy is required to welcome the brave new world may have been a naive and distorted version of the Enlightenment, but, for almost half a century, it was taken for granted as a hope, a faith, indeed a light source for the future. In this peculiar version of the Enlightenment, Confucian conceptions of community, not only the family but all modalities of human interaction (the five dyadic relationships for example) were relegated to the dustbin of history.

In a contemporary perspective, while we are willing to grant that the modernization project as exemplified by the Western Europe and North America is now the common heritage of humanity, we should not be blind to the serious contradictions

inherent in the project and the explosive destructiveness embodied in the dynamics of the modern West. The legacy of the Enlightenment is pregnant with disorienting ambiguities. The values it espouses do not cohere as an integrated value system recommending a coordinated ethical course of action. For example, the conflict between liberty and equality is often unresolvable.

An urgent task for the community of like-minded persons deeply concerned about degradation of the environment, social disintegration, and the lack of any form of distributive justice is to rethink the Enlightenment heritage. The paradox is that we cannot afford to uncritically accept its inner logic in light of the unintended negative consequences it has engendered for the global community; nor can we reject its relevance, with all of the fruitful ambiguities it entails, to our intellectual self-definition, present and future. There is no easy way out. We do not have an "either-or" choice.

The possibility of a radically different ethic or a new value system separate from and independent of the Enlightenment mentality is not realistic. It may even appear to be either cynical or hypercritical. We need to explore the spiritual resources that may help us to broaden the scope of the Enlightenment project, deepen its moral sensitivity, and, if necessary, creatively transform its genetic constraints in order to fully realize its potential as a world view for the human community as a whole.

### ***A New Ethic for the Global Community***

A key to the success of this intellectual joint venture is to recognize the conspicuous absence of the idea of community, let alone the global community, in the Enlightenment project. Fraternity, a functional equiv-

alent of community in the three cardinal virtues of the French Revolution, has received scanty attention in modern Western economic, political, and social thought. The willingness to tolerate inequality, the faith in the salvific power of self-interest, and the unbridled affirmation of aggressive egoism have greatly poisoned the good well of progress, reason, and individualism. The need to express a universal intent for the formation of a "global village" and to articulate a possible link between the fragmented world we experience in our ordinary daily existence and the imagined community for the human species as a whole is deeply felt by an increasing number of concerned intellectuals. Understandably, the basic unit in any society, past and present, namely the family, looms large in contemporary political discourse. The idea of global stewardship implicit in this line of thinking demands a new ethic significantly different from the Enlightenment mentality.

From the Confucian perspective, this requires, at a minimum, the replacement of the principle of self-interest, no matter how broadly defined, with the golden rule stated in the negative: "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you." The recognition that what we cherish as the best way to live our lives may not be applicable to the concrete situation of our neighbor is the initial step toward an empathetic appreciation of the integrity of the other. Since this version of the golden rule is stated in the negative, it will have to be augmented by a positive principle: "in order to establish ourselves, we must help others to establish themselves; in order to enlarge ourselves, we have to help us to enlarge themselves." An inclusive sense of community, based on mutual benefit and fruitful interchange, rather than the zero-

sum game in an economic calculus, need to be cultivated.

Industrial East Asia, under the influence of Confucian culture, has already developed a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested modern civilization.<sup>3</sup> It is now widely acknowledged that the co-existence of market economy with government leadership provides an important impetus for rapid economic development in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and, more recently, the People's Republic of China. Scholars in comparative politics have also noticed that the development of democratic polity in East Asia is not at all incompatible with meritocracy. Indeed, educational elitism, through competitive examinations, may have been instrumental in developing a style of leadership which enables the public sector to continuously attract the best talents among college graduates. In short,

the synergy engendered by individual initiatives with group orientation has made this region economically and politically the most dynamic area of the world since the Second World War.

The Westernization of Confucian Asia (including Japan, the two Koreas, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam) may have forever altered its spiritual landscape, but its indigenous resources (including Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, shamanism, and other folk religions) have the resiliency to resurface and make their presence known in a new synthesis.

In the Confucian perspective, neither capitalism nor socialism (both exemplify the Enlightenment mentality) addresses the issue of primordial ties: the embeddedness of the human condition. Specifically, the vital importance of ethnicity, gender, language, land, and religion in defining the





concrete living human being in a unique nexus of human relationships. The abstract universal principle in either the capitalist or the socialist conception of the *homo economicus* totally fails to account for the complexity and variability of human settlements that physically constitute the global community. The primordial ties, as culturally specific and historically contextualized ways of fashioning the human community, are diametrically opposed to the Enlightenment assumption that modernization naturally leads to homogenization. On the contrary, Confucian inclusive humanism may provide rich resources for us to develop an ethic that celebrates cultural diversity, respects difference, and encourages a plurality of spiritual orientations.

The caveat, of course, is that, having been humiliated and frustrated by the imperialist and colonial domination of the modern West for more than a century, the rise of industrial East Asia also symbolizes the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment heritage with a vengeance. Indeed, the mentality of Japan and the Four Mini- Dragons is characterized by mercantilism, commercialism, and international competitiveness. Surely, the possibility of their developing a more humane and sustainable community should not be exaggerated. However, this need not undermine the persuasive power of the Confucian idea that despite ethnic, linguistic, religious, social, political, and economic diversity, human community ought to be inclusive.

In the modern liberal-democratic perspective, the Confucian humanism clearly suffers from manifold shortcomings. In its overall spiritual orientation, the Confucian tradition apparently lacks a strong commitment to individualism. The issue of individualism as a reflection of modern ethos is complex but, undeniably, the dignity, autonomy, and independence of the person

is greatly valued in all modern societies. If a Confucian society, based on its cherished value of "learning for the sake of oneself" and the moral imperative of continuous self-realization, can generate ideas of basic liberties and rights and develop a legal system to protect the privacy of its citizenry, its belief in the person as a center of relationships rather than as an isolated individual may be conducive to stable democracy.

In its basic belief, the Confucian tradition apparently lacks ideas of radical transcendence, positive evil, and transcendental rationality. As a result, Confucian societies may not have rich resources to check the abuses of power by autocratic or paternalistic regimes. Modern Confucian societies must learn to appreciate the psychology of suspicion in conceptualizing the proper relationship between the government and the governed. Lord Acton's liberal dictum that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is particularly instructive to East Asian intellectuals, who have been too much seasoned in the Confucian scholar-official mentality to cultivate a critical spirit against the dictatorial tendency of strong rulership for their own well-being. The idea of God as the Absolute has been, by and large, effective in rendering all worldly structures of power relative in the West; the unintended healthy consequence of making political authority subsumed under a more transcending framework of meaning is eminently suited, as a prescription, to the East Asian vulnerability toward authoritarianism. Yet, the Confucian theory of the Mandate of Heaven, based on the ethic of responsibility of the elite, is more congenial to democratic polity than, say, the divine right of kings. The Confucian ideas of benevolent government, the duty-consciousness of the elite, and the right of the people to revolution are all consistent with

democratic demands for civility, impartiality, and public accountability. Actually, the Confucians are noted for their commitment to cultivating the value of reasonableness in ordinary daily human interaction for they believe that true social harmony is attainable only through communication and negotiation.

In its political philosophy, the Confucian tradition apparently lacks concepts of liberty, human rights, privacy, and due process of law. The Confucian predilection for rightness, duty, public-spiritedness, and ritual may have undermined the East Asian capacity to fully integrate freedoms of individual expression, inalienable political and civil rights, respect for the private sphere, and an independent judiciary. However, in a complex modern society, we can no longer afford to underscore the value of liberties without considering adequate political measures to protect the economically disadvantaged. The ills of an inefficient welfare system notwithstanding, the government must ensure that vicious competitiveness enhanced by market forces does not lead to unbearable inequalities. This requires the cultivation of a strong sense of culpability and answerability of business and government elite to the well-being of society at large. Confucian concern for duty is not at variance with the demand for rights. Actually, for a discourse on self-interest and privacy to have the salience it deserves, the development of a public sphere, where the spirit of impartiality is respected, is both desirable and necessary. Paradoxically, the formation of a civilized mode of conduct (a fiduciary commitment to the public good) by legal professionals may still be the most effective way to curtail concern for self-interests.

In its institutional structure, the Confucian tradition apparently lacks a mechanism and checks and balances against autocracy,

an adversarial division of labor within a constitutional framework, loyal opposition and total political participation. Authoritarianism, either harsh or soft, continues to haunt East Asian democracies. The penchant for consensus formation undermines the dynamism, engendered by a creative tension inherent in an adversarial system, in East Asian political culture. The patient tolerance and informed understanding of the role and function of the loyal opposition, characterized by most western democracies, is yet to have a presence in East Asia. Surely, multi-party elections have already become a reality of life for all industrial East Asian politicians. Even The People's Republic of China is experienced in voting behavior. However, while the political process within a constitutional framework is being worked out in most industrial East Asian societies, it will take years to create an ethos of civility and openness in intra-party communication. The idea of government for, of, and by the people is no longer merely wishful thinking in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons, but democratic polity, far from being an institutionalized mechanism fully integrated into the ordinary way of life, remains contentious, disruptive, and even explosive.

In interpersonal praxis, the Confucian tradition apparently lacks the precedents of social contract, civil society, and public sphere. However, the fruitful human interaction involved in "network capitalism," which has successfully extended to virtually all corners of the global community, suggests that the ethical requirements of complex business transactions, such as trust, reliability, responsibility, and obligation, rooted in Confucian culture, are a salient feature of this approach. Although, without a well-developed legal system, this way of generating wealth is hardly universalizable, it has already created a unique style

of economic and social development with far-reaching implications for the rest of the world. The emergence of public institutions in business, mass media, academia, religion, and the profession, independent of the political center and yet instrumental in shaping its long-term policies, enables industrial East Asia gradually to develop full-fledged civil societies. While it is difficult to predict the course of action of these emerging institutions which have made the idea of civil society intelligible to East Asian intellectuals, the increasing pluralism inevitably leads to new constellations in thought, religion, ethics, aesthetics, and world views. Whether or not a truly functioning public sphere adjudicated by communicative rationality will come into being in each of these newly industrial countries, the density of the human network and the complexity of the cultural texture have made them a remarkably modern exemplification of "organic solidarity" in Durkheim's conception of division of labor as a necessary condition for modernity.

The above discussion of the limitations of the Confucian tradition in the liberal-democratic perspective and the possible Confucian responses to the Enlightenment mentality suggest a new ethical horizon.

In ethical terms, what Confucian East Asia exemplifies is a significantly different form of modernity. Surely, market economy, democratic polity, and individualism are all present in East Asian modernity, but government leadership, meritocracy, and communitarianism have so fundamentally restructured the market as the "invisible hand," democracy as an adversarial system, and the individualistic ethos that the basic rules defining modernity in Western Europe and North America do not necessarily apply. The idealized notion of a human being as a rights-bearing individual motivated by self-interest who attempts to maximize

his profit through rational calculation in the market place adjudicated by a legal framework is certainly incompatible with the Confucian perception of the self as a center of relationships and the Confucian emphasis on duty-consciousness, general well-being, rightness, sympathy, and the moral transformation of ritual.

The re-presentation of the *Problematik* of community in European and American political discourses in recent years is symptomatic of the confluence of two apparently contradictory forces in the late twentieth century: the global village as both a virtual reality and an imagined community in our information age and the disintegration and restructuring of human togetherness at all levels, from family to nation.

It may not be immodest to say that the Confucian tradition can provide a spiritual resource for us to develop a new vision of community from the core of the Enlightenment project itself. The need to go beyond the Enlightenment mentality, without either deconstructing or abandoning its commitment to rationality, liberty, equality, human rights, and distributive justice, requires a thorough re-examination of the kind of global ethic that is necessary for human survival and flourishing.

### **Implications**

If we assume, as dictated by the East Asian example, that traditions shape the modernization process and, in a substantial way, define the meaning of being modern, what is the status of the claim that modernity must be conceived in terms of three inseparable dimensions: market economy, democratic polity, and individualism? Surely, the case at hand enhances the conviction that market economy, as a powerful engine of modernization, is a constitutive part of modernity.

It is worth noting, however, market economy, as it has been practiced in East Asia, is not at all incompatible with strong and comprehensive government participation. Often, political leadership provides necessary guidance for a functioning market. In both domestic coordination and foreign competition, economically sophisticated government officials are often instrumental in allowing for the smooth functioning of the system and for creating an environment for healthy growth. Collaboration between officialdom and the business community is the norm in East Asian societies and the pervasive and fruitful interaction between polity and economy is a defining characteristic of East Asian political economy. The authority of the government in adjudicating economic matters may take different forms: direct management (Singapore), active leadership (South Korea), informed guidance (Japan), passive interference (Taiwan), or positive non-interference (Hong Kong)--but the presence of the government in all weighty economic decisions is not only expected but also desired by the business community as well as the general public.

The universal applicability of democratic polity notwithstanding, the East Asian manifestations of the democratic idea strongly suggest that democratization as a process is not necessarily incompatible with bureaucratic meritocracy, educational elitism, and particularistic social networking. The western democratic experience itself has been significantly shaped by traditions of pragmatism, empiricism, skepticism, and gradualism as in the English case, anti-clericalism, rationalism, culturalism, and the revolutionary spirit as in the French case, and romanticism, nationalism, and ethnic pride as in the German case. And the continuous presence of a strong civil society as in the American case. The Confucian faith

in the betterment of the human condition through self-effort, commitment to family as the basic unit of society and to family ethics as the foundation of social stability, trust in the intrinsic value of moral education, belief in self-reliance, work ethic, and mutual aid and a sense of an organic unity with an ever-extending network of relationships provides rich cultural resources for East Asian democracies to develop their own distinctive features.

It is true that the Confucian rhetoric, as in a discussion of Asian values, may be used as a strategy for criticizing the indiscriminate imposition of Western ideas on the rest of the world. The new agenda to broaden human rights from exclusive emphasis on political and civil rights to include economic, social, and cultural rights may very well be perceived of as a strategic maneuver engineered by Asian leaders to divert attention from blatant human rights violations by authoritarian regimes in East Asia. While the need for East Asian societies under the influence of Confucian culture to free themselves from nepotism, authoritarianism, and male-chauvinism is obvious, democracy with Confucian characteristics is not only imaginable but may also become practicable.

East Asian intellectuals are actively involved in probing the Confucian tradition as a spiritual resource for economic development, nation-building, social stability, and cultural identity. But, the echoes of the iconoclastic attacks on Confucius and Sons still reverberate in the halls of academia and in the corridors of government throughout Japan and the Four Mini- Dragons. Paradoxically, the Confucian personality ideals (the authentic person, the worthy, or the sage) can be realized more fully in a liberal democratic society than either in a traditional imperial dictatorship or a modern authoritarian regime. East Asian



Confucian ethics must creatively transform itself in light of Enlightenment values before it can serve as an effective critique of the excessive individualism, pernicious competitiveness, and vicious litigiousness of the modern West.

Intellectuals in the Confucian world have been devoted students of Western learning (Dutch, British, French, German, and American) for more than a hundred years. As they became seasoned in the “universal” discourses exclusively informed by the Enlightenment mentality of the modern West, they began to raise challenging questions by drawing from their own indigenous spiritual traditions. The transvaluation of Confucian values as a creative response to the hegemonic discourses of Western Europe and North America seems a natural outcome of this intercultural communication. Part of the impetus came from a critical awareness

among Chinese intellectuals that Cultural China is no longer an agrarian society with its vast majority statically wedded to the land. For it is also one of the most dynamic migrant communities in the world.

With more than 36 million ethnic Chinese overseas, primarily in Southeast Asia and throughout the world, it is impossible to relegate the most enduring and dominant ethical system to the background by consigning it to either the “feudal past” or the “agrarian present.” China encompasses not only the largest farming population but also one of the most enterprising merchant classes in the emerging global community. If we assume that culture matters, that values people cherish or unconsciously uphold provide guidance for their action, that the motivational structure for people is not only relevant but crucial to their economic ethics, and that the life-orientation of a society makes a difference in the eco-

conomic (and political) behavior of its people, whether or not our current ethical thinking can provide strong enough of a moral basis for the kind of global stewardship essential to world peace is vitally important.

The matter is immensely complicated by the decision of the political leadership of the People's Republic of China (PRC), through the "reform and open" policy, to join the restless march toward modernity narrowly defined in terms of wealth and power. Already, an internal migration of more than 100 million people has occurred within the PRC mainly from the countryside to the cities, especially those along the southeastern coast where economic development has been most vibrant. As the tidal waves of commercialization begin to overwhelm the Chinese interior, the pressure of migration will be greatly enhanced.

In the perspective of "Cultural China," a second migration, as contrasted with the first migration of millions of Chinese from Guangdong and Fujian provinces to Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, is underway. Chinese with substantial financial resources in Southeast Asia, for reasons of political security, economic opportunity, cultural expression, or education for their children, have begun to emigrate to Australia, Canada, and the United States in the last two decades. The number will be greatly increased as residents of Hong Kong and Taiwan join the process. In the United States, ethnic Chinese from South Vietnam and students from the PRC in recent years have literally altered the landscapes of Chinatowns and international student communities throughout the country. On the other hand, it should also be noted that there has been a steady flow of highly qualified professionals in science and engineering returning from North America to industrial East Asia in recent decades.

If we broaden our scope to include both industrial and socialist East Asia, the presence of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities throughout the world further enhances the need to understand Confucian ethics.

I would like to quote, at this junction, a paragraph from Edwin Reischauer's prophetic statement made in 1973 and subsequently published as "The Sinic World in Perspective" in *Foreign Affairs*:

The peoples in East Asia...share certain key traits, such as group solidarity, an emphasis on the political unit, great organizational skills, a strong work ethic, and a tremendous drive for education. It is because of such traits that the Japanese could rise with unprecedented speed from being a small underdeveloped nation in the mid-nineteenth century to being a major imperial power in the early twentieth century and an economic superpower today.... And now her record is being paralleled by all the other East Asian units that are unencumbered by war or the economically blighting pall of communism, namely, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, which, like Hong Kong, is essentially a Chinese city-state. Throughout the non-East Asian countries of Southeast Asia, Chinese minorities remain so economically and educationally dominant as to cause serious political and social problems. One cannot but wonder what economic growth might be in store for Vietnam, if peace is ever achieved here, and for China and North Korea if their policies change enough to afford room for the economic drive of which their people are undoubtedly capable.<sup>4</sup>

If we maintain that Confucian ethics is an underlying East Asian value, two qualifications are required. First, the implicit designation of East Asia as "Confucian" in the

ethicoreligious sense is comparable to the validity and limitation of employing “Christian,” “Islamic,” “Hindu,” and “Buddhist” in identifying geopolitical regions such as Europe, the Middle East, India, or Southeast Asia. The matter is confounded by the religious pluralism of “Confucian” East Asia. However, it is not at all difficult to imagine that Shintoist or Buddhist Japan, shamanist, Buddhist or Christian Korea, and Daoist or Buddhist China are all constitutive parts of the East Asian spiritual landscape. Second, Confucian ethics so conceived is not a simple re-presentation of traditional Confucian teaching. Rather, it is a way of conceptualizing the form of life, the habits of the heart, or the social praxis of those societies which have been under the influence of Confucian education for centuries.

As we are confronted with the issue of a new world order in lieu of the exclusive dichotomy (capitalism and socialism) imposed by the super powers, we are easily tempted to come up with facile generalizations: “the end of history,” “the clash of civilizations,” or “the Pacific century.” The much more difficult and, hopefully, in the long haul, much more significant line of inquiry is to address truly fundamental issues confronting the global community:

Are we isolated individuals, or do we each live as a center of relationships? Is moral self-knowledge necessary for personal growth? Can any society prosper or endure without developing a basic sense of duty and responsibility among its members? Should our pluralistic society deliberately cultivate shared values and a common ground for human understanding? As we become acutely aware of our earth’s vulnerability and increasingly wary of social disintegration what are the critical spiritual questions to ask?

Since the Opium War (1839), China has endured many holocausts. Prior to 1949,



imperialism was the main culprit, but since the founding of the PRC, the erratic leadership and faulty policies must also share the blame. Although millions of Chinese died, the neighboring countries were not seriously affected and the outside world was, by and large, oblivious to what actually happened. Since 1979, China has been rapidly becoming an integral part of the global economic system. More than 30% of the Chinese economy is tied to international trade. Natural economic territories have emerged between Hong Kong and Quanzhou, Fujian and Taiwan, Shandong and South Korea. Japanese, European, and American as well as Hong Kong and Taiwanese investments are present in virtually all Chinese provinces. The return of Hong Kong to the PRC, the conflict across the Taiwan Straits, the economic and cultural interchange among overseas Chinese communities and between them and the motherland, the intra-regional communication in East Asia, the political and economic integration of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, and the rise of the Asia-Pacific region will all have substantial impact on our shrinking global community.

The revitalization of the Confucian discourse may contribute to the formation of a much needed communal critical self-consciousness among East Asian intellectuals. We may very well be in the very beginning of global history rather than witnessing the end of history. And, from a comparative cultural perspective, this new beginning must take as its point of departure dialogue rather than clash of civilizations. Our awareness of the danger of civilizational conflicts, rooted in ethnicity, language, land, and religion, makes the necessity of dialogue particularly compelling. An alternative model of sustainable development with emphasis on the ethical and spiritual

dimensions of human flourishing must be sought.

The time is long overdue to move beyond a mindset shaped by instrumental rationality and private interests. As the politics of domination fades, we witness the dawning of an age of communication, networking, negotiation, interaction, interfacing, and collaboration. Whether or not East Asian intellectuals, inspired by the Confucian spirit of self-cultivation, family cohesiveness, social solidarity, benevolent governance, and universal peace, will articulate an ethic of responsibility as Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese emigrate to other parts of the world is profoundly meaningful for global stewardship.

We can actually envision the Confucian perception of human flourishing, based upon the dignity of the person, in terms of a series of concentric circles: self, family, community, society, nation, world, and cosmos. We begin with a quest for true personal identity, an open and creatively transforming selfhood which, paradoxically, must be predicated on our ability to overcome selfishness and egoism. We cherish family cohesiveness. In order to do that, we have to go beyond nepotism. We embrace communal solidarity, but we have to transcend parochialism to fully realize its true value. We can be enriched by social integration, provided that we overcome ethnocentrism and chauvinistic culturalism. We are committed to national unity, but we ought to rise above aggressive nationalism so that we can be genuinely patriotic. We are inspired by human flourishing but we must endeavor not to be confined by anthropocentrism, the full meaning of humanity is anthropocosmic rather than anthropocentric. On the occasion of the international symposium on Islamic-Confucian dialogue organized by the University of Malaya (March 1995), the Deputy Prime



Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Iberhim, quoted a statement from Huston Smith's *The World's Religions*. It very much captures the Confucian spirit of self-transcendence:

In shifting the center of one's empathic concern from oneself to one's family one transcends selfishness. The move from family to community transcends nepotism. The move from community to nation transcends parochialism and the move to all humanity counters chauvinistic nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

We can even add: the move towards the unity of Heaven and humanity (*tianrenheyi*)

transcends secular humanism, a blatant form of anthropocentrism characteristic of the Enlightenment mentality. Indeed, it is in the anthropocosmic spirit that we find communication between self and community, harmony between human species and nature, and mutuality between humanity and Heaven. This integrated comprehensive vision of learning to be human can very well serve as a point of departure for a new discourse on the global ethic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more on Weber's distinction between instrumental and value-oriented rationality, see: Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). pp.6-20.

<sup>2</sup> Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth Movement. Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University), 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Tu Weiming, "Industrial East Asia: The Role of Culture," *Bulletin of American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 38, No. 7, April 1985: 9-20.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, "The Sinic World in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs*, 52, No. 2, January 1974, 341-48.

<sup>5</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, (San Francisco: Harper's, 1991), 182.



## Loving Compassion in Islam and Buddhism: Rahma and Karunā

**By Reza Shah-Kazemi**

Compassion, even on the human plane, is not just a sentiment, it is an existential quality. This existential quality presupposes a concrete sense of participation in the suffering of others, as is expressed by the etymology of the word: com-passion means to 'suffer with' another. The metaphysics of *tawhīd* finds its most appropriate ethical

expression in this quality, for when the illusion of separation is overcome, the suffering of the 'other' cannot be separated from oneself; the virtues of compassion and mercy, generosity and love thus become the hallmarks of the character of one who has truly realized Unity. Likewise, but from a different angle: when self-centredness is overcome, together with the worldliness, subtle or overt, which feeds it, then the same qualities centered on compassionate

love will flow forth naturally and spontaneously: these qualities, inherent in the spiritual substance or *fitra* of each soul, will no longer be constrained or suffocated by coagulations of egotism and worldliness. Rather, compassionate love will emanate to the whole of creation, the compassionate soul will reflect and radiate the all-encompassing grace of God. Speaking of two types, those who reject God and those who believe in Him, the Qur'ān declares:

*Unto each, the former and the latter, do  
We extend the gracious gift of thy Lord.  
And the gracious gift of thy Lord can  
never be confined (17:20).*

This is because God's *Rahma*, being infinite, can be excluded from nowhere, and from nobody: *My loving Compassion encompasses all things (7:156).*

Islam and Buddhism are not so far apart from each other as regards the role of this quality of compassionate love. Despite their very different conceptual starting-points, both traditions stress this human quality as a key ethical trait; and for both traditions, this human quality is inseparable from the Absolute—from *Allāh* in Islam, and the *Dharma*, or the Void (*Shūnya*) or *Nirvāna* in Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

In this article we intend to show ways in which the Islamic conception of *Rahma* helps to render explicit what is largely implicit in the earliest texts of the Pali canon; in this respect, it can be seen to serve a function similar to that of Mahayana Buddhism, wherein compassion comes to play a determinative role, elevated as the very principle, cosmological and not simply ethical, which motivates the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas*. We would therefore argue that for both Muslims and Buddhists, the quality of loving compassion must determine the core of one's personality, and it must

dominate the nature of one's conduct in relation to others; this ideal, at once ethical and spiritual, derives its ultimate justification and transformative power from the fact that it expresses on the human plane a principle which is rooted in the heart of the Absolute.

In both traditions compassion is inseparable from love, *mahabba* in Islam and *mettā* in Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> In Buddhism one even finds the compound *maitrī-karunā* 'love-compassion' which expresses the intertwining of these two principles; in Islam, likewise, *Rahma* cannot be adequately translated by the single English word 'compassion' or 'mercy', but requires the addition of the element of love. A compelling reason for translating *Rahma* as 'loving compassion' and not just 'compassion'—and certainly not just 'mercy'—is provided by the Prophet's use of this word in the following incident. At the conquest of Mecca, certain captives were brought to the Prophet. There was a woman among them, running frantically and calling for her baby; she found him, held him to her breast and fed him. The Prophet said to his companions: 'Do you think this woman would cast her child into the fire?' We said, 'No, she could not do such a thing.' He said, 'God is more lovingly compassionate (*arham*) to His servants than is this woman to her child.'<sup>3</sup> The *Rahma* of God is here defined by reference to a quality which all can recognize as love: the mother's acts of compassion and mercy stream forth from an overwhelming organic love for her child. One cannot love another without feeling compassionate to that person, while one *can* feel compassion for someone without necessarily loving that person.

The Jewish scholar Ben-Shemesh goes so far as to translate the *basmala* as 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Beloved' to bring home this key aspect of love

proper to the root of *Rahma*.<sup>4</sup> He argues that in both Arabic and Hebrew the meaning of love is strongly present in the root *r-h-m*, and gives the following evidence: Psalm number 18 contains the phrase: *Erhamha Adonay*—‘I love thee my Lord’.<sup>5</sup> In Aramaic/Syriac, the root *r-h-m* specifically denotes love, rather than ‘compassion’. One can thus feel the resonance of this Syriac connotation within the Arabic *Rahma*. Moreover, there is epigraphic evidence that early Christian sects in southern Arabic used the name *Rahmānan* as a name of God, and this would probably have been understood as ‘The Loving’.<sup>6</sup>

God’s *Rahma* is described by the Prophet as being greater than that of the woman for her child, implying that the transcendent prototype of this most loving and compassionate of all human qualities is found in the divine Reality. It is interesting to note that the Buddha refers to an almost identical image in order to bring home the meaning of *mettā*, the love that is inseparable from *karunā*. This is from a passage in the *Mettā-sutta* (‘Teaching on love’) in the Pali canon:

Even as a mother watches over and protects her child, her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all living beings, radiating friendliness over the entire world, above, below, and all around without limit. So let him cultivate a boundless good will towards the entire world, uncramped, free from ill will or enmity. Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all his waking hours, let him establish this mindfulness of good will, which men call the highest state!<sup>7</sup>

It is out of compassion, indeed, that the Buddha preached his *Dhamma*: his desire was to liberate people from suffering by enlightening them as to its cause, and show-

ing them the means—the ‘noble eightfold path’—to eliminate that cause. It is clear, then, that even in early Buddhism compassion was not just a cardinal virtue, it went to the very heart of the Buddhist *upāya*, the ‘expedient means’ or ‘saving strategy.’ However, it is not hard to see that in the later texts, those from which the Mahayana branch of Buddhism derive, the stress on compassion goes well beyond anything found in the earliest texts, those of the Pali canon, upon which the Theravada branch of Buddhism is based. In the latter, compassion is indeed fundamental and indispensable, but it remains a human virtue; in Mahayana texts, by contrast, it takes on altogether mythological dimensions, and enters into the definition of what most closely approximates the Personal God in Buddhism, namely, the Buddha of Infinite Light, *Amitābha*. By tracing the compassionate function of Gautama the sage back to its principal root, Mahayana Buddhism helps to solve a logical problem within the very structure of Theravada Buddhism, or at least makes explicit what is implicit in the earlier tradition. The logical problem is this: If, as the Buddha preached, there is no ultimate reality pertaining to the individual soul (this being the doctrine of *anattā*, ‘no soul’), from where does the compassion derive its substance, and its enlightening efficacy? If the soul is but a conglomeration of empirical and psychic envelopes (*skandhas*), with no essential reality, can the compassion manifested by such a soul have a more substantial reality than these ‘envelopes’ themselves? In other words, what is the ultimate source of the compassion of the Buddha?

A simple answer would be that this source is none other than the enlightened state itself: compassion flows forth from the very nature of Nirvana or *Shūnya*. But the question remains: how does compas-

sion spring forth from an *impersonal* or supra-personal state, when the very nature of compassion is so clearly *personal*, that is, it so intimately implies a personal will, actively and compassionately involved in the lives of suffering humanity, a personal will which, moreover, must at the same time be transcendent or absolute. It must be transcendent, otherwise it could not save relative beings through its compassion; but it must also assume a dimension of relativity, otherwise it would have no relation to living human beings. It is precisely this combination of absolute transcendence and personal compassion which is expressed in the Islamic conception of divine *Rahma*, and in the various heavenly Buddhas depicted in later Mahayana texts.<sup>8</sup>

According to these texts, the principle of compassion, so perfectly embodied in Gautama the sage, is depicted as a principle transcending his own empirical individuality. He insisted that one can only 'see' the Buddha in the light of the reality of the Dharma, the supreme principle,<sup>9</sup> of which he is an embodiment: 'Those who by my form did see me, and those who followed me by my voice, wrong are the efforts they engaged in; me those people will not see. From the Dharma one should see the Buddha, for the dharma-bodies are the guides.'<sup>10</sup> The compassion proper to the *Dharma* is universal; Gautama the sage manifested this quality in one particular modality. This relationship between the particular and the universal is expressed in Buddhism by means of the mythology of cosmic Buddhas existing in unimaginably distant aeons prior to the earthly appearance of the Gautama. Mahayana texts therefore present a picture of a 'Personal God' with diverse traits—the *Ādi-Buddha*, *Vairochana*, *Amitābha*, etc—without whose grace and mercy, one cannot attain salvation into the celestial domains known

as the 'Pure Land', let alone that state of *Nirvāna* wherein the various Buddhas themselves are all transcended.

It is clear, then, that Mahayana Buddhism comes close to the Islamic conception of divinity as regards the root of the quality of compassion. Both traditions make explicit a metaphysically irrefutable principle, one about which the Buddha himself was silent, but which he did not contradict: compassion cannot be exhausted by its purely human manifestation; on the contrary, it derives all its power and efficacy from its supra-human, absolute or 'divine' source. This source is transcendent, but insofar as it radiates towards all creatures, it assumes a 'personal' dimension, for it consists of an active, conscious and loving will to save all creatures: and to speak of such a will is to speak of some kind of 'person' directing that will.

In one respect, then, this can be seen as a personalization of the Absolute, bestowing upon the pure, ineffable and inconceivable Essence a personal or anthropomorphic dimension, a dimension without which it cannot enter into engagement with human persons. For the pure Absolute has no relation whatsoever with any conceivable relativity. But this personal dimension does not in any way diminish the intrinsic absoluteness of the Absolute. For the manifestation of such qualities as compassion, love, and mercy does not exhaust the nature of the Principle thus manifested. In Islamic terms, the pure Absolute is the Essence (*al-Dhāt*), transcending the Names and Qualities which are assumed by the Absolute in its relationship with the world; transcending these Names and Qualities implies transcending those 'personal' dimensions of God which presuppose and manifest these Names and Qualities.

The Islamic synthesis between two conceptions of God—the supra-Personal and

the Personal—can be seen as analogous to the synthesis effected by Mahayana Buddhism between the two dimensions of the Absolute. For the personal and supra-personal dimensions of *Allāh*, comprising all the qualities designated by all of the divine Names, are in perfect harmony and perfect synchronicity. There is no contradiction between asserting, on the one hand, that the Essence of God infinitely transcends all conceivable ‘personal’ qualities, and on the other, that God assumes these personal qualities for the sake of entering into compassionate, enlightening and saving relationship with His creatures. This Islamic synthesis can help to show that what has been called Mahayana ‘theism’ does not violate early Buddhism’s insistence on the impersonal nature of the Absolute, the transcendence of the *Dharma/Nirvāna/Shūnya* vis-à-vis all conceivable qualities, personal or otherwise.

### **Oneness and Compassion**

Islam also helps to answer the question which might be posed to a Buddhist: what is the connection between the metaphysics of unity—in terms of which there appears to be no ‘other’, no ‘dualism’, *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna* being ultimately identical—and the quality of compassion—which logically presupposes both an agent and a recipient of compassion, thus, a duality? Or it might be asked: is there a contradiction between the absolute transcendence of Reality, and the compassionate manifestation of this Reality? We would answer in terms of Islamic metaphysics that the oneness of Reality strictly *implies* compassion. For the oneness of God is not simply exclusive, it is also inclusive—it is both *Ahad* and *Wāhid*, it is both transcendent and immanent. As *al-Wāhid*, all-inclusive oneness, God encompasses all things, whence such divine Names as *al-Wasi*, ‘the Infinitely Capacious’

and *al-Muhīt*, ‘the All-Encompassing’. Now it is from this all-embracing dimension of divine reality that compassion springs: for it is not just as being or knowledge, presence or immanence, that God encompasses all, it is also as *Rahma*: *My Rahma encompasses all things*, as we saw above. The angels, indeed, give priority to God’s *Rahma* over His knowledge (*‘Ilm*) when addressing Him as the one who encompasses all things: *You encompass all things in Rahma and ‘Ilm* (40:7).<sup>11</sup>

It might still be objected: God is certainly ‘merciful’ but He should not be called ‘compassionate’ as He does not ‘suffer’ with any creature. Mercy, it will be argued, is the more appropriate word by which to translate *Rahma*. One may reply as follows: insofar as compassion is a human virtue, it cannot but be rooted in a divine quality; it is this divine quality of *Rahma* which serves as the transcendent archetype of the human virtue of compassion. The relationship between this divine quality and its human reflection is characterised by two apparently contradictory principles: similarity (*tashbīh*) and incomparability (*tanzīh*). Thus, in respect of *tashbīh*, God as ‘The Compassionate’ can metaphorically be said to manifest sympathy for us in our suffering; and it is out of this ‘com-*passion* or ‘sym-*pathy*’ that He graciously lifts us out of our suffering. However this conception needs its complement: the point of view deriving from the principle of *tanzīh*: inasmuch as the quality designated by ‘The Compassionate’ has no self-subsistent essence, but subsists solely through the Essence as such, it cannot possibly be subject to any relativity. The inner dimension of this divine quality must perforce transcend the sphere within which suffering and other such relativities are situated, failing which it would not be a *transcendent* quality, that

is: one that is rooted in the utter transcendence of the divine Essence.

Conversely, on the human plane, compassion as *Rahma* is evidently a virtue which one must acquire and cultivate; it must therefore be present in God, failing which our human quality of compassion would lack any divine principle; compassion would then be a human effect without a divine cause. This is made clear in the prophetic saying on the *Rahma* of the mother for her child: human compassion is akin to the compassion of God for all creatures, except that divine compassion is absolute and infinite, while human compassion is relative and finite. The essence of the quality is one and the same, only its ontological intensity, or mode of manifestation, is subject to gradation.

The aspect of transcendence proper to God implies that this attribute, when ascribed to God, has an absolute and infinite quality, in contrast to the relative, finite participation in that quality by human beings. In the human context, then, compassion manifests two things: a virtue whose essence is divine, on the one hand, and a human capacity to suffer, on the other. In the divine context, the transcendent source of human compassion is affirmed, but the susceptibility to suffering, which accompanies the human condition, is totally absent. As between the human virtue and the divine quality—or simply: between the human and the divine—there is both essential continuity and existential discontinuity, analogical participation and ontological distinction, *tashbih* and *tanzih*.

Another way of resolving the apparent contradiction between divine compassion and divine unity is provided by al-Ghazālī. If compassion be understood as a mode of love, then one can reformulate the question and ask whether it is possible to ascribe love to God: can God be susceptible

to desire for His creatures, when He possesses perfectly and infinitely all that He could possibly desire? Can the Absolute desire the relative? Al-Ghazālī addresses this question, first in theological mode, and then in terms of the metaphysics of oneness, from the point of view of *ma'rifa*. One can legitimately apply the same word, love (*mahabba*), both to man and to God; but the meaning of the word changes depending on the agent of love. Human love is defined as an inclination (*mayl*) of the soul towards that which is in harmony with it, beauty both outward and inward, seeking from another soul the consummation of love. Through this love it attains completeness, a mode of perfection which cannot be attained within itself. Such love, al-Ghazālī asserts, cannot be ascribed to God, in whom all perfections are infinitely and absolutely realized. However, from a higher, metaphysical point of view, one can indeed say that God loves His creatures. God's love is absolutely real, but His love is not for any 'other' being or entity. Rather, it is for Himself: for His own Essence, qualities and acts. There is nothing in being but His Essence, His qualities and His acts. Hence, when the Qur'ān asserts that '*He loves them*' (5:54), this means that 'God does indeed love them [all human souls], but in reality He loves nothing other than Himself, in the sense that He is the totality [of being], and there is nothing in being apart from Him.'<sup>12</sup>

Al-Ghazālī demonstrates that God is the entirety of being by reference to the holy utterance (*hadīth qudsī*), in which God speaks in the first person, on the tongue of the Prophet: 'My slave draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My slave never ceases to draw near to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I am his

hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks.<sup>13</sup>

It is the saint, the *walī Allāh* (literally: friend of God), who comes to understand the reality that God alone is—that there is no reality by the divine reality—and this understanding comes through effacement, *fanā'*, in that reality, and this, in turn is the function of God's love: 'My slave never ceases to draw near ... until I love him.' It is from this divine love that the saint comes to see that God loves all creatures, and that the reality of this love is constituted by God's infinite love of Himself. This love is expressed not just by the term *mahabba* but also by *Rahma*, which *encompasses all things*.



### **Rahma as Creator**

Turning now to another aspect of compassion, that of its creative power, we see again that what is left implicit in early Buddhism is rendered altogether explicit both in Islam and in such Mahayana traditions as Jodo Shin. In both traditions, the Creator is nothing other than the 'All-Compassionate', or the 'All-Loving'; but whereas this conception is enshrined in the very heart of the Qur'ān, it emerges in Buddhism only in certain Mahayana traditions.

The Muslim consecrates every important action with the utterance of the *basmala*, the phrase: *Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*. This formula also initiates each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'ān (except one). It is altogether appropriate that all ritual and



significant action be initiated with a recollection of the compassionate source of creation. In terms of the two divine Names deriving from the root of *Rahma*, the first, *al-Rahmān* is normally used to refer to the creative power of *Rahma*, and the second, *al-Rahīm*, to its salvific power. Combining these two properties of loving compassion, the creative and redemptive, one sees that ultimately nothing can escape or be separated from God's all-embracing *Rahma*.



This is why calling upon *al-Rahmān* is tantamount to calling upon God: *Call upon Allāh or call upon al-Rahmān* (17:110). If *al-Rahmān* is so completely identified with the very substance of God, then it follows that the *Rahma* which so quintessentially defines the divine nature is not simply 'mercy' or 'compassion' but is rather the infinite love and perfect beatitude of ultimate reality, which overflows into creation in the myriad forms assumed by mercy and compassion, peace and love.

*Rahma* is thus to be understood primarily in terms of a love which gives of itself: what it gives is what it is, transcendent beatitude, which creates out of love, and, upon contact with its creation, assumes the nature of loving compassion and mercy, these being the dominant motifs of the relationship between God and the world. As was seen above, God's transcendent *Rahma* is alluded to by the Prophet in terms of the most striking expression of *Rahma* on earth—that expressed by a mother who, after searching frantically for her baby, clutches it to her breast and feeds it.

'*Call upon Allāh or call upon al-Rahmān; whichever you call upon, unto Him belong the most beautiful names*' (17:110). It should be noted in this verse that all the names are described as 'most beautiful', including therefore all the names of rigour as well as those of gentleness. But the most important point to note here is that the name *al-Rahmān* is practically coterminous with the name *Allāh*, indicating that the quality of loving mercy takes us to the very heart of the divine nature. In two verses we are told that *Rahma* is 'written' upon the very Self of God: *He has written mercy upon Himself* (6:12); *Your Lord has written mercy upon Himself* (6:54). The word *kataba*, 'he wrote', implies a kind of inner prescription, so that *Rahma* can be understood as a kind of inner law govern-

ing the very *nafs*, the Self or Essence of God. The use of the image of 'writing' here can be seen as a metaphor for expressing the metaphysical truth that *Rahma* is as it were 'inscribed' within the deepest reality of the divine nature. God's 'inscription' upon Himself is thus God's description of Himself, of His own deepest nature.

The creative aspect of the divine *Rahma* is vividly brought home in the chapter entitled '*al-Rahmān*' (Sūra number 55), it is *al-Rahmān* who '*taught the Qur'ān, created man, taught him discernment*' (verses 1-3). The whole of this chapter evokes and invokes the reality of this quintessential quality of God. The blessings of Paradise are described here in the most majestic and attractive terms; but so too are the glories, beauties and harmonies of God's entire cosmos, including all the wonders of virgin nature, these verses being musically punctuated by the refrain: *so which of the favours of your Lord can you deny?* In this chapter named after *al-Rahmān*, then, we are invited to contemplate the various levels at which *Rahma* fashions the substance of reality: the *Rahma* that describes the deepest nature of the divine; the *Rahma* that is musically inscribed into the very recitation of the chapter; the *Rahma* that creates all things; the *Rahma* that reveals itself through the Qur'ān and through all the signs (*āyāt*) of nature. One comes to see that God has created not only *by Rahma*, and *from Rahma* but also *for Rahma*: ... *except those upon whom God has mercy: for this did He create them* (11:119); and *within Rahma: My Rahma encompasses all things* (7:156).

Combining these two properties of loving compassion, the creative and redemptive, or the ontological and salvific, we see why it is that ultimately nothing can escape or be separated from God's all-embracing *Rahma*, which is the divine matrix contain-

ing the cosmos. The word 'matrix' should be taken quite literally, in relation to its root: 'mother'. The word for womb, *rahim*, derives from the same root as *Rahma*. The entire cosmos is not just brought into being by *Rahma*, it is perpetually encompassed by *Rahma* which nourishes it at every instant, as the mother's womb nourishes and encompasses the embryo growing within it. One should note here that in Buddhism, one of the terms denoting the Buddha is *Tathāgatagarbha*, which literally means the 'womb' (*garbha*) of the Tathāgata, the 'one thus gone'. This womb or matrix not only contains all things, it is also contained within the soul, being one with the immanent Buddha-nature (*Buddhadhatu*) which each individual must strive to realize.

In the Islamic worldview, God's *Rahma* is not just mercy; rather it is the infinite love and overflowing beatitude of ultimate reality, one of whose manifestations is mercy. In this light, one can better appreciate such perspectives as the following, within Jodo Shin Buddhism: 'The inner truth is: From the Eternal Love do all beings have their birth'.<sup>14</sup> Such a statement articulates a dimension of causality left completely out of account by the earlier Buddhist scriptures, where the entire emphasis was on escape from the round of births and deaths. The only important point about the 'birth' of beings was the existence of the 'unborn' to which one must flee for refuge: the process by which beings were born was thus seen as a process of enslavement to the ineluctability of suffering and death. In Mahayana Buddhism, however, one can find expressions of love and compassion which are identified with the creative power of the Absolute. This passage from *Naturalness* shows that the Absolute reveals its 'Eternal Life' through the dimension of its 'Great Compassion':

Amida is the Supreme Spirit from whom all spiritual revelations grow, and to whom all personalities are related. Amida is at once the Infinite Light (*Amitābha*) and the Eternal Life (*Amitāyus*). He is at once the Great Wisdom (*Mahāprajna: daichi*)—the Infinite Light—and the Great Compassion (*Mahākaruna: daihi*)—the Eternal Life. The Great Compassion is creator while the Great Wisdom contemplates.<sup>15</sup>

Some lines later, we read about the unitive power of love; this can be compared with the compassionate love which is spiritually required and logically implied by the metaphysics of *tawhīd*: 'In love ... the sense of difference is obliterated and the human heart fulfils its inherent purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the spirit-world.'<sup>16</sup>

In love, *the sense of difference is obliterated*: the unity of being, which may be conceptually *understood* through knowledge, is spiritually *realized* through love, whose infinite creativity overflows into a compassion whose most merciful act is to reveal this very oneness. To return to al-Ghazālī: the perfect and eternal love of God creates the human being in a disposition which ever seeks proximity to Him, and furnishes him with access to the pathways leading to the removal of the veils separating him from God, such that he comes to 'see' God by means of God Himself. 'And all this is the act of God, and a grace bestowed upon him [God's creature]: and such is what is meant by God's love of him.'<sup>17</sup> This enlightening grace of God towards His creatures is constitutive of His love for them, a love which in reality is nothing other than His love for Himself. Human love and compassion, by means of which *the sense of difference is obliterated* between self and other, can thus be



seen as a unitive reflection herebelow of the oneness of the love of God for Himself within Himself. Absolute compassion and transcendent oneness, far from being mutually exclusive are thus harmoniously integrated in an uncompromisingly unitive *tawhīd*.

The compassion which we have been examining is clearly an overflow of the beatitude which defines an essential aspect of ultimate Reality, the oneness of which embraces all things by virtue of this compassion, precisely. Inward beatitude, proper to the One, and outward compassion, integrating the many, is a subtle and important expression of the spiritual mystery of *tawhīd*. We observe in this affirmation of *tawhīd* another conceptual resonance between the two traditions, a resonance

made clear by the following verses of Milarepa, the great poet-saint of Tibet:

Without realizing the truth of  
 Many-Being-One  
 Even though you meditate on the  
 Great Light,  
 You practice but the  
 View-of-Clinging.  
 Without realizing the unity of Bliss  
 and Void,  
 Even though on the Void you  
 meditate,  
 You practice only nihilism.<sup>18</sup>

The truth of 'Many-Being-One' can be read as a spiritual expression of *tawhīd*, and mirrors many such expressions in Islamic mysticism, indeed, the literal meaning of *tawhīd* being precisely a dynamic integration, not just a static oneness. It is derived from the form of the verb, *wahhada*, meaning 'to make one'. Phenomenal diversity is thus integrated into principial unity by means of the vision unfolding from this understanding of *tawhīd*. In these verses, Milarepa tells one of his disciples that however much he may meditate on the supernal Light, if he regards that Light as being separate from all things by way of transcendence, then he cannot realize the immanence of that Light in all that exists, that immanence by virtue of which the 'many' become 'one', the 'face' of reality being visible in everything that exists. In the absence of this vision, then meditation on the Light results only in 'clinging'—clinging, that is, to a false distinction between the One and the many, a duality which will imprison the meditator within the realm of multiplicity. It is when Milarepa addresses the intrinsic nature of the Void, however, that the similarity with the Islamic conception of the beatific *rahma* of God emerges in a striking manner. 'Without realizing the unity of Bliss and Void', any medita-

tion on the Void is but nihilistic. The Void is intrinsically blissful, or it is not the Void. *Nirvana* and the Void (*Shūnya*) are identical in essence, the term *Nirvāna* stressing the blissful nature of the state wherein one is conscious of the Absolute, and the term 'Void' stressing the objective nature of the Absolute, transcending all things are 'full'—full, that is, of *false* being. Milarepa's verse makes clear this identity of essence, and shows moreover that it is precisely because the Void is overflowing with beatitude that the experience of the Void cannot but be blissful: it is far from a nihilistic negation of existence and consciousness. Knowing and experiencing the beatitude of the Void thus cannot but engender in the soul a state of being reflecting this beatitude, and a wish to share that beatitude with all beings: such a wish being the very essence of compassion, which is not simply a capacity to feel the suffering of others as one's own—which articulates one level of ethical *tawhīd*—but also, at a higher level of *tawhīd*, a capacity to bring that suffering to an end through making accessible the mercy and felicity ever-flowing from ultimate Reality. This is the message—which is immediately intelligible to any Muslim—of the following verses of Milarepa:

If in meditation you still tend to  
strive,  
Try to arouse for all a great  
compassion,  
Be identified with the All-Merciful.<sup>19</sup>

Here, we see the All-Merciful being identified with Absolute Reality, referred to earlier as the Void, but here, the character of the Void is clearly affirmed as infinite mercy. To identify with this mercy is to identify with the Absolute; arousing for all 'a great compassion' means infusing into one's soul a quality which reflects the infinite compassion of the Absolute. One

from whom compassion flows to all is one in whom 'the overflowing Void-Compassion', as Milarepa calls it in another verse, has been realized: it ceaselessly overflows from the Absolute to the relative, and to the extent that one has made oneself 'void' for its sake, one becomes a vehicle for the transmission of the Compassion of the Void:

Rechungpa, listen to me for a  
moment.  
From the centre of my heart stream  
Glowing beams of light.  
...  
This shows the unity of mercy and  
the Void.<sup>20</sup>



To conclude this article, it may be objected that however remarkable be the similarities between the Islamic and the Jodo Shin conceptions of the loving compassion that articulates the creativity of the Absolute, Jodo Shin cannot be taken as representative of the broad Buddhist tradition, and is rather an exception proving the rule. To this, we would reply that the Jodo Shin presentation of this crucial theme—God as Creator through compassion—does not prove that the two traditions of Islam and Buddhism can be crudely equated as regards this theme; rather, it simply demonstrates that the differences between the Islamic conception of God as Creator through compassion and the Buddhist silence on the question of such a Creator need not be seen as the basis for a reciprocal rejection. Rather, the very fact that at least one Buddhist school of thought affirms the idea of a compassionate Creator shows that there is no absolute incompatibility between the two traditions as regards this principle. There is no need to claim that the principle

plays an analogous role in both traditions, far from it: definitive, central and inalienable in Islam; and conceivable, possible, and, at least, not absolutely undeniable in Buddhism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is all too often stated that Buddhism is ‘atheistic’, insofar as it does not speak about the Personal God. But, as Frithjof Schuon explains, the Buddhist notion of the Void, or of extinction, is God conceived in subjective mode, as a ‘state’; what is called ‘God’ in the theistic traditions is conversely, the Void considered objectively, as principle. F.Schuon, *Treasures of Buddhism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1993), p.19. See also our *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), on which this article is based.

<sup>2</sup> *Anukampā* and *dayā*, translated as ‘sympathy’, are closely related to the idea of compassion. See Harvey Aronson, *Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism* (Delhi, 1980), p.11. As Reverend Tetsuo Unno notes in his introduction to Kanamatsu’s *Naturalness* (p.xiii), the author uses the English word ‘love’ to translate *karuna*, normally translated as ‘compassion’.

<sup>3</sup> Bukhārī, *Sabīh, kitāb al-adab, bāb 18 hadīth* no. 5999 (Bukhari summarized: p.954, no.2014); Muslim, *Sabīh, kitāb al-tamā, hadīth* no. 6978.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Ben Shemesh, ‘Some Suggestions to Qur’an Translators’, in *Arabica*, vol.16, no.1, 1969, p.82.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Albert Jamme, ‘Inscriptions on the Sabaeen Bronze Horse of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection’, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 8 (1954), pp. 323-324 et passim.

<sup>7</sup> E. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* (Baltimore, 1968), p.186.

<sup>8</sup> This celestial level of the manifestation of the Buddha-principle is referred to as *Sambhoga-kāya*, in contradistinction to the *Dharma-kāya*—which pertains to the supra-manifest Essence—and the *Nirmāna-kāya*, the human form of the earthly Buddha.

<sup>9</sup> Marco Pallis, in his important essay, ‘Dharma and Dharmas as Principle of Inter-religious Commu-

nication’, shows convincingly that the concept of ‘Dharma’ is a bridge linking Buddhism to the other religious traditions: ‘If Dharma corresponds, on the one hand, to the absoluteness and infinitude of the Essence, the dharmas for their part correspond to the relativity and contingency of the accidents.’ M. Pallis, *A Buddhist Spectrum* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p.103. It should be noted that just as Dharma can mean both Reality and the Law or Norm or Rectitude which leads to that Reality, so the Arabic concept of *Haqq* refers both to the ultimate Reality and the human obligations and duties fashioned by conformity to that Reality.

<sup>10</sup> *Vajracchedikā*, 26a, b. Cited in *Buddhist texts through the Ages* eds. E. Conze, I.B. Horner, D. Snelgrove, A. Waley (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1954), p.144.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that in Tibetan Buddhism, there is likewise a certain priority of compassion over knowledge, as far as the manifestation of these qualities is concerned on earth, for the Dalai Lama, representing the Bodhisattva of compassion (Chenrezig, the Tibetan name of Avalokiteshvara) has priority over the Panchen Lama, who represents the Buddha of Light (Opagmed, the Tibetan name for Amitābha). See M. Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain* (London: Peter Owen, 1991), pp.161-162.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Ghazālī is here cites the saying of Shaykh Sa’id al-Mayhīnī. This is from ‘The Book of love and longing and intimacy and contentment’ of his *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), book 6, part 4, vol. 5, p.221.

<sup>13</sup> *An-Nawawī’s Forty Hadīth*, p.118, no.38. It is cited there from Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-riqāq*, p.992, no.2117.

<sup>14</sup> Kenryo Kanamatsu, *Naturalness—A Classic of Shin Buddhism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), p.113.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, op. cit., pp.221-222.

<sup>18</sup> *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, (tr. Garma C.C. Chang) (Boston & Shaftsbury: Shambhala, 1989), vol. 2, p.526.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p.561.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p.445.





# Love and compassion in the Abrahamic religions

*By Oliver Leaman*

Talking about the role of love and compassion in religion is always problematic, since we have a very positive attitude towards love and most things associated with it. As a result, advocates of a particular religion tend to see that religion as embodying love in the strongest possible way, and by comparison with other religions often rather better than they do. No-one has anything bad to say about love and compassion, and if it can be shown to be what a religion is “all about”, that seems to be even better. An added bonus occurs if the religion is thought by many to be about something else entirely. So for example when a lot of people have negative views of Islam due to its putative connections with violence and terrorism, what better way of defusing the situation than by arguing that Islam is in fact imbued with values that are based on love and compassion, that the Prophet himself in his sayings and lifestyle embodied such values, and any interpretation of Islam that takes a different attitude is systematically misleading? This simplistic approach is strenuously pursued, for instance, by Gülen and his many followers, and really does not do justice to the complexity and sophistication of a religion like Islam.

On the other hand, many Muslims do compare their religion with Christianity on this topic and argue that on the contrary the latter pays too much respect to love, and as a result is unbalanced. Christianity is seen as being too “soft” in its emphasis here on love, while Judaism as too “hard” in its materialism. Islam is the religion in the middle, with just enough love and also materialism to hit the happy mean. But it is

worth spending some time here looking at the Islam=love idea, since it is quite popular now, especially in its contrast with the rather grim stereotype of Islam that persists in many minds. This idea is very much based on a particular interpretation of Islam as Sufism, a form of mysticism which emphasizes the personal relationship between the believer and God, and which often interprets this relationship very much along the lines of love and affection. For example, when someone is loved, he can get those who love him to act in certain ways without acting himself, since the lovers all try to please the loved one, and admire his qualities even if the loved one does not directly respond. This is not a bad way to see the relationship between God and his creatures and has the advantage of explaining how the distance between him and us is maintained, even though we are affected greatly by him. There are also antinomian trends in Sufism, the suggestion that the rules of Islam and the doctrinal principles of a particular approach to religion are not so important, especially when compared with the emotional links between people, and we find this quite often in Rumi when he refuses to distinguish between Muslims and the People of the Book, on occasion, as though this difference does not matter. Anyone can love God, and if all who seek to do so are equally respected from a religious point of view, then the distinction between religions becomes less significant.

Let us see how this might work for Christianity and Judaism. It is often now argued that Paul did not really set out to establish a huge distinction between Juda-



ism and the new religion of Christianity, although he is often credited, or blamed, with this accomplishment. He seems to be arguing most of the time against Christians who insisted that in order for a gentile to be a Christian he or she would have to convert to Judaism first. This seemed to Paul to be an exaggerated demand, and he opposed it. Provided the gentiles agreed to abide by the seven Noahide rules that all righteous people are supposed to follow, the rules that were set in the Hebrew Bible at the time of Noah, they can become Christians. This was of course a clever move for the new religion to make and greatly increased its attraction. The notion that Jewish law is harsh and inflexible is sometimes suggested in the New Testament, but just as often Jesus speaks of the law with respect and denies that he has come to overturn it. Many would say that the dichotomy between love and law is a false dichotomy anyway. After all, Christianity says some quite harsh things also about people which puts its status as a religion based on love into jeopardy. For example, we are told that "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple" (*Luke 14:26*). We need to acknowledge also *Mark 3:31-35* and *Luke 11:27-28* where again Jesus seems to prioritize supporters over family, which is perhaps a rather strong way of saying that one should not prioritize family over everyone else, but still seems to be rather inappropriate in a religion said to be based on love. There are plenty of similar passages in the *hadith*, where ordinary love is said to be secondary and love of God and his Prophet primary, so that the former is made possible by the latter. In the *hadith* collected by Malik there is "God said, 'My love (*mahabbati*) necessarily belongs to those who

love one another (*mutahabinna*) for My sake, sit together for My sake, visit one another for My sake, and give generously to one another for My sake'." It is often said that Islam refers to love a good deal less than Christianity, yet we should not notice that the customary reference to God does involve two expressions, *al-rahman* and *al-rahim*, both of which involve love since they are often translated as the compassionate and the merciful, and it is difficult to make sense of those terms unless they are linked with love. Yet in the rest of the Qur'an it is certainly true that love is often referred to negatively, as when people love to believe something false, or do something they should not.

Judaism and Islam both regard law as a very important way for people to work out how they are to live. Christians often see law as something rigid and insensitive to the feelings of those who are covered by it. The thing about law is that it establishes rules which apply to everyone in the community and establishes rules of how to live that make it possible for the individual to understand and follow religion. In doing this he or she acts in the way that God wishes them to act, as they see it, and there is nothing in itself harsh and inflexible about this. There are certainly rules that are difficult to follow, and the two Jewish legal schools of Hillel and Shammai distinguished themselves often in terms of how difficult they made life for those following them. The school of Hillel was invariably gentler than the School of Shammai, and saw this as a virtue. Whether we should see it as a virtue depends on whether one thinks that religion should present the individual with relatively easy or relatively difficult tasks to perform.

## Compassion and animals

It is not difficult to find reasons to be compassionate in Judaism. First of all we need to pay some attention to the reason that human beings were created in Judaism. Adam was created by divine breath to look after the garden. Adam is made from the dust of the ground and his role is “to till it and care for it” (*Gen* 2.15). He is assisted by the creation later on of a woman to be his companion, but before the woman arrived he was with the animals whose names he was taught. After the flood God says to Noah and to his sons and said “I now make my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, all birds and cattle, all the wild animals with you on earth, all that have come out of the ark” (*Gen* 9. 8-11). The ox and the ass are not to be yoked together, presumably because one is stronger than the other and this would be unfair, and on the Sabbath the animals are supposed to rest, and also can be looked after even though this might constitute what would otherwise be forbidden work. There are many stories about how animals have important roles in the life of the world, and how our attitudes to them reveal much about us. Moses and David, for instance, as shepherds are supposed to have behaved in ways that would suggest strength in a leadership role, since a good shepherd has to be pay attention to the weakest of his followers and those most prone to going astray. Levi was the brother who discovered Benjamin’s money in his sack, it is also suggested, because he unlike the others attended to his animals’ needs before his own, a meritorious disposition displaying care and compassion for weaker creatures. Not sacrificing parents and children together is another rule that perhaps allows parents to enjoy, at least for a time,

the companionship of their offspring and vice versa.

The Jewish and Islamic modes of animal slaughter are complex but basically involve the quick cutting of the throat of the animal, after a short prayer, with a very sharp implement, and the rules are clearly designed to avoid pain as far as possible. However, in modern times there are other methods of killing which seem to most observers to be more satisfactory. For example, if an animal is first of all stunned, then killed, surely the pain is even less. The problem from a Jewish and Muslim point of view of this procedure is that if the animal is first stunned, it is not possible for it to be killed appropriately according to religious law. This has led to a debate about whether it should be allowed for Jews and Muslims to kill their animals in ways that contravene ordinary standards of animal welfare, although of course talking about animal welfare when this involves killing millions of animals is perhaps a strange form of expression. In recent times the debate has been widened to include wider issues of cruelty where factory farming is at issue, although the kosher nature of the slaughter is technically not in question. If the Torah and Qur’an emphasize compassion for all creatures, and indeed care and concern for all life, then should Jews and Muslims be allowed to treat the earth and the creatures on it as available to them to be used and exploited, or should they rather see themselves as in partnership with our environment and responsible for taking care of it?

Abraham Kook (1865-1935) is an unusual thinker on the treatment of animals. He was a very traditional rabbi, indeed the first (Ashkenazi) chief rabbi of Palestine, yet regarded Judaism as advocating vegetarianism. He suggested that the very complex rules about eating animals were designed

to make us think that it would be better to give up that practice! For example, Jews are supposed not to mix meat and milk, so rules developed about what constitutes meat and milk products, and what degree of separation should exist. Some go so far as to have two kitchens in which meat and milk products can be prepared, and two sets of cutlery and crockery for each type of food. Then dead animals that have been slaughtered appropriately might still raise an issue, such as if a drop of blood found on the animal rendered it potentially unacceptable, and a visit to the rabbi might be required. Keeping kosher is time consuming and often difficult, and Kook suggests that perhaps the strict rules about meat and its consumption and production are designed to make us wonder whether we ought not to do without it altogether, which he saw as raising us to a higher level of moral consciousness. The Torah works with us rather than against us and realizes that we tend to enjoy meat and often see the world as our possession to use as we wish, and seeks to wean us gradually from this notion by putting in front of us obstacles in the form of Jewish law which do not prevent us from doing what we want, but make it tougher and more convoluted.

He is using here a very important idea in Jewish thought, an idea that Maimonides enunciated very clearly, and that is that God could just create in us a disposition to behave in whatever way he wants us to, but prefers to allow us to get to that disposition gradually through our own efforts, albeit aided by his law. After all, a disposition, a way of doing things and thinking about them, is acquired by us on the whole gradually, over time, and the point of a religion is to get us to think about what we are doing, and why, through the mechanisms of the religion. We go to pray and although the prayers may be familiar to us,

we are supposed to think about the words we are using, and we reflect on them and on what they might mean in a particular situation. We perhaps give some money to charity, and then think about why we do it, and we eat a cracker that has a *kosher* or a *halal* sign on it, a symbol that it is kosher or halal, and we think about the laws of *kashrut* or *halal* and what their purpose might be.

According to Maimonides, unless we explore the reasons for the commandments we are really operating on a very superficial level in following them. It is better to follow them superficially than not to follow them at all, of course, but the whole point of even the ostensibly minor ceremonial laws is to change us as people, to make us acquire the right frame of mind and the ability to understand why we act in the ways we do and have the feelings we possess. God has given us laws he wants us to follow not for his sake, since he needs nothing from us, but for our sake, since these ways of acting are in our interests. They are in our interests as actions particularly because if we think about what we do we start to change into the sort of people who take an intelligent and self-aware view of who we are. There is a nice story in the Talmud of a calf who escaped from the slaughterer and who ended up in the prayer house and hid under the cloak of the great Judah Hanasi, the compiler of the Mishnah, pleading with him to save him from the knife. Hanasi said, quite reasonably, that the calf should return to the fate which had been established for him, presumably with slaughter as its end. The passage ends up criticizing him, although everything he says is technically correct, since it is rather heartless to reject such an appeal from a creature who manages to escape from the knife. Heaven was not pleased with Hanasi's actions here,

or rather absence of actions, and it is said that for that reason, his lack of compassion, a lack of compassion was shown to him. He relieved the situation though later on when his servant uncovered a group of kittens in his house and was about to destroy them, only to be prevented by his quoting the verse *Ps 145.9* "His mercy is upon all his work". As a matter of custom we often do treat animals who escape in situations like that of the calf rather differently from the rest of the animals who just end up being killed. Why are we compassionate about this particular case, and are apparently encouraged to be so by the Talmud (*Bava Metzia 85a*) when in general we have no compunction, as a culture, in doing to death for our pleasure huge numbers of similar creatures? Why were the kittens spared, and their sparing approved by heaven, when presumably there is nothing wrong with destroying animals in our houses that we regard as objectionable?

### **Love and law**

This raises an intriguing question about compassion, which is how can we justify limiting our compassion to particular objects? If it is right to be compassionate in all cases where a certain situation applies, which surely it is, unless compassion is to rest on nothing more than a whim, then should we not be compassionate in all such cases? This is the point of the commandments, according to Maimonides, they help us move from the particular to the general by helping us think about why we do what we do. So for example we follow the rules of what we are allowed to eat and then come to wonder what the point of these rules are, except to obey the word of God. It must be more than that, and surely as Kook says it might be to question the whole activity of killing and eating animals, the source of the complexity of kashrut. But it is not

the complexity per se that should make us think about the rationale for what we are doing, Kook would argue, but the fact that so much care is taken to ensure that the eating and killing of animals is done in just the right sort of way. That should get us to think about the whole process and in his terms raise the issue of how we reconcile that with the compassion that we should feel for other forms of life on the earth.

Despite his argument and that also of Maimonides that law makes us think about what the deeper purpose of what we are doing involves, there is an argument that law can take us in an entirely different direction. We can become so entranced by the law, so enmeshed in the legal processes and learning what the law requires of us, that we ignore or become abstracted from what the aim of the law might be. This is not really an objection to Maimonides since he understands that this is possible, he talks about a category of people who are skilled in the law yet who are not really advanced in coming close to the truth since they remain at the legal level without enquiring into what the law is really for. It is worth pointing to this danger of law, though, that it tends to have an intellectual structure of its own that can be satisfying in itself and we may well stay at that level and not delve any deeper. To go further, the greater the complexity of the law, the greater the sense of achievement in mastering it, and perhaps the less of a tendency there is to wonder what it represents. It becomes an end in itself. In this sense law operates contrary to compassion, since we may do what we ought to do legally without asking any of those more searching questions about what the law is actually supposed to bring about. What the law usefully addresses is the idea that people have to be treated in general terms, and that is why in the Anglo-American tradi-

tion justice is depicted as blindfolded, so that she does not notice the individuals who come before her, just the deserts of their cases in general. But compassion applies to individuals, and although we may acknowledge that we ought to be compassionate to everyone who deserves it, it is very difficult to act in this way. If we spread compassion around too thinly, there is not enough to go around even to apply to those close to us. Yet at the same time that we limit our compassion to only a few, we acknowledge our duty to apply it to everyone, and it is this paradox that the Abrahamic religions are very interested in exploring

### **Love and responsibility**

In one of the stories that Buber so much enjoyed, the *tzaddik*, the authentic community leader in the mystical pietistic movement of Hasidism, is expected to take thorough responsibility for all that goes on in the neighborhood, not limited to his congregation or whom he knows. Rebbe Mordechai of Neshkizh said to his son, the Rebbe of Kovel, "He who does not feel the pains of a woman giving birth within a circuit of fifty miles, who does not suffer with her and pray that her suffering may be assuaged, is not worthy to be called a *tzaddik*." His younger son Yitzchak, who later succeeded him in his work, was ten years old at the time. He was present when this was said. When he was old he told the story and added, "I listened well. But it was very long before I understood why he had said it in my presence." (Buber, 1991, 164).

The degree of empathy and compassion referred to here is evidence that the Hasidic *tzaddik* is supposed to have an almost organic connection with the body of the community as a whole, and there are many such stories. The community in these stories is certainly not limited to the Jew-

ish community, and he is supposed to be constantly attuned to what is taking place around him.

Yet how is this possible, except in a story that is supposed to have as its moral the idea that we should be interested in the welfare of others? If someone is really in tune with all the feelings of even a limited group of people, how will that individual manage to function? Will he not be so affected by those sufferings, and also pleasures, that he will be unable to concentrate on his own affairs or even carry out his basic religious functions on behalf of the community? It would be like trying to have a conversation with one person while carrying on a conversation with lots of other people all at the same time. Religions are good at emphasizing the significance of compassion, but they are also excellent at explaining how to maximize compassion while allowing the other aspects of life to continue. In Judaism the *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination, that leads us to do evil actions, comes in, as one would expect, for a lot of abuse, and yet it is also praised as a faculty that allows for a lot of good things also. It is involved in the notion of ambition, of competition and the desire to succeed. Unless we have these desires we shall do very little in life, unless we are saints, and most of us are not saints. It is the point of religion to direct our evil inclinations in positive directions, and for this to happen what religion does is work with who we are, where we are and how we can become better. It does not just tell us to reform and improve, on the contrary, it works with those negative aspects of our personality and thought to direct and transform them into more positive directions. A *tzaddik* is a very unusual person, certainly very different from most members of the community. This leads to another danger, the opposite of feeling dissatisfied if one

is not perfectly compassionate to everyone (and everything?) around one, the danger of feeling that since this is an ideal one is unlikely to meet, one does not need to try. As it says in the very practical *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers 2.16): “You may not complete the task but you are not therefore excused from trying to complete it”. This still does not help us a lot since it leaves open precisely how compassionate we ought to be, what is the level of compassion that is acceptable and compatible with bringing about the appropriate degree of improvement in the world that we are capable of through our ordinary activity.

Another Hasidic story that is often quoted is of a rabbi called Zusya who regretted not being Moses, by which he presumably meant that he regretted not reaching the heights of prophecy and leadership established by Moses. Moses is supposed to have said to him that his role was not to be Moses but to be Zusya, and we are reminded of the passage from the *Pirkei Avot* where we are told to be both for ourselves, but not only for ourselves and to regard the present time as the time when things ought to be done (1.14). That is, we should not constantly put off what we know we ought to do because we are waiting for the time to be right. This brings out nicely the sort of balance that is involved in being a human being, and for different people the amount of compassion that their lives encompass will differ. For example, there are people who perhaps would find it easier and more effective to work for a living in some commercial field where they can earn money and then dispose of it in charitable directions, to an extent, and where their improvement of the economic structure of their country is in itself a helpful activity. Their ordinary work creates the context within which compassion can be effective as directly carried out by others, those

who perhaps are more comfortable helping people directly who need to be helped, and who have the interpersonal skills to achieve something significant in this area. Not everyone does. For them to do this other people need to make resources available to them for their work, and so are perhaps better regarded as indirectly compassionate. There is no general formula that would suit everyone and every situation, and again religions are very good at inviting the individual to think about how he or she can best participate in the project of making the world a better place, what in Hebrew is called *tikkun olam*.

### **Religion and law**

We return to the topic that started this discussion, the idea of religion as expressing or identifying a middle position, something that Islam very much prides itself on. Love is certainly important, but surely it is too vague and variable an emotion to base one’s behaviour on entirely. This is why many religions like Islam and Judaism think law is important as a way of working out how to act. Basing our actions on love and compassion would make those actions too subjective, it might be argued, and also would not help us learn from them, since instead of looking for principles to follow and think about we would be forever reflecting on our personal experiences and feelings. The latter are certainly important but their role in helping us understand why we act as we do and what we ought to do is necessarily rather limited. Here again the Abrahamic religions like Islam and Judaism are rather clever in suggesting that love and compassion need to be embodied in something more solid than just in what we are experiencing at a particular time.

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## Compassion in Traditional and Secular Morality

**By M. Ali Lakhani**

But a certain Samaritan...had compassion on him.

(*St. Luke: 10, 33*)

Mercy is the first word of God; it must therefore also be his last word.

Mercy is more real than the whole world.  
(Frithjof Schuon)<sup>1</sup>

One of the principal ways in which modernism can be distinguished from the tradi-

tional worldview is in terms of its existential perspective. For the modernist, the starting point can be framed in these terms: "I exist, and the world exists around me"; while from the traditional vantage, the formulation would be: "Only Absolute Reality exists, and neither I nor the world has any independent reality". These different existential perspectives—which might be termed "anthropocentric" and "theocentric"<sup>2</sup>, respectively—inform one's understandings of identity and relationship, and will tend to indicate significantly different conceptions of human purpose and val-



ues, conceptions which lie at the core of so many issues facing the contemporary world, including its definitions of morality.

While the modernist perspective tends to be secular<sup>3</sup>, the traditional perspective tends to be religious<sup>4</sup>. These different worldviews—modernist and traditional—have given rise to differing conceptions of “humanism”. The modernist conception of secular humanism holds that man alone, governed by the instrumentality of Reason, is the arbiter of human values, while the traditional view of spiritual humanism proceeds from the understanding that human values are inscribed into the spiritual core of one’s innermost self, and can be discerned not by merely discursive reason, but by the instrumental grace of the transcendent Intellect which is the spirit’s cognitive faculty. Thus, for the modernist, the paragon of humanity is the “Enlightenment” man, while for the traditionalist, it is the “enlightened” man.

The purpose of this brief essay is to trace the metaphysical contours of the traditionalist understanding of compassion, and to examine the implications of modernist attempts to define a moral philosophy constructed on secular humanistic values. We will conclude with a few remarks on the central importance of compassion in both worship and morality.

While the particular viewpoint and illustrations offered in this paper will be Islamic<sup>5</sup>, the perspective described will be traditional and universal, and therefore will be found to exist in all the major faith traditions. We will refer to correspondences in other faith traditions as an illustrative reminder of this universal perspective, though this paper is not intended to be a comparative survey of particular theological expressions of the universal metaphysical principles that in-

form the understanding of compassion in the various faith traditions.

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From a traditional perspective, Reality is the intimate unity that transcends all relativistic conceptions of oneness. It is the all-embracing Presence of the Absolute Beyond-Being, which transcends contingency and limitation, yet penetrates to the core of all existence. The nature of this Reality is not physical or psychic, but spiritual. This ever-present core or spiritual Center is, in man, the Heart, whose cardinal quintessence is compassion.<sup>6</sup>

In Islam, this principle of transcendent unity, known as “*tawhīd*”, is reflected in the testimonial creed or “*Shahāda*”, according to which “There is no reality if not the Reality” (“*lā ilāha illā’Lah*”). This principle is present in all the major faith traditions. By whatever name this Reality is termed (Ptah, Brahman, YHWH, the Tao, the Monad, the Godhead, Allāh, *Haqq*), by whatever hypostasis, or by whatever experience (*nirvana*, *samadhi*, *satchitananda*, *fanā’*), it is the same Reality and principle that is being apprehended. In the words of the *Rig-Veda*: “With words, priests and poets make into many the hidden Reality which is One.”<sup>7</sup>

Principally, Reality is the Origin and transcendent Center. Existentially, it is the radiating Circle of Existence, with multiple dimensions, within which it is immanently present. Teleologically, it is the reality of reunion within the principal Center, so that the Origin (*Alpha*) is also the promised End (*Omega*). Each of these ways of apprehending Reality—principle, manifestation, and purpose—reflects the compassionate nature of Reality, and we shall now consider each of these aspects in turn.

From the principal perspective, transcendent Reality is Beyond Being and beyond all limitation, and its Essence is therefore beyond all name and understanding. Nevertheless, the ineffable Absolute has revealed itself in three ways: through its creation, its holy books and messengers, and our innermost Self. Each of these receptacles of the Divine Word bears the imprint of the Divine Spirit of Presence. It is for this reason that mankind is urged in the Koran to seek evidence of Reality both within the outer world of creation and also within oneself: "We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in their selves".<sup>8</sup> These "signs"—which also include the Koranic verses themselves—are symbolic gateways to the Divine Treasury of the qualities and attributes of Reality, which in Islam are called "The Most Beautiful Names" (*al-asma' al-husna*). They represent all the archetypal qualities and attributes manifested in creation, which include both the rigorous (masculine), and the clement (feminine), aspects of Reality. These are the "names" that God revealed to Adam (or primordial man), so that their knowledge is thereby inscribed pre-existentially within the Adamic Heart and, in their quintessential reality, constitute its primordial nature (*fitra*). According to Muslim tradition, God has kept for Himself the name of His Essence. Yet, this "Hidden Treasure" can be known by the Heart—the cardinal Center of the innermost self—within which it resides, for, in the words of a sacred tradition, "God has said: The heavens and the earth would not be able to contain Me, yet I dwell in the heart of the true believer." This interiority is, as we shall see, the most intimate proof of divine compassion, but it is also the foundation of gnosis. Hence, it is also said, "Whoso knows himself, knows his Lord." The quintessence of the indwelling "Hidden Treasure" is designated by the

Arabic term *Rahmah*, whose root letters, R-H-M, signify the sense of a nurturing womb—the womb that is the existential matrix. The term *Rahmah*, denotes compassion in two senses—as both Beneficent Grace and Benevolent Mercy. It is the root of the Koranic Names of Mercy, *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahīm*, which correspond to these two senses of Grace and Mercy, the former describing the projecting "Mercy of gratuitous gift" (*rahmah al-imtīnān*) which is synonymous with the divine nature, and the latter describing the reintegrating "Mercy of obligation" (*rahmah al-wujūb*) exercised based on divine discrimination.<sup>9</sup> These terms are contained in the verse of consecration—*Bismi Llāhi ar-Rahmāni ar-Rahim*, "In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful". The importance of this verse is evident in the fact that it is used to commence all but one *surah* of the Koran,<sup>10</sup> and is uttered by every Muslim in prayer. Commenting on the Names of Mercy, Martin Lings explains how they relate to the divine nature:

Amongst the most striking features of the Revelation were the two Divine Names *ar-Rahmān* and *ar-Rahīm*. The word *rahīm*, an intensive form of *rahīm*, merciful, was current in the sense of very merciful or boundlessly merciful. The still more intensive *rahmān*, for lack of any concept to fit it, had fallen into disuse. The Revelation revived it in accordance with the new religion's basic need to dwell on the heights of Transcendence. Being stronger even than *ar-Rahīm* (the All-Merciful), the name *ar-Rahmān* refers to the very essence or root of Mercy, that is, to the Infinite Beneficence or Goodness of God, and the Koran expressly makes it an equivalent of *Allāh*: "Invoke God (*Allāh*) or invoke the Infinitely Good (*ar-Rahmān*), whichever ye invoke, His are the names most Beautiful." (*Sūrat al-Isrā'*, XVII:110)<sup>11</sup>

This scriptural affirmation of the equivalence of the divine nature with the root of Mercy and “Infinite Beneficence or Goodness of God”, is reiterated in another important Koranic verse, “He has prescribed Mercy for Himself.”<sup>12</sup> The Arabic words used to describe this prescription (*kataba ‘ala nafsihī r-Rahmah*) can be rendered “He has inscribed (or written) Mercy upon Himself”, conveying the sense that the quality of *Rahmah* (Grace and Mercy) is integral to (“written upon”) the divine nature and is not contrary to any outward manifestation of the Divine Acts, no matter how seemingly contradictory these may appear. In other words, such outward contradictions—such as the evils, sufferings, and apparent imperfections of this world—are not evidence of God’s lack of compassion, but merely of our own metaphysical privation, spiritual ignorance or moral failings. For, as the Koran also explains, “Whatever good comes to you is from God, and whatever evil comes to you is from your own soul.”<sup>13</sup> The Koranic explanation of God’s compassionate nature as “written upon” Reality can be understood in this sense: though God is all-powerful and possesses powers of wrath, severity and rigor—as well as those of gentleness, compassion, and mercy—He cannot transcend His own good nature, which, like that of a good parent, is to be maternally loving, compassionate and merciful, despite the appearance of paternal rigor. For this reason, though God possesses rigorous attributes as well as clement ones, the divine nature transcends these archetypal polarities, and is intrinsically compassionate. This accords with the famous *hadīth*, “God has said: Verily, My Mercy precedes My Wrath!”, and this precedence has profound salvific and eschatological implications, as we shall see.

From the perspective of the divine manifestation, there is no existence but God. Existential Being *is* Mercy. The analogy of light or illumination is frequently employed to express the idea of creation<sup>14</sup> and this is because it is in the nature of light to give of itself—or, according to the well-known Platonic and Augustinian maxim, it is in the nature of the Good to communicate itself. Relating this to our discussion of the divine nature of Grace and Mercy, existence can be understood as inherent within the divine nature, as the gracious response of the Absolute to those possibilities of existence latent within Itself—that is, within the Divine Treasury<sup>15</sup> of archetypes from which creation emerges. It is important here to understand creation not in a chronologically linear and historic sense, but in a trans-historical and metaphysical sense as a dynamic process of the ever-renewing theophany. Thus, according to Ibn ‘Arabi’s famous theory, creation is a perpetual process of instantaneous annihilation and re-creation, occurring within an ontological continuum whose very core is Mercy. Ibn ‘Arabi likens this to the process of breathing. God creates through the breath of His Speech, through his inhalation and exhalation, through spiritual projection and spiritual reintegration, which Ibn ‘Arabi calls the *Nafas al-Rahmānī* or “Breath of the All-Merciful”.<sup>16</sup> God is as intimately present within us as our breathing. We are not only originated in and through compassion, but are embraced and sustained within the oceanic Spirit of Mercy. The enveloping nature of this sustaining Spirit is referred to in the Koranic verse, “My Mercy embraces everything”<sup>17</sup>—which further affirms the central principle of *tawhīd*, emphasizing both the transcending oneness of Reality and its integrally compassionate nature.

Implicit in the principle of *tawhīd* is the notion of the divine imprint. It is a universal

theme in faith traditions to view man as being created “in the divine image”<sup>18</sup>, with the Divine Spirit breathed into his soul<sup>19</sup>, or to view Reality in terms of a metaphysical correspondence between Earth and Heaven<sup>20</sup> by virtue of the presence of the divine imprint within manifestation. This derives from the understanding that creation is the Divine Self-Revelation: it is the exteriorization of the divine principle, with each level unfolding hierarchically from principle to manifestation through successive levels, and each unfolding level reflecting the higher level and thereby bearing the divine imprint from which all things originate. It is in this sense that the Heart—that is, the compassionate core of man’s primordial nature or *fitra*—contains God. The fact that all creatures therefore contain something of God, and are intrinsically good<sup>21</sup>, is a further confirmation of the All-encompassing nature of Divine Mercy, which embraces all things. A corollary of this is that the Divine Image or the “Face of God” is everywhere. Thus the Koran states, “Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.”<sup>22</sup> This is the saving Face, or salvific Presence of Mercy, of which the Koran states, “Everything will perish save His Face”<sup>23</sup>—for *Rahmah* alone is Absolute, “embracing everything”, transcending all polarizations, and the originating source and eschatological end of everything that is contingent.

From a teleological perspective, the end of everything is to retrace its way back to its Divine Source. In our end is our beginning. The purpose of human life is the Self-discovery that is the counterpart of Divine Self-disclosure. Self-search proceeds through levels of interiority, each level mirroring the processes of exteriorization. From the outer we are led by degrees to the inner sanctum of the Heart—and what leads us to that Center is our own receptivity to its compassionate and radiant Light. We are never

without the means at hand for our own salvation—though in the end all salvation is nothing but Grace. Our task is merely to respond to God’s compassion—present within His “signs” and in the latent capacities of our Heart—and to do so through our own God-given compassionate nature, by seeking refuge in the intimate “heaven” of His Radiant Presence, from the dark “hell” that is blind to the Face of God.<sup>24</sup> This response requires a re-orienting “conversion”—or “turning away” from darkness toward Light—which is the essence of repentance. It is in this sense that repentance is Mercy. This profoundly comforting message assures the faithful that they can seek refuge in the comfort of God within their own Heart, which reflects His intrinsic Mercy. The three dimensions of manifestation—the outer creation, the revealed Word (transmitted in the scriptures and through divinely inspired messengers), and our innermost Self—are all “signs” of the Face of God and of His compassionate and gracious reaching-out to mankind.<sup>25</sup> There are “tongues in trees, books in running brooks, *sermons in stones*, and good in everything.”<sup>26</sup> It is only when we are blind to our innermost self that we lack the eyes to see. As we noted earlier, the intimacy of God’s compassion is evident in our very breathing—and the Beauty of the Divine Face is as much taken-for-granted as is our own breathing. The antidote to this human “forgetfulness” is the practice of divine “remembrance” (in Islam, *dhikr*), about which we shall have more to say later—but for now, we shall pause. We have surveyed how the traditional worldview places compassion at the very heart of Reality, in its metaphysical nature, its existential reality, and as the *raison d’être* of human existence. We will now contrast this with the modernist perspective.



If transcendent unity is at the heart of tradition, modernism by contrast is characterized by fragmentation and deracination. In a deconstructed world, there is an urgent need to discover the “*terra firma*” upon which to construct the edifices that are vital to human existence. The traditional worldview emphasizes that Reality is intimately interconnected, and this interconnectedness—vertically, between man and God; and horizontally, between man and his fellow creatures—constitutes the foundation of traditional ethics and aesthetics, by which virtue is related to beauty. There is a profound connection between inner

Goodness and outer Beauty—as is evident in the Platonic dictum of “Truth, Goodness, and Beauty”. Truth is the primordial perception of theophany. It is the gracious perception of the symbolist spirit, not the human synthesis constructed out of an atomized universe. Reality is the sacred Presence of Goodness and Beauty. It is neither material nor mental, but profoundly spiritual. It is to be discerned not by human reasoning but by the self-reflective Intellect—by that transcendent faculty within us that enables us to look receptively, beyond appearances, to perceive our own Heart reflected everywhere. This compassionate

core is both the intrinsic beauty within us—Goodness, or, in Arabic, *ihsān*—and the extrinsic goodness in creation—Beauty, or, in Arabic, *husn*. Both Goodness and Beauty are aspects of the Divine Face—the Mercy that encompasses everything. But in the modernist conception, these vital connections are either lacking or, where apparently present, are superficially grounded in human constructs derived from rationalistic arguments or subjective preferences.<sup>27</sup> They are not rooted in the Absolute and therefore lack any metaphysical objectivity. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a proper demonstration of how different modernist schools of thought—that is to say, those that reject the traditional axiom of the transcendent and immanent, Absolute ground of Reality—are subject to fatal errors that manifest either as relativism or false reductionism. Suffice it to say that, however noble the intention to construct a secular basis for morality, it is self-evident that the lesser cannot construct a path to the greater, but can only walk across the path that the greater holds out to it. All attempts to construct a secular morality based merely on constructs of rational consensus or secular humanistic “values” are doomed to failure insofar as they are rooted in the modernistic denial of transcendence and thereby deny the metaphysical foundations of “virtue”. For man is much more than the sum of his thoughts, and the universe is much more than the sum of its parts. Both man (the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm) derive from the same Origin and Center, and it is this metaphysical intersection of (metacosmic) Reality, which alone can form the construct of any foundation of morality.

It is meaningless to speak of modernist conceptions of morality because they are not grounded ontologically in virtue. Without anchoring virtue in its transcen-

dent roots, terms such as goodness, love, and compassion become no more than malleable personal morals or else abstract ideas without any proper underpinning in reality. In our times we are all too aware of changing moral standards. This is precisely because modernist versions of morality are deracinated, without spiritual roots. In this regard, Frithjof Schuon has noted how modernist values differ from traditional virtues: “Morals can vary, for they are founded on social exigencies: but virtues do not vary, for they are enshrined in the very nature of man; and they are in his primordial nature because they correspond to cosmic perfections and, *a fortiori*, to Divine qualities.”<sup>28</sup> Secular moral constructs that fail to root morality in primordial virtue cannot fully engage us because they do not engage us ontologically. When morality fails to engage us, we become “heartless”. This is what the Koran terms *kufṛ* or the “covering up” of the Heart. An example of disengaged morality is found in Dostoevsky’s masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in Ivan Karamazov’s famous speech on love, where he says, “The idea of loving one’s neighbor is possible only as an abstraction: it may be conceivable to love one’s fellow man at a distance, but it is almost never possible to love him at close quarters”.<sup>29</sup> There is a dangerous disengagement underlying that sentiment, an amorality bordering on blindness. Another example of this blindness—this one involving a more substantial “covering up”—is found in the chilling moral rationalization provided by Harry Lime to his friend Holly Martins (in Graham Green’s *The Third Man*), when Martins asks Lime about his “victims” in their famous encounter on the Ferris Wheel:

MARTINS: Have you seen any of your victims—

HARRY: Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there. All of those human beings... don't they look like dots? Would you feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I offered you 20,000 pounds for every dot that stopped moving, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax. It's the only way to save money nowadays—

...

You're just a little mixed up about things in general. Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, so why should we? They talk about the people and the proletariat. I talk about the suckers and the mugs. It's the same thing. They have their five-year plans, and so have I—

MARTINS: —You used to believe in God—

...

HARRY: —I still do believe in God, old man. I believe in God and Mercy, and all that. The dead are happier dead. They don't miss much here, poor devils...<sup>30</sup>

Ivan Karamazov's conception of neighborly love is as dangerously abstracted and disengaged as Harry Lime's empty conceptions of God and Mercy. Both examples involve a reductionism—the erasure of the reality of the “neighbor”—and relativism—placing self-interest above objective interests—that typify the flaw of spiritual blindness in modernist conceptions of humanism. There can be no real engagement of compassion when we are blind to Reality—that is, blind to the spiritual “in-sight” of “Heart-vision”. This spiritual disengagement contrasts with the traditional virtue of spiritual detachment, which, through interiorization, engages compassion. While disengagement is a flight from Reality to a lower (infernal and self-limiting) realm, de-

tachment is the movement towards Reality, and is the removal to a higher (spiritual and participative) plane. It is only through the verticality of detachment that we can engage the interiority of compassion. It is by living in cardinal sympathy with our fellow creatures, by seeing them not reductively as mere “dots” on the landscape, but ontologically as translations of our very selves, that we can engage our true human potential for compassion. It is our capacity for the realization of this potential that constitutes the essence of our humanity.

Modernistic humanism, however laudable its aims, cannot arrive at the heart of compassion, for it is precisely its obliviousness to the Presence of the Heart that fundamentally undermines its aims. The Heart is both the vital center of one's being and the qualitative seat of compassion—and it is no accident that these meanings coincide in the term “heart”. But the search for our center is not a solipsistic enterprise for we live within a larger universe whose center is none other than the immanent Self that is our own transcendent Heart. This is the identity of Brahma and Atmā in Vedantic terminology. It is this ontological coincidence that resonates within us, and its resonance is what we feel as compassion. This is the vital essence of Reality—the transcendent and compassionate unity of being that lies at the center of all faith traditions.

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The humanistic appeal of the recent initiatives promoting a Charter of Compassion<sup>31</sup> and “A Common Word”<sup>32</sup> based on Love, points to an existential truth that is central to traditional teachings, namely, that the qualities of compassion and love lie at the very heart of reality. These are important initiatives because they are attempts to

drill below the surface of our differences to the spiritual core of those Heart-centered values that can unite us as human beings. These values are metaphysically rooted, transcending theological differences while respecting them, and they point to an underlying spiritual humanism that is vital for us to promote in these troubled times.

But there are two significant dangers in this enterprise<sup>33</sup>: abstraction and sentimentalism.<sup>34</sup> With regard to abstraction, it is important for any initiatives that advocate humanistic universal values to avoid promoting them as “*a priori*” neo-Kantian categorical imperatives, for—as the quoted words of Ivan Karamazov indicate—there is a danger that values can be abstracted of any meaningful reality when they are removed from their metaphysical underpinnings. A “value” is truly valuable only when it operates as a “virtue”—that is, when it is transformatively and alchemically operational within us. There is a further danger—that of sentimentalizing values so that they become mere expressions of emotion rather than operative virtues grounded in the moral intelligence of the Heart.<sup>35</sup> It is important in this regard to recall that the Heart is the seat of the Intellect, and that love and compassion are above all aspects of moral intelligence.

Earlier in this paper, we referred to the vertical relationship of man and God, and the horizontal relationship of man with his fellow creatures. These relationships dictate the two central obligations of mankind: worship and morality. But the point we wish to emphasize here is that the relationships and obligations are integrally linked: it is *because* we worship God or the greater Reality, that we owe moral obligations to all that is holy or sacred within creation. Compassion is central to both worship and morality. Worship is the self-surrender of the soul to the compassionate core that

is its spiritual center; while morality, in its spiritual sense, is the operation of virtue through the compassionate illumination of the soul. As it is compassion that has originated and sustains us, so it is compassion that continually calls to us to respond to it from our Heart-Center wherein it lies—the Hidden Treasure within our soul. And this response is both reintegrating prayer and transforming virtue. Prayer is the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the existential verity of *tawhīd*. We remember who we really are, so that we may “act out in God’s eye what in God’s eye we are.”<sup>36</sup> Remembrance is our witnessing of the sacred Presence of the Face of God within and around us. This can only be done by being Heart-centered. This is the essence of *dhikr*. Though human beings may feebly attempt prayer, in truth they can at best “get out of the way”, for it is the Heart alone that prays—hence the Koranic verse, “Remember Me, and I will remember you”.<sup>37</sup> When God remembers us, it is the Heart that opens (in self-remembrance) to its own compassionate nature. It is through this compassionate opening that the illusory boundaries between the soul and the spirit, and between the “self” and the “other” dissolve. We are able to discern the sacred within us and thereby its resonance in all things. There is no virtue without this transcendent foundation. We can be virtuous only when we are responding out of our Heart—when our actions are “heart-felt”, and addressed not to the “other” but to the transcendent Self. Thus, according to the famous *hadīth* of Gabriel, “Spiritual virtue (*ihsān*) is to adore God as if thou sawest Him: and if thou seest Him not, He nevertheless sees thee”. Spiritual morality is integrally based on faith and worship. Virtue is the “in-sight” of compassion. It is what enables us to be compassionate, like the Good Samaritan, acting out of our innermost nature, in the



faith that God sees us, and in the knowledge that “All that lives is holy”.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frithjof Schuon, “*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*”, translated by P. N. Townsend. Perennial Books, Middlesex, 1987, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Non-theistic perspectives, such as that of Buddhism, are intended to be embraced within this definition: while we recognize that the terminology is not ideal, its selection is primarily a matter of convenience, with the caveat that the term “theocentric” is not intended to refer to any particular limited conception of divinity, but to embrace a conception of ultimate Reality which is Absolute and Infinite and Perfect, whether expressed in theistic terms or not.

<sup>3</sup> That is, it privatizes religion, sometimes regarding it as an irrelevant anachronism, if not rejecting it outright—the latter tendency being better understood as “secular fundamentalism”.

<sup>4</sup> That is, it views all aspects of existence through its theocentric lens, though this does not necessarily place it in conflict with either empirical science or those secular aims that reject theocracies—the tendency to such a conflict within the religious outlook being better understood as “religious fundamentalism”.

<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons for this paper’s focus on Islam is that, though compassion is central to the message of Islam, the conception of Islam in the “West” is—for historical and other reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper—dominated by images and understandings of the faith, of its sacred scripture, and of the Holy Prophet, that derogate from the centrality of its compassionate message.

<sup>6</sup> Etymologically, the word “compassion” is derived from the terms “*passio*” (suffering) denoting an intense feeling or suffering, and “*com*” (with) denoting participation. It conveys the sense of participation in the suffering of the “Other” to the point where distinctions between the Self and the Other are dissolved in a sense of fellow-feeling. As such, the term is strongly linked to “*sympatheia*” (Gr.), from “*syn*” (together) and “*pathos*” (feeling). However, as Dante has noted (in *Il Convito*, II.ix.2), compassion is a human predisposition of the soul to certain qualities that are inherent in (its) nature: “Compassion is not a passion; rather a noble disposition of the soul, made ready to receive love, mercy, and other charitable passions.” This primordial predisposition has metaphysical roots, as we discuss in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X, 114.2; see also *Rig-Veda*, I, 164.46: “Being One, the sages name Him variously.”

<sup>8</sup> *Sūrat Fussilat*, XLI:53: The “horizons” refers to the macrocosm, while the Self is the microcosm. Each of these contains “signs” of the metacosmic Reality.

<sup>9</sup> This distinction by Ibn ‘Arabi is discussed by Toshihiko Izutsu in *Sufism and Taoism* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983), chapter IX, “Ontological Mercy”, p. 116 et seq.

<sup>10</sup> The verse of consecration is absent only in *Sūrat at-Taubah* (IX), stressing the rigorous nature of this particular revelation.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources*, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1983, 1986, chapter XVI, pp. 46 and 47.

<sup>12</sup> *Sūrat al-An-‘ām*, VI:12.

<sup>13</sup> *Sūrat an-Nisā’*, IV:79

<sup>14</sup> For example, “Light is the progenitive power” (*Taittirīya Sambhita*, VII: 1.1.1)

<sup>15</sup> See *Sūrat Al-Hijr*, XV:21: “There is no thing whose storehouses are not with Us, but We send it down only in a known measure.” The Storehouses are the Divine Treasury, the archetypal realm out of which things are brought into existence as the “Speech of God”.

<sup>16</sup> The word for “breath” (*nafas*) is a cognate of the word for “self” (*nafs*), demonstrating etymologically the link between creation and the divine nature.

<sup>17</sup> *Sūrat al-Ar‘āf*, VII:156.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Book of Genesis, 1:27; and the *had-ith*: “God created Adam in His own form.”

<sup>19</sup> For example, Book of Genesis, 2:7; and *Sūrat As-Sajdah* XXXII:9: “Then He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him of His Spirit.”

<sup>20</sup> For example, *Katha Upanishad*, IV:10: “Whatever is here, that is there. What is there, that again is here.”

<sup>21</sup> Book of Genesis, 1:31: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Note also William Blake’s dictum, “Everything that lives is holy”—the term “holy” conveying that it bears the divine imprint, being “of the whole”, and “wholesome” or good.

<sup>22</sup> *Sūrat Al-Baqarah*, II:115.

<sup>23</sup> *Sūrat al-Qasas*, XXVIII:88.

<sup>24</sup> The presence of Hell does not contradict the inherent Mercy of the Absolute, for the purpose of hellfire is precisely to burn away the impurities

within us that keep us from Heaven. According to Muslim tradition, when all is purified and finally restored to its primordial condition at the end of time, God will stamp out the fires of Hell.

<sup>25</sup> That God has not abandoned man, in some Deistic sense, is evident in the many scriptural revelations, and in the ever-renewing theophany itself. The fact that there were diverse scriptural revelations (each with the language of their own folk—see Koran, 14:4), and the fact that we exist and that existence is being sustained, are themselves expressions of Divine Mercy.

<sup>26</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II.1.13.

<sup>27</sup> One recent example of a modernist attempt to construct a system of ethics based on secular humanism is that of Jurgen Habermas, presented in *The Future of Human Nature*, Polity, 2003. In his review of this work in the journal, *Sacred Web*, Vancouver, Volume 13 ([www.sacredweb.com](http://www.sacredweb.com)), the traditionalist scholar Ibrahim Kalin considers the feasibility of Habermas' project. Kalin comments (in the review, which is titled, "All Too Human...And That is the Problem") on the difficulty of doing away with religion when discussing any system of ethics. He asks (at p. 156), "Can one construct a secular ethics with total disregard to the religious and the metaphysical? Assuming that one can, the question is then: can one sustain it? The known history of secular humanism does not provide us with any convincing answers that this project can be completed without violating rules of logic or subverting religious arguments into a quasi-religious and quasi-secular discourse."

<sup>28</sup> Frithjof Schuon, "*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*", *supra*, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, "*The Brothers Karamazov*", translated by Andrew H. MacAndrew, Bantam Classic, 1981, p.285.

<sup>30</sup> Radio Script of Graham Greene's "*The Third Man*", Shamrock Eden Publishing, Kindle edition released March 7, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> <http://charterforcompassion.org>

<sup>32</sup> <http://acommonword.com>

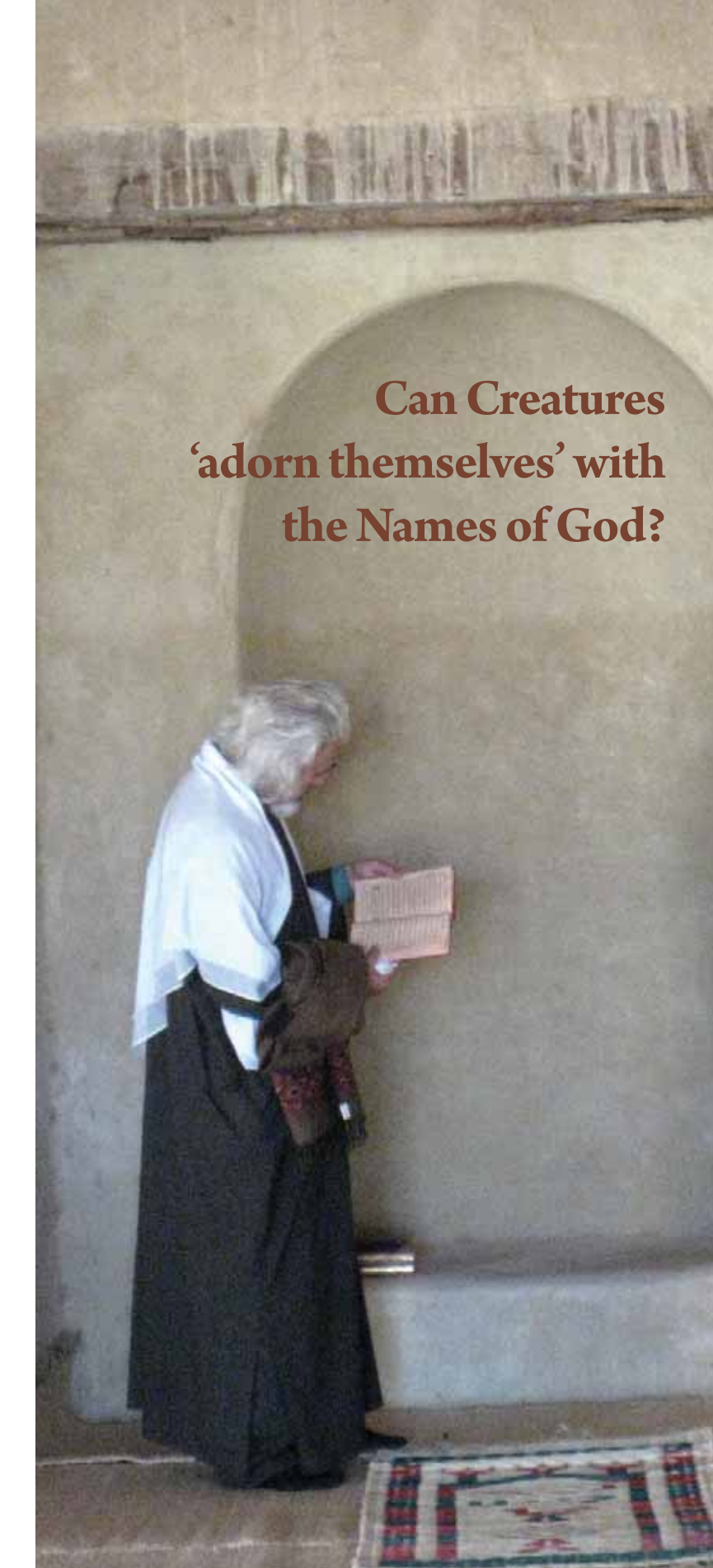
<sup>33</sup> No doubt the initiators of the Charter of Compassion and A Common Word are well aware of these dangers. No criticism is intended of these laudable initiatives, yet it is important to bear in mind how difficult it is to avoid these appealing universal values of "compassion" and "love" finding appeal merely at the level of "values" rather than as ontological "virtues".

<sup>34</sup> Abstraction reduces forms and particulars to generalized mental concepts. It is the excessively "dry" intellectualism of Truth without Presence. It expresses itself through various forms of philosophical humanism and syncretism. Its charity is either disengaged or condescending. Sentimentalism, by contrast, is the excessive attachment of the emotions to particular forms. It is the excessively "moist" emotionalism of Presence without Truth. It expresses itself in certain forms of evangelism and New-Ageism. Its philanthropy is sentimental and therefore not disinterested.

<sup>35</sup> See the quotation from Dante, *supra*, at footnote 6, which emphasizes the distinction between compassion and mere (sentimental) passion.

<sup>36</sup> This phrase is derived from Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet, "As kingfishers catch fire...", where he writes: "...Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—/Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/To the Father through the features of men's faces."

<sup>37</sup> *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, II:152.



## Can Creatures 'adorn themselves' with the Names of God?

**By David B. Burrell**

To introduce us to the genre proper to his celebrated commentary on the 'Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God', al-Ghazālī opens by offering readers the goal of 'adorning themselves' with these names.<sup>1</sup> For this is not a mere speculative adventure into 'naming God', but an exercise meant to effect something in readers who will undertake the disciplines indicated with each name in the form of 'admonitions'. Now any Muslim who dares to speak of love, charity, or compassion will be reminded immediately of God's own names, for these English terms already suggest a number of them (with Qur'anic references). Besides the ubiquitous *Al-Rahman*, *al-Rahim* [the Infinitely Good, the Merciful], consider *Al-Wahhāb* [The Bestower] (3:8, 38:9, 38:35), *Ar-Razzāq* [The Ever-Providing] (51:58), *Al-Karīm* [The Bountiful, The Generous] 27:40, 82:6), *Al-Wakīl* [The Trustee, The Dependable] (3:173, 4:171, 28:28, 73:9), *Al-Afuww* [The Pardoner, The Effacer of Sins] (4:99, 4:149, 22:60), *Ar-Ra'ūf* [The Compassionate, The All Pitying] (3:30, 9:117, 57:9, 59:10),

Now inspired by the Muslim convention that whoever intends to name a child with one of these names must prefix it by 'abdul-', as in 'Abdul-Khadr', we might well ask whether we can ever 'adorn ourselves' with any of these names. And pursuing that query will open a rich vein of comparative reflection for Christians and Muslims. To take a name paradigmatic

for the exercise of love, charity, or compassion, we may ponder *'al-Ghaffar'*, where the intensive fifth form of the Arabic verb suggests a rendering like 'One who never ceases to forgive' or 'One whose forgiving continues to forgive' (Qur'an 20:82, 38:66, 39:5, 40:42, 71:10, 13:16, 14:48, 38:65, 39:4, 40:16). Christians would be reminded of Jesus' way of responding to the query of Peter: 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' As if to dispense with any such accounting, Jesus turns the number offered into a multiplier carrying us beyond calculation: 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven' (Mt 18:21)! Might this maneuver suggest how *al-Ghaffar* stands ready to forgive us? Indeed, I would propose there can be no other reading of Jesus' response. For he can hardly be suggesting that any of us would be capable of repeating the act of forgiving that many times! Indeed, were it necessary to do so, we would have to wonder whether the act could ever be efficacious? Yet that wonderment might well prove to be the thread we need.

For Christians speak readily of loving and of forgiving, yet closer scrutiny of the lives of exemplary Christians, in the light of scriptures offering them access to the One who animates their lives, suggests that truly loving or forgiving lies quite beyond their power to effect. Let us begin with the admonition attached to the *shema*, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), which Jesus cites in answer to an ostensibly academic question; 'which is the greatest commandment of the law?' 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Mt 22:36-38). But this admonition puts the grammar of 'commandment' to a severe test, for we would have no way of ascertain-

ing whether we had fulfilled it: who of us could ever be sure of loving with our whole heart, or all of our soul or strength? And might we not surmise that to be Jesus' very point: reminding the 'lawyer who asked him a question to test him', as Matthew puts it, to seek the answer in his own scripture. Following directly upon the foundational *shema*, the pride of place is given to a command which defies execution!

Moreover, the first of the letters of John explains why that must be the case. After a convoluted lead regarding a commandment at once new and old, John focuses on 'the message you have heard from the beginning, that you should love one another' (1 John 3:11). Yet to remind us that we are unable to fulfill that injunction, he goes on to exhort:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us (1 John 4:7-10).

What distinguishes this form of *knowing* is that it follows upon *doing*--'he who does not love does not know God', much as Al-Ghazālī offers an exercise to follow if we have any inkling of the import of a divine name. And for John that exercise recapitulates the way Jesus completes his answer to the lawyer: 'this is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18, Mt 22:38-39). As John elaborates it:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has

ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (4:11-12).

John's form of address offers the decisive clue: he is addressing those already 'beloved' by God, so can expect them to understand the import of what he is saying:

by this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. ... So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in loves abides in God, and God abides in him (4:13-16).

Moreover, the source of this knowledge is

the anointing you have received from him [which] abides in you, [so] you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true (2:26-7).

John even finds it superfluous to issue this original commandment to 'beloved' already anointed, as if to emphasize what a strange form of command it is: evoking the active presence of God to remind us that we ought not take these commands to be exhortations to fulfill, as though we could carry them out ourselves.

Yet to return to Jesus' admonition to forgive 'seventy times seven' times, he confirms his point with a story of a servant whose master forgave a huge debt when he implored him to do so, only then to turn around himself to throttle a fellow servant who owed him far less (Mt 18:23-33). And Jesus endorses the master's punishment—'to deliver him to the jailer till he should pay all his [original] debt'—by insisting: 'so also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your

brother or sister from your heart' (18:34-35). But how can Jesus be so unequivocal if, as I have been intimating, forgiving itself is an impossible undertaking for us? For the very reason that John gives: though we cannot hope to fulfill these commandments ourselves, we are never alone, we who are 'beloved of God'. And here we find the hidden key to Jesus parable of the ungrateful servant. The force of the parable turns on the apparent contradiction: one who has been forgiven fails to forgive; yet the servant could never have acted as he did had he truly accepted forgiveness.

In fact, the contradiction is only apparent. The original servant never received forgiveness for he never acknowledged his fault; he simply breathed a sigh of relief at having been reprieved. Yet failing to acknowledge any fault kept him outside the kingdom of God, for only those able to admit sinfulness are able to ask for and receive forgiveness, and so be admitted to the kingdom. For it is only in receiving God's forgiveness that we can forgive others, yet to receive we must ask, and to ask we must acknowledge our need. Resting on our own laurels, we can never forgive, for we will always be busy 'editing and re-editing a yet more elegant version of ourselves' (Kierkegaard). Such is the dynamic of the invitation to love, charity, or compassion issued by the Christian scriptures and the Qur'an. It quickly becomes an invitation to seek the presence of the God who commands, so that we may be released from our own preoccupations enough to hear those commands and be empowered to fulfill them.

### **Parallel Muslim Testimony**

So far our focus has been on forgiving, as the acid test of love, charity, and compassion, and as a way of showing how we can only connect with the reality intimated



by the 'divine names' via that reality itself. As the first letter of John puts it: 'not that we loved God but that he loved us'. Reza Shah-Kazemi elucidates the more meta-physical aspects of divine love in Muslim tradition, stemming from the *hadīth qudsī*: 'I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, so I created the creation in order to be known'.<sup>2</sup>

[this] knowledge ... is not abstract but concrete, not just posited discursively but 'realized' spiritually, that is, made 'real'; since ultimate reality is at one with love, 'realized' knowledge must be a perfect synthesis between the two principles, just as it must integrate knowledge with-in being. Without the dimension of love, knowledge remains abstract; realized knowledge is thus overflowing with love, and the consummation of love is beatific union with the Beloved, thus, *tawhīd* in its deepest spiritual significance of 'making one'. Just as, according to the *hadīth*

*qudsī*, love for being known initiates creation, so it is knowledge of God that brings about a love which consummates creation. In other words, it is consciousness of God that attracts the love of God, and this love reveals the ultimate meaning of the first testimony of Islam, 'No God but God'. It is this dimension of *tawhīd* as union that the saints or the 'friends of God' (*awliyāh Allāh*, sing. *walī Allāh*) have realized.

Such knowledge results in the 'state of the 'friend of God', the 'slave' who has 'drawn near' to God, to the point where God loves him', as another *hadīth qudsī*, expresses it: 'My slave never ceases to draw near to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks'.<sup>3</sup> Here Reza Shah-Kazemi invites us beyond the obvious import of this saying, to see the way in



which al-Ghazzālī interprets this saying, one of the most oft-quoted in the works of the Sufis. Book six of volume four of his *Ihyā'* is entitled 'The Book of Love (*mahabba*) and longing and intimacy and contentment'. In his discussion on the love of God for man, he writes, in theological mode, that whereas one can legitimately apply the same word, love, both to man and to God, the meaning of the word changes depending on the agent of love. Human love is an inclination (*mayl*) of the soul towards that which is in harmony with it, beauty both outward and inward, seeking from another the consummation of love, for its perfection cannot be achieved within itself—and such love cannot be ascribed to God, in whom all perfections are infinitely and absolutely realized.

However, at this point al-Ghazzālī shifts into a completely different mode of discourse, and asserts that God's love is absolutely real, and that His love is not for another—such is inconceivable—but rather is for Himself: for His own Essence, qualities and acts: for 'there is nothing in being except His Essence

and His acts'. Hence, when the Qur'ān asserts that 'He loves them' (5:54), this means that 'God does indeed love them [people], but in reality He loves nothing other than Himself, in the sense that He is the totality [of being], and there is nothing in being apart from Him.' Al-Ghazzālī proceeds to show how this love of God for Himself ... most clearly manifests itself, and this he does by reference to the saying: 'God is the hearing, sight, hand and foot of the one He loves, and the one He loves is the one who draws close to Him through supererogatory prayer.'

Finally, and most significantly for our inquiry:

This capacity to attain this degree of 'nearness' is itself an expression of the eternally real love of God. According to al-Ghazzālī, this perfect and eternal love of God creates the human being in a disposition which seeks proximity to Him, and furnishes him with access to the pathways leading to the removal of the veils separating him from God, such that

he comes to 'see' God by means of God Himself. 'And all this', says al-Ghazzālī, 'is the act of God, and a grace bestowed upon him [God's creature]: and such is what is meant by God's love of him.' This enlightening grace of God towards His creatures is constitutive of His love for them, a love which in reality is nothing other than His love for Himself; and there is a clear link between this divine love of God for Himself and the highest realization of mystical *tawhīd*.

Although on the surface the saying appears to make God's love the result of contingent actions—the voluntary performance of religious acts of devotion—divine love is the eternally pre-existent reality, for God is not subject to change: all that can change is the perception of the soul, which, mysteriously, comes to see its own illusory nature and the unique reality proper to God; evidently, only God can 'see' this reality, whence the saying: God becomes the 'eye' by which the saint sees, and the saint 'sees' both his own nothingness and the sole reality of God. In other words, it is only possible to assert that God loves Himself as and through His creatures, from the point of view of one who has gained this 'proximity' to God and thus comes to a realization that it is indeed God and not himself who 'sees' through him, 'hears' through him, and so on. Such a knowledge is only granted, according to al-Ghazzālī in another treatise, to those who have seen through the illusory nature of their own existence, and this can only occur as a consequence of realizing the state of *fanā'*, extinction, annihilation, in God. It is this that the highest category of knowers of God undergo, it is this *self-dénouement* that provides them with the ultimate realization of the principle of *tawhīd*:

The love of God for Himself through His creation assumes an altogether transfor-

mative power from the point of view of *walāya*, that sanctity which is the fruit of the purest *tawhīd*, which in turn is predicated upon the complete effacement of all that is other than God—only then can one speak about God's love for Himself *through* His creatures. .... To see a saint is thus to witness something of the divine reality which he has rendered transparent by his very effacement in that reality.

### **Christian Testimony of John of the Cross**

We may readily compare this unitary view of creator and creature with John of the Cross's presentation of the inner dynamics of a life of faith.<sup>4</sup> John is disarmingly forthright in identifying the goal of that journey: 'the union and transformation of the [person] in God' (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2.5.3); as well as the means: 'faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God' (2.9.1). He is at pains to distinguish this intentional union from the 'union between God and creatures [which] always exists [by which] God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially. ... By it He conserves their being so that if the union would end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist' (2.5.3). So John will presume the unique metaphysical relation of all creatures to their source which Meister Eckhart elaborated from Aquinas' 'distinction', and does not hesitate it to call it a *union*--indeed, an 'essential or substantial union'.<sup>5</sup> This grounding fact attends all creatures, hence it is *natural* and found in everything (though displayed differently in inanimate from inanimate, and in inanimate, differs from animals to humans, though among humans it can still be found in 'the greatest sinner in the world'), while the intentional union is *supernatural* and can only be found 'where there is a likeness of



love' [such that] God's will and the [person's] are in conformity' (2.5.3).

In her study of Shankara, Sara Grant shows how the 'non-reciprocal relation of dependence' which attends all creatures of a free creator eliminates any prospect of 'heteronomy' between those two wills, but let us attend first to the internal connection between *faith* and *union* which John confidently asserts.<sup>6</sup> What makes this sound so startling is our propensity to confine such talk to 'mystics' as we tend to reduce faith to belief: holding certain propositions to be true. This long and complex debate in Christian theology cuts oddly across confessional lines, so the best we can do here is to remind ourselves that John of the Cross could well have been responding from the Iberian peninsula to sixteenth-century winds from northern Europe. He does so by elaborating key assertions of Aquinas to defuse debates polarizing intellect and will in the act of faith. For Aquinas, 'faith is a sort of knowledge [*cognitio quaedam*] in that it makes the mind assent to something. The assent is not due to what is seen by the believer but to what is seen by him who is believed'.<sup>7</sup> The one who is believed is, of course, the incarnate Word of God, Jesus, as mediated through the scriptures, so this peculiar 'sort of knowledge' is rooted in an interpersonal relation of the believer with Jesus. It is that relation at the root of faith which John of the Cross sets out to explore, quite aware that what results from it will 'fall short of the mode of knowing [*cognitio*] which is properly called "knowledge" [*scientia*], for such knowledge causes the mind to assent through what is seen and through an understanding of first principles' (*Ibid.*). More positively, Aquinas will characterize faith as 'an act of mental assent commanded by the will, [so] to believe perfectly our mind must tend unfailingly towards the perfection of

truth, in unfailing service of that ultimate goal for the sake of which our will is commanding our mind's assent'.<sup>8</sup> Unlike ordinary belief, then, faith must be an act of the whole person, involving a personal and critical quest for a truth which outreaches our proper expression. John assesses our concepts sharply: 'nothing which could possibly be imagined or comprehended in this life can be a proximate means of union with God' (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2.8.4), since 'nothing created or imagined can serve the intellect as a proper means for union with God; [rather], all that can be grasped by the intellect would serve as an obstacle rather than a means, if a person were to become attached to it' (2.8.1).

### ***Culminating in Al-Ghazzālī on trust in God***

The operative alternative to conceptual knowing in Islam is *trust*, the epitome of which is found in the state of *tawakkul*, elaborated by Al-Ghazzālī in the central book of his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-dīn* as the complement to *tawhīd*, which culminates in the believer's profound conviction 'of the unalterable justice and excellence of things as they are ..., of the 'perfect rightness of the actual'.<sup>9</sup> Eric Ormsby sees this conviction as the upshot of the ten years of seclusion and prayer following Al-Ghazzālī's spiritual crisis. By 'the actual' he means what God has decreed, itself the product and reflection of divine wisdom. And in asserting the primacy of the actual over the possible, Al-Ghazzālī shows himself a true theologian. For philosophers, contingency tends to bespeak the logical fact that 'whatever exists could always be other than it is'. Yet while it may be 'logically correct and permissible to affirm that our world could be different than it is, it is not theologically correct and permissible--indeed, it is

impious--to assert that our world could be better than it is. The world in all its circumstances remains unimpeachably right and just, and it is unsurpassably excellent'.<sup>10</sup> Yet the excellence in question is not one which we can assess independently of the fact that it is the product of divine wisdom, so Al-Ghazzālī directs us to the second part where practice will allow us to traverse domains which speculative reason cannot otherwise map.

What sort of a practice is *tawakkul*: trust in divine providence? It entails accepting whatever happens as part of the inscrutable decree of a just and merciful God. Yet such an action cannot be reduced to mere *resignation*, to be caricatured as 'Islamic fatalism.' It rather entails aligning oneself with things as they really are: in Ghazali's sense, with the truth that there is no agent but God Most High. This requires surrender since we cannot formulate the relationship between this single divine agent and the other agents which we know, and also because our ordinary perspective on things is not a true one: human society lives under the sign of *jāhiliyya* or pervasive ignorance. Nor can this resignation be solely intellectual, as though I could learn 'the truth' so as to align myself with it in the way speculative reason is supposed to illuminate practical judgment. For this all-important relationship resists formulation. Nevertheless, by trying our best to act according to the conviction that the divine decree expresses the truth in events as they unfold, we will allow ourselves to be *shown* how things truly lie. So faith [*tawhīd*] and practice [*tawakkul*] are reciprocal; neither is foundational. The understanding given us is that of one journeying in faith, a *salik*, the name which Sufis characteristically appropriated for themselves.

There are stages of trust in divine providence, to be sure, which Ghazzālī catalogues as (1) the heart's relying on the trustworthy One [*wakil*] alone, (2) a trust like that of a child in its mother, where the focus is less on the *trust* involved than on the person's orientation to the one in whom they trust; and (3) the notorious likeness of a corpse in the hands of its washers, where the relevant point is that such trust moves one quite beyond petition of any sort. Yet the operative factor is present already in the initial stage, which is not surpassed but only deepened by subsequent stages: trusting in the One alone. The formula for faith here is the hadith: 'There is no might and power but in God', which Ghazzālī takes to be equivalent to the Qur'anic *shahādah*: *There is no god but God*, thereby reminding us that the hadith does not enjoin us to trust in *power* or *might*, as attributes distinct from God, but in God alone. It is in this context that he selects stories of Sufi sheikhs, offering them as examples to help point us towards developing specific skills of trusting: habits of responding to different situations in such a way that one learns by acting how things are truly ordered, the truth of the decree. The principle operative throughout is that a policy of complete renunciation of reliance on customary means [*asbab*] is contrary to divine wisdom, the *Sunnah Allāh*, but those who journey in faith will learn that means are of different kinds, hidden as well as manifest.

So there is a school whereby we learn how to respond to what happens in such a way that we are shown how things are truly ordered. This school will involve learning from others who are more practiced in responding rightly; Al-Ghazzālī's judicious use of stories is intended to intimate the Sufi practice of master / disciple wherein the novice is offered way

of discerning how to act. Philosophy no longer pretends to be a higher wisdom; speculative reason is wholly subject to practical reason; the inevitable implication of replacing the emanation scheme with an intentional creator, evidenced also in Maimonides. So the challenge of understanding the relation of the free creator to the universe becomes the task of rightly responding to events as they happen, in such a way that the true ordering of things, the divine decree, can be made manifest in one's actions-as-responses. Al-Ghazzālī expresses this relationship between speculative and practical reason by noting that we need to call upon both *knowledge* and *state* [of being] in guiding our actions according to a wholehearted trust in God. What he wishes to convey by those terms in tandem is an awareness of the very structure of the book itself: the *knowledge* which faith in divine unity brings is only gained through practice, leading one to an habitual capacity to align one's otherwise errant responses to situation after situation according to the guidance that faith offers.

These reflections have shown how the faith of these diverse communities in a free creator converges to challenge us to find ways to articulate the ensuing relationship between creatures and creator, and notably free creatures, so as to give due homage and gratitude to divine wisdom in creating.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Ghazālī on the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, translated by David Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992; Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> See Reza Shah-Kazemi, 'God 'the Loving', in Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington, eds., *Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand rapids MI / Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010) 88-109. These quotations, however, are taken from a portion of his contribution which was omitted from the printed version, which we are indebted to the author for supplying.

<sup>3</sup> *Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-riqāq*, no.2117, p.992.

<sup>4</sup> John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle, The Living Flame of Love in Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Dobie: *Logos and Revelation: Ibn 'Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), and Reza Shah-Kazemi: *Paths to Transcendence according to Shankara, Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington IN: World Wisdom Books, 2006); French trans. *Shankara, Ibn 'Arabi et Maître Eckhart : La Voie de la Transcendance* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 1.12.13.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 2-2.4.5.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Ghazālī on Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence*, tr. David Burrell (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard McGinn and David Burrell, eds., *God and Creation* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 257.





## Further Observations on Love (or Equality)

**By Nur Yalman**

***An essay dedicated to Talat Halman***<sup>1</sup>

|  
André Malraux in his *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* writes of the decline of interest in the modern world of the “admirable” person; a person whose life and actions were highly esteemed and held up as examples for the rest of humanity, whose

presence in spirit was an encouragement to the rest of us to emulate his (or her) contributions to our existence. Societies throughout history have often had such revered oftentimes saintly personages held up as a source of inspiration for the rest of human kind. The great prophets or exemplary teachers like Confucius or the Buddha have shown “the way” for human kind with their radiant personal examples. Islam is no exception. Beginning with the beloved

prophet himself, it also has its extensive list of "saintly" personages and their myths. In Iran such "teachers" are simply referred to as "*mercii taklid*" (lit. locus of emulation). In Turkey, the saintly personages whose simple or elaborate tombs provide a sacred geography for the countryside, which are often venues for pilgrimages, have always had this kind of attraction for the ordinary people. It is indeed impressive for an anthropologist to see the degree to which the mystical teachings of the contemplative orders, and especially the actual personal narratives of the "saints" (*evliya*) have penetrated into public consciousness (Halman 1981). A great deal of the ethos of the Turkish countryside can be seen to be a reflection of these ethical teachings which have become so deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the people that their origins are no longer recognized or even known. The paper that follows attempts to bring to the surface the interplay between the mythic history of a famous dervish order (the Mevlevi) and the cultural forms which can be observed in the life of simple people in the eastern provinces of Turkey. Not only do the present cultural forms bear a close affinity to the values expressed by the mystics since ancient times, they also represent a fascinating contrast to the consumerist-capitalist values that now inform much of Western life. In Turkey, the consumerist-capitalist way of existence is developing rapidly, "converting" the masses to a consumerist-capitalist ethos especially among the growing middle and professional classes, but the expression of "traditional" Islamic values remains very strong. This is still in evidence not only in the resurgence of Islamic discourse both on television and in the large number of published books and papers — there are immense book fairs in the courtyards of the great mosques in Istanbul — but also in expectations of behav-

ior which inform personal relations in small towns and villages. In this sense, the rise in Islamic politics in recent years in Turkey may be interpreted as partly a reaction to the materialist and instrumental values so heartily espoused, and so callously flaunted by the Westernized elite. The greedy and shameless financial scandals in the "modern" sector compounded by high inflation has served to remind people of the attractions of an imagined alternative timeless, pure, and ethical way of life.

Although much of the paper concerns the question of love and equality, it is not intended to distract attention from the untold suffering, the terrible toll of violence and hate that has been so much in evidence in recent years (Sayari 1985). This was so even before the Kurdish revolt in Southeastern Turkey (see Yalman, von Bruinessen?) for particular local reasons, and has now escalated with complicated international dimensions involving Iraq, Syria and other countries.

The paper therefore deals with only one positive facet of the cultural ethos of religious life in Turkey. It refers to a happier period before the rise of Kurdish irredentism. It also highlights the contrast between the deeper rhythms of culture and demands of immediate political action.



In looking back over Islamic political philosophy it is difficult not to see the connection with certain very "modern" preoccupations of the social sciences. There is the preoccupation with certain central concepts such as equality and justice in the community, but there are also the discussions on the triad of prophecy (*nebi*), tradition (*hadith*) and reason (*akhl*). These are evidently the main issues worthy of speculation for Farabi, Ghazzali, Ibn Khaldun and others. It is surely noteworthy that this same triad

which might be restated as charisma, tradition, and rationality is the cornerstone of Weberian sociology and not unrelated to the thoughts of Pascal who also writes of inspiration, tradition and reason. The Islamic philosophers were evidently thinking along lines which have been familiar in a non religious context.

These apparently academic concerns in Islamic thought are enlivened from time to time by the irresistible upsurges of emotion. The vehicles for spiritual emotion are the brotherhoods, known as the *tariqat* (from *tariq*: the "way," the "path"), which are organized communities which bring the pious together to celebrate their devotion to God. These communities are formed around the metaphors of "love" and "adoration": the love of man for God, and the love of man for man in the most general sense. The *tariqat* are always formed around the memory of an exemplary saintly (*veli*-pl. *evliya*) personage. They celebrate the Saint's life and personal example and allow individuals to dedicate themselves to living their lives in his image. There are hundreds of such communities active in the Islamic world today (Popovic 1986, 58). One of the most famous of these brotherhoods is that of the Mevlevi, formed in memory of the beloved mystic poet Celaleddin-i Rumi after his death in the year 1273, which has come down to our day with their central shrine (*tekke*) and mausoleum (*turbe*) in Konya in central Anatolia. The metaphor of "love" for God is most clearly expressed in the parable of Rumi and his adoration for Shems-i tabrizi which is recited in devotional Islamic poetry in many places and diverse languages. It needs no great insight to see that the overwhelming "love" of man for man must embrace "equality" too, albeit in an abstract and general sense. Halman writing of another celebrated mystical poet, the great Yunus Emre (d.1320-21?),

(Schimmel 1991) whose work is closely related to Rumi, does not mince his words:

"God's revelation in man" and "the human being as a true reflection of God's beautiful images" are recurrent themes in Yunus Emre's poems:

He is God Himself - humans are his images. See for yourself: God is man, that is what He is. It is a duty for the mystic to love God, and to become, through love, the perfect man."

And, "See all people as equals,  
See the humble as heroes."

"We regard no one's religion as contrary to ours, True love is born when all faiths are united as a whole." (Halman 1981), pp.9-14.

How these lofty concerns about love and equality have been translated into practice and how Islamic societies have dealt with the more profound forms of social inequality remain completely contemporary issues everywhere that Islam is practiced. One could well say that the one serious question which torments Islamic society in this age is the preoccupation with the political form taken by the social contract. How Islam as is reflected in these high expectations to be put into practice as a political regime? The question is worthy of sustained analysis with care and depth.

This paper on the cultural expressions of love (and equality) attempts to portray some of the elements which characterize the relations among Muslims. The underlying expectation of equality which provides legitimacy for the sense of community is often near the surface. It cannot be dismissed in discussing the nature of social hierarchies, and administrative classes in the Islamic East. It is certainly true that the gap between expectations and practice has

been quite painful in most Islamic countries, but it is useful to have a clear idea of some of the cultural aspirations.



This paper is not about the sexes, but it is about the sentiment of love and “equality”. But, as my Indian friend, the sociologist T.N.Madan, so perceptively noted, it does border on the question of how “divine adoration” may even penetrate some of these vexed concerns of “equality” among human beings. The paper therefore is about that old but central concern in Islam (and Christianity) that is the subject of love between men and God, which in turn is a powerful metaphor for love (but not sex) among men (and women) in connection with certain doctrines of equality among men (and women) in these vital religious traditions.

The subject of “equality” in Islam, and of the metaphor of Dionysian love, which we may accept as the religious dimension of equality, stands in stark contrast to what a great French anthropologist has written about India. Professor Louis Dumont has written subtly and imaginatively of “hierarchy” in the culture of Hinduism, and of the doctrines of renunciation, which we could regard as the religious dimension of hierarchy. On this latter point, we have Dumont’s celebrated Frazer Lecture in 1958 (Dumont 1980), whereas on the Islamic side the situation has not been fully clarified. Nonetheless, we may have here, in this highly idealized formula, equality and love on the one hand, hierarchy and renunciation on the other, an almost mirror image-like comparison of two religious world-views which have intermingled with such bitter intimacy for more than a thousand years in India.

Dumont has an unusual perspective on Indian civilization. He has argued that “renunciation” and caste as a sacred hierarchy

are closely related ideas. Given the caste hierarchy as an elaborate social and religious system of categories which fully determines the trajectories of individual lives, “renunciation” allows for a sense of “liberation”. In other words, the renunciation of the world turns out to be an powerful religious mode which permits the specially gifted individual to escape from the strict crucible of caste connections, to liberate himself from family ties and obligations, and provides a prestigious cultural opening, a greatly valued different “route” for some special persons. So the Hindu *sannyasi* is greatly respected, but only on the condition that family and social ties have been abandoned. The *sannyasi* therefore undergoes funeral rites for himself and is “reborn” outside his caste, in a special casteless state (Dubois 1906). Thus, he can be respected as a saintly figure by all castes. That at least is the theory.

“Renunciation” is a well recognized theme in Islam and Christianity as well, but the conditions are very different from the Indian case. In Islam, especially in keeping with the concern about avoiding the creation of a privileged group with privileged access to Divine truths, the more extreme forms of world renunciation have always been discouraged by the doctors of Islamic law, the *Ulema*. Piety and humility is valued but ascetic otherworldliness in not considered to be a privileged or indeed acceptable form. So, although there are many traditions of “otherworldly” behavior, much mortification of the flesh especially in some *tariqat* communities, and among the Shi’a during Muharram celebrations, Islam has no monasteries and nunneries which are such important institutions in many other religions.

In writing of equality in the culture of Islam, and of the doctrine of love, I do not mean of course that there is no “inequal-



ity" among Islamic peoples. A mere mention of Islam in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and of Islamic "castes" of the sub-continent, not to speak of all kinds of Islamic groups elsewhere, would be enough evidence of inequality. There are also the "noble" tribes of Arabia, as well as the intense preoccupation with pollution in many parts to indicate that, in practice, the relations of inferiority and superiority are as much a part of daily Islamic experience as any other. While this is indeed often enough the practice, the high ideals of Islam do turn around the principle that there are no privileged persons in Islam, or rather that a person's worth depends upon the morality of his or her intentions, behavior, and piety. This may lead to the gates of heaven but even in the worldly kingdoms, once converted to the belief of Islam--i.e., have "surrendered" (*teslim*) to the Will of God--they must be given an equal chance to rise in society. Hence the promise of Islam, for instance, to Black Muslims in America, and other oppressed peoples elsewhere.

Hence also the many celebrated cases of the converts who went on to become the highest officers in the Islamic states. This is true for the Arabic, Persian and Turkish and even Mogul Empires, and comes from a conception that whoever accepts the sacred constitution--the *shari'a*- is a full "citizen". The openness of recruitment to the highest positions of the state has meant that at least among the Ottomans, men of every possible cultural background in eastern Europe, Poles and Albanians, Bosnians and Serbians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Greeks and Armenians and Georgians and of course the peoples of western Asia, Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Circassians, and many others were completely assimilated in the service of the empire and of Islam. Recruitment to the *Ulema* too, appears to have been quite open, reminiscent some-

what of the friendly hospitality among our intellectual circles and Universities to scholars of the most astonishing backgrounds (Gibb and Bowen).

I do not want to give the impression of an early utopian Marxism. The openness of recruitment appears to have given a tremendous emphasis to the need for achievement and power, because so much seems possible and open to the individual. We have the words of Sir Adolphus Slade, an Englishman who served as an officer in the Ottoman Navy in the 1820's.

It is curious to observe the similarity of advantages which are enjoyed by nations in opposite spheres of knowledge, and separated by perfectly distinct manners and religion. Hitherto the Osmanley has enjoyed by custom some of the dearest privileges of freemen, for which Christian nations have so long struggled. He paid nothing to the government beyond a moderate land tax, although liable, it is true, to extortions, which might be classed with assessed taxes. He paid no tithes, the *vacouf* (*waqf*) sufficing for the maintenance of the ministers of Islamism. He traveled where he pleased without passports; no custom house officer intruded his eyes and dirty fingers among his baggage; no police watched his motions, or listened for his words. His house was sacred. His sons were never taken from his side to be soldiers, unless war called them. His views of ambition were not restricted by the barriers of birth and wealth; from the lowest origin he might aspire without presumption to the rank of pasha; if he could read, to that of grand vizir; and this consciousness, instilled and supported by numberless precedents, ennobled his mind, and enabled him to enter on the duties of high office without embarrassment. Is not this the advantage so prized by free nations? Did not the exclusion of people from posts of honor

tend to the French revolution?...For this freedom, this capability of realizing the wildest wishes, what equivalent does the sultan offer? It may be said none. (Lewis 1968: 125-126).

However, the notion of "equality" is so vivid in the minds of some Islamic scholars that Maududi, the celebrated activist writer in Pakistan is said to have declared: "If you want to see Islam put into proper practice, go to see the China of Mao Tse Tung". I would not argue the case of a similarity of intention between Marxism and Islam, or even of a political attraction, when we have had case after case of unspeakable hostility both in the Middle East and inside the former Soviet Union of communism and Islam. Suffice it to say that they had met on the ground of equality, but obviously parted company in the fundamentals.

Equality of opportunity was not achieved in Islamic states for Muslims, but something like it seems at least to have been intended. In this sense, Islam has always given the impression of a "fraternity" (and "sorority") to outsiders. Since it is at least a utopian movement, if not often a tide of social revolt, there is also the constant interest in proselytization which is another facet of open recruitment. Consider, for instance, the education of the great Persian poet, Sadi, known for his sexually free views. We have the words of G.M. Wickens: "It is usually accepted that Sadi received his early education in (Shiraz) and then proceeded to the famous Nizamiyya Academy at the caliphal metropolis of Baghdad... Prestigious institution though this was at different periods of its existence, Sadi would not have found himself excluded by the modern obstacles of poverty, entrance standards, limited enrollment, course requirements, centrally set quotas, and all the rest." (The Gulistan of Sa'di).

Or in a lighter vein, about this fraternity, the Syrian leader, Shukry el Kuwatly, had apparently complained about the intractable attitudes of his countrymen: "Fifty percent of Syrians think that they are national leaders, 25% think they are prophets, and the rest think they are God."

#### IV

The interest in Love as a social doctrine can be said to arise with the mystic *tariqats* very early in Islam. There is much talk of the heart (Al Ghazzali): Love in this sense is a dangerous even subversive doctrine. So are the *tariqats* regarded to this day in many places. The love of men for God, and for each other has a Dionysian quality difficult for the authorities to control.

Such irrepressible and all consuming love is expressed in highly emotive rituals, the passion plays of the Shi'a, or the ritual chanting (*dhikr*) of the various Dervish orders, or the *sema* (whirling) of the Mevlevi, and, in all cases, it is reported that the effect of the communal ritual is the submerging of the individual in an "ocean of love" in his group.

The degree to which the Middle East at least was susceptible to such ideas can be understood from the fact that love-"divine love" ("*tasavvuf*") mysticism is the largest and most persistent subject in the poetry and music of the Ottoman and Persian and indeed Mogul Empires. The stream ran deep and wide for many centuries. It is in full flood still. The major poets such as Yunus Emre and Celaleddin-i Rumi, Sadi and Hafiz and many others too numerous to mention were much involved with mystic orders and their entire and vast corpus is about divine love. Behind the divine spirituality one senses the powerful imagery of love as a metaphor for human relations (Andrews 1985). Again, the insistence is on communal joint Mystic experience. Individ-

ual mystic experience and ecstasy is said to belong properly to Christians (for Mevlana, see Schimmel 1992; Schimmel 1993).

The metaphor of love, the love of men for God and for each other has certain political implications. It denies, of course, the machine-like quality that well-run societies sometimes come to exhibit. Love as a consuming passion would deny formalities, and would undermine social barriers. It would erode the privileges of small closed groups which often run the important institutions in societies, and would insist that the hierarchical structures, built up with such care, and which depend of people keeping their places and doing their duties, be brought down. It would insist that men be level with each other, dissolve the barriers separating them and unite with one another in a sense of community and identity and become one with each other and with God.

I am not advocating the ritual of love as a practical solution to social problems. I merely observe that these sentiments which from time to time rise to the surface in the West as well, permeate the work of the poets mentioned above. It is characteristic of a major theme in Islamic writing. In reading them, one takes these matters and the element of social protest in the mystic orders almost for granted (Basgoz 1981). It is often mentioned as a deeply humanist concern.

The contrast with the hierarchy, rituality and sense of structure in Dumont's depiction of India is striking. These mystic movements, all based on love, are a threat to whatever social order and administration they have encountered.

How does this humanism appear in "anthropological" terms? An intriguing feature of the Islamic world, at least in the Middle East, is that it is a "vibe" culture. People must relate to each other as

individuals, I am tempted to say through "vibrations." Governments in the Middle East are always complaining that formality, order, rules and organization cannot be effectively maintained and are going to the winds. In Turkey, which has made a massive effort during the Republic to cease all these "vibrations," there are pejorative terms expressing this combination of warm, personable, informal disorder--" *alla Turca* ". This is opposed to *alla Franca* meaning cold, distant, elegant, formal. The East is *laubali*, annoyingly informal and unnecessarily friendly; it has no time sense. The West in the archetype, is formal, structured, organized and obsessed with punctuality. The stereotype at least, fits in with the complaints of the author of *The Greening of America*.

One meets the expressions of these cultural preoccupations in unexpected ways. During field work in eastern Turkey in the town of Malatya, I was much impressed by the fulsome bodily contact that was constantly taking place between men. I used to spend time in the shop of an informant friend, a small merchant of about fifty who was in the dried fruit business. We would sit on great mounds of apricots and apples and prunes and discuss matters of local interest. Now and again his friends would come in. Even though, in this small town, he encountered them almost every day, they would be kissed, caressed, their cheeks stroked and examined with a special cultural gesture much like that of a gastronome examining the ripeness of a peach. Then after the first pleasantries and much laughter, sometimes horseplay, the friends would stand arm in arm, or hand in hand for many minutes and talk. This expression of cordial intimacy was accompanied by a self conscious effort of great trust in many matters, but in particular, in matters of money. These friends were merchants,



and hence considerable sums would pass back and forth between them for business purposes. They would trust each other and other friends with immense sums of money. In an almost medieval context where banks and personal checks were not in great use, (I am writing of the 1960's) this almost ritual trust between friends--and friends not so close--was perhaps understandable but still very impressive. The group of friends tended also to pray together five times a day often in the same mosque, and though these people were merchants and involved in bitter politics in the small town and province to which they belonged, there was a constant denial of the importance of money and wealth, a claim that these were surface matters, and that beyond money what was important was a good moral family, a good name, honor and a circle of thoughtful children. The preoccupations of a consumer society, the labels and fashions would not have been further from their minds. Even

the more successful, even rapacious, larger landlords could be heard saying, "I am an old man. My needs are few. All I need is a piece of bread and a bit of cheese (*iki lokma peynir ekmek*) to keep me going." This was an expected cultural expression again of a way of life most evident in the carefreeness of the Dervish orders. It was being manifested among ordinary people not necessarily members of Dervish groups, who, while making protestations of poverty and lack of needs, were quite often engaged in cut throat struggles with other political groups, and even numerous blood feuds between the various clans of the locality. It may be recalled that Khomeini too, when he returned to Iran, made a great impression leading a very humble existence. He too is said to have dined on a simple meal of bread and yogurt in the evenings. It did not prevent him from sweeping away the vast machinery of the Shah regime.

This culture of detachment in worldly matters, in particular to money, was also expressed in the indifference shown to dress. My friends, though important members of the community, would go around unshaven, in old clothes which looked as if they had been slept in since they had been first put on months ago, old crumpled shirts and overcoats frayed around the edges and buttonholes. They wore western "business suits," but as they prayed every day on their knees, and as they took their ablutions numerous times in the course of the day, the sleeves of their coats and trouser bottoms would be rolled up and down, and the backs of their shoes would be pressed down from washing their feet. There were, of course, occasions when they would be spruced up, but it did seem as if the religious preoccupation with purity and cleanliness, a state most evident to the inner man took precedence over how they appeared on the outside. And these were merchants supposedly in competition in the capitalist modern world.

## V

The preoccupation with love is rendered most explicit in the story of the life of one of the poets of Islam, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi. The stature of Rumi in Islamic literature is like that of Chaucer or Shakespeare in English. His story has been told many times. He is also the saintly spirit which animates the famous Mevlevi order of "Whirling Dervishes" which has survived to this day. He was born in Balh (Central Asia) on September 30, 1207; but lived most of his life in Konya, Central Turkey, and died in Konya on 17 December 1273. The time is one of great upheavals in the Islamic world; the rise and fall of great states; great invasions of Turkish speaking peoples from Central Asia. Mevlana was a professor of law like his father. He was greatly admired

in the city of Konya, with many students at this University and many interested in his work and lectures in the town. He was on very good terms with the court of the Seljuk kings. He was, in other words, a very successful intellectual concerned with his books, papers, lectures and deeply interested in the explication of religion.

Suddenly, on the 29th of December 1244, a revolution took place in his placid life. He met a man called *Sems-i tabrizi* in Konya (the "sun" of Tabriz). The circumstances of their meeting are not very clear. There are many diverse accounts. Sems apparently simply grabbed the bridle and stopped his horse on the street. Sems is said to have been a man good for nothing. He might have been called a "hippie" at this time. However, it is clear that he exemplifies "love" and the mystery of the "divine" in the story. Upon meeting Sems, Mevlana is stunned by his alien way of life. He goes through what we may call a mental crisis and falls irresistibly in love with Sems. He stops his lectures. He ceases to see his students, friends, members of the court. He withdraws with Sems into a cell in the college where they stay together engaged in friendly discourse for forty days. (A ritual number often associated with austerities). During this time, the population of Konya is increasingly incensed. There are great riots outside the college. The Seljuk throne itself is said to be endangered. Friends of Mevlana fear for the life of Sems. Finally, Sems departs. This departure occasions the most extraordinary gushing forth of lyric poetry on the subjects of love and separation from Mevlana. He feels he must see Sems again. His son, Veled Cebeci goes to find Sems, and succeeds in bringing him back to the hostile environment of Konya, but once again their intimate happiness is threatened by the mobs. Sems leaves finally, never to return. There are traditions

suggesting that he may have been killed (see Schimmel 1993, 1992). Then Mevlana travels to Damascus to find Sems, but is unsuccessful. He spends the rest of his days, again in Konya, at his College, with his students, but this time his life has meaning, which is predicated on divine love. He composes vast and still deeply moving works of poetry on the allegory of Love.

It should be observed that the entire story has a heavy religious tone and the incidents in Konya are interpreted in entirely metaphysical terms. Nicholson notes that "Sultan Walad likens his father's all-absorbing communion with this "hidden saint" to the journey of Moses in company with Khadir (Koran, xviii, 64-80), the sage whom Muslim mystics regard as the supreme hierophant and guide of travelers on the Way to God." (Nicholson 1970, p.19) What is clear to the commentators, and in the poetry, is that Sems-i tabrizi is turned into the master symbol of divine love between men and God, and between humans. Nicholson again, "In this union of loving souls all distinctions vanish: nothing remains but the essential Unity of Love, in which "lover" and "beloved" have merged their separate identities" (Nicholson, p.21). It is not fortuitous that "sems" is named after The Sun. He gives direction to the life of Mevlana and meaning to his existence, but he is both united with Sems and separated. The rituals relating to this story, especially the commemoration of the death of Mevlana and his reunion with God, can still be seen every December in the town of Konya at the college of Mevlana. The books of poetry - almost all in Persian - have been the basis for the *tariqat* from the 13th century to our day. Many would regard them as the central religious element in the Turkish and indeed Anatolian psyche. The rituals accompanied by courtly mystical music have taken place from time to time in Europe

and the U.S. Nicholson writes, "We see him standing out as a sublime mountain peak; the many other poets before and after him are but foot-hills in comparison" (p.26).

My description of the relations among men in eastern Turkey, and the life of Mevlana are separated by many centuries. But the teaching of Mevlana concerned with mysticism and love ran as a powerful current energizing intellectual and emotional life for many centuries. There is little doubt that the culture of Turkish society has been profoundly affected by the powerful stream of mystical thought (Sapolyo 1964). The entire Mevlevi order, together with numerous other manifestations of popular Islam, indeed all the *tariqats*, was outlawed by the Turkish Republic in the 1930s; but all evidence suggests that their teaching and traditions were carefully maintained.

Since the 1960s public and private interest in these traditions has experienced a great reawakening (Gunes-Ayata 1994). Interestingly enough, these Orders were originally outlawed since they appeared to express too much "otherworldliness" and "fatalism" to the positivist modernizers such as Ataturk or Inonu who set the direction of the young Turkish Republic (Mardin 1989; Mardin 1994).

## VI

The difference between men in eastern Turkey, and the formality and relative distance in the relations of men in Sri Lanka, where I spent much time in field work in small villages was always striking to me. In Sri Lanka too, like in South India, there are concerns about body pollution. The different castes maintain degrees of space between each other. The act of kissing, even between husband and wife, has heavy overtones of pollution and is almost never seen in public. The anxiety about bodily pollution ap-

pears even in unexpected contexts such as the manner of food consumption. There is little doubt that commensality expresses a certain kind of “equality” in both India and the Islamic East. The difference is that in the Hindu case, the tendency is to eat separately and to deny the “equality” that eating together would imply. The many descriptions of the Brahman male eating in his home in splendid isolation, or the public marriage feasts of Jaffna Tamils eating in strictly “hierarchical” rows on separate mats in a happier time before the civil war which has overtaken them, stand in eloquent contrast to the constant attempt made in the Middle East to get men to eat together around a round copper tray, and, if possible, from the same pot of soup or the same plate of rice. I recall vividly seeing the local Muslims in Pottuvil in Sri Lanka showing their solidarity in great public ceremonies by cooking rice in enormous cauldrons in public and having a ceremonial feast for all to see. It seems to me again, that the symbol is the same, but its context and message is different; food brings out “hierarchy” in India and Sri Lanka, but implies “equality” in the Middle East.

Finally consider how much the preoccupation with Love, worldly involvement, and equality contrast with the predominant values of Hindu-Buddhist civilization of “hierarchy” and “detachment” from the world. The master symbol of this renunciation is the Sannyasi or indeed the Buddha. The Buddha’s sacred quest in search of Nirvana liberation involves the touching story of giving up his family, abandoning his wife and child to be detached from the world. Even his horse Chantaka dies understanding that he will be abandoned when the Buddha in his incarnation as Prince Siddhartha takes final leave of him. How very different from the conception of piety on the Muslim side. Of the mystic poet, Abu



Said b. Abi'l-Khair (d. 1049) the following story is told:

They said to him, 'So-and-so walks on the water'. He replied: 'It is easy enough: frogs and water fowl do it.' They said, 'So-and-so flies in the air'. 'So do the birds and insects', he replied. They said,

'So-and-so goes from one town to another in a moment of time.' 'Satan', he rejoined, 'goes in one moment from the East to the West. Things like these have no great value.' And he added: 'The true saint goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them and buys and sells in the market and marries and takes part in social intercourse, and never forgets God for a single moment' (Grunebaum 1951, pp. 71-72).

If we can claim that the principle of "equality" in Islam finds its most prominent religious expression in the cult of love such as that of Mevlana, and that as Dumont has claimed, "renunciation" is one of the central values of Hindu civilization, where do we place the extraordinary love cults in Hindu history and experience? What do we do with the Divine Love of God Krishna and the *Gopis*, the exquisite Bhajans of South India, the superb Vaishnava traditions of Bengal and elsewhere?

In fact, we have evidence that these important traditions of love in Hindu civilization also powerful metaphors of social equality. "...the followers of Bhakti are persons who consider poverty and service as positive virtues for...devotion. ...They stress the understanding of the misery of others, compassion and impartiality toward all persons regardless of class. Their standards include modesty, ...freedom from pride in birth, actions, class, caste, wealth or status" (Hopkins 1966, p. 18). "...Bhakti religion itself is considered an act of compassion on the part of the Lord by which women, Sudras, and those who have fallen from twice born status might be brought to better condition" (Hopkins 1966, p. 19).

The great intensity of the *gopis* love for Krishna...comes from its being the love of a woman for her lover. This kind of love is even more intense than the love of a woman for her husband, because it

is not subject to the discipline, respect, and obedience of wifely love. It is a love among equals which is bound to be more intense and more sweeping than the love between a superior and an inferior. Fear, respect, sense of inequality, absence of liberty...is all distracting factors in the intensity of love..." (Hence)... the love of the *gopis* for Sri Krishna was wild and dashing like the storm or the gale and it swept everything before it... it knew no check or restraint. The *gopis* forgot themselves absolutely. They forget their own bodies, their dress, their homes, their people (husbands, sons, daughters, parents-in-law...) They were not aware of how time was gliding... (Singer 1966, p. 131).

In other words, all social structures of time dissolve in the passion of love. And more pointedly:

Nityananda, unlike Caitanya, was decidedly conscious of the social significance of the bhakti doctrine. Not only was he himself casteless, as a member of an Avadhuta ascetic order, not only did he "stay with the Sudras" as indeed Caitanya himself had done, not only was he "apostle to the Banyas" but he has been accused by tradition of allowing "degraded elements"-- some thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns, presumably Tantrics-- into the Vaishnava fold.

Indeed, Caitanya says, "Hear, O Nityananda. Go quickly to Navadvip. It is my promise, made with my own mouth, that ignorant and low-caste and humble people will float upon the sea of prema (love)...you can set them free by bhakti"(Dimock, Jr. 1966, p.53-54).

This makes the point neatly, it would seem, for Divine Love expressed in communal ritual and feeling as a revolutionary and leveling force in society. It is a point of profound contact in Hindu and Mus-





lim devotionalism. But in the Hindu case, it is a minor theme of a great civilization, whereas in Islam many have said that little else matters.

In both cases I have written in the same vein as Louis Dumont. These appear to be fundamental principles on which different civilizations base their most profound conceptions of human existence and meaning. In both cases, the vision is religious and therefore more difficult to understand for persons brought up in the anti-religious positivist, utilitarian and pragmatic traditions of the late 19th and 20th century in the West. In both cases, it seems profitless to reduce these principles to merely utilitarian or pragmatic ones such as economic facts, social categories or power relations. It is the dialectical interplay between these infrastructural bases and the singulari-

ties of the superstructural conceptions of the universe (to revert to a Marxist idiom) which is most worthy of our attention.

Islamic mysticism and Bhakti with their intense attention to the "inner" and individual particularity of the person, their fervent pleas for individual spiritual liberation, are both indeed a metaphors for ultimate human freedom. They do understand each other. Robinson in a recent review writes of religious tolerance in Bangladesh, which is 'a striking feature of this world': "A Muslim mystic sings of the longing of Radha for Krishna, and his Muslim audience is enraptured by this metaphor of the soul's longing for God." "All of us, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists," Haripada Pal (described [by art historian Kathleen A. Foster] as one of the 'finest sculptors at work in the modern world') declares "are here in this vexed place, struggling to endure for a brief span. The world is one, and we are one, all of us alike in the drop of God we contain" (Robinson 1998). This longing is expressed in the language appropriate for a different age but the intention is crystal clear.

All the Muslim mystics from the great martyr al-Hallaj onwards have sung of the sanctity of the individual and his (or her) vision of God. The martyrdom of al-Hallaj (857-922) at the hands of a cruel tyrant in Baghdad on 26 March 922 has passed into Muslim legend. It is also the subject of an extraordinary feat of French scholarship which has brought the matter to the attention of western readers (Massignon 1982). Sung and celebrated through the centuries, the story of the dreadful incident (Arberry has 28 March 913 as the fateful date) is a master narrative of this passionate claim for individual illumination as against oppressive and unjust authority. The compendium of Attar (b.1119-d.1220) contains a long list of those who suffered

similar fates (Attar 1990, pp.264-71). Islam shares this passion for the free inner life of the individual (and its proper expression) with the other world religions. This is what brings Massignon, the Catholic scholar, so close to al-Hallaj. The mystical orientation to individual spiritual experience is to speak about human dignity, individuality, sanctity and decency in a different voice. As we recall the gentle memories of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi and Yunus Emre, the generations of Islamic poets in many languages, the musicians as well as the love songs of the Gopis for Krishna, we should remember that the critique of the state authorities (in any guise) in personal life, so necessary in our world to-day, is entirely in their spirit.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> I met Talat when we were young boys at that legendary school in Istanbul, Robert College. We were both interested in literature with the significant difference that I read novels whereas he not only composed poetry but did so in those amazingly complex classical Ottoman meters. I knew something about recent literature, or so I pretended, whereas he could read and even understand those enigmatic courtly poets writing in their obscure Arab- Persian Ottoman forms in the 16th century. I regret to say that this difference has endured except that now his expertise in the entire sweep of Turkish literary and epic adventures from the earliest writings in Central Asia to the sparkling outpourings of the latest poetry (and literature) radiates from many universities. Quite apart from Talat's contributions to an understanding of the Turkish mind in America (not a task for the faint hearted), apart from his efforts as minister culture and ambassador for Turkey, representative at UNESCO and similar public service duties, his most important contribution has been to make both Westerners and Westoxicated Turks understand the depth and richness of the Turkish literary and spiritual heritage. Talat was one of the early voices among the secular republicans to draw attention to the profundity and continuing vitality of the humanist spiritual tradition in much of the Turkish literary heritage. This after all is no small achievement considering the immense corpus of works spanning a period longer than a millennium that is hardly glimpsed at in the West and often neglected in Turkey. The brief work that follows owes much to our conversations over the years about the powerful current of humanism in Turkey.







## Shared Typologies of Marital Love and (Com)passion in Islam and Christianity

**By Mark Farha**

A comparison of the extensive literature on spousal love and affection across the ages shows that Islam and Christianity have distinguished terms associated with lust and passion (*'ishq*, *hawā*, *eros*) from spousal

love (*mawadda*, *rahma*, *misericordia*) and compassion (*mawadda*, *misericordia*) [see appendix].<sup>1</sup> Like most traditions, Christianity and Islam have come to discard ephemeral impulses and infatuations as a foundation for marriage.<sup>2</sup> The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard once marveled that

“in the whole New Testament there is not found a word about (emotional) love in the sense in which the poet sings of it and paganism defined it;”<sup>3</sup> much the same could be said about the Qur’ān and Islam.

While it may be conceded that love has not figured as the centerpiece of Muslim theology *per se*,<sup>4</sup> one may call into question the facile deduction that the Qur’ān itself is silent on this existential topic. From the dawn of Islam, this majestic verse from the Sūrat al-Rum has constituted the textual touchstone for all subsequent Muslim conceptualizations of the marital nexus:

Among His signs is this: That He created for you, from your souls, spouses that you may find repose in them, and [that] He has created love [*mawadatan*] and compassion [*rahmatan*] between you. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect. [30:21]

Kenneth Cragg goes so far as to speak of traces of a “marital benediction and sacrament” in [30:21],<sup>5</sup> and indeed the homage to God as the ultimate source for the affection between the spouses is in full accord with the Christian consecration of marriage. Yet the common ground extends further. In his authoritative commentary on this verse, the fourteenth century exegete Ibn Kathir employs language highly reminiscent of that found in Jesus’ famous discourse in Matthew:

Truly man will cleave for his wife, be it out of love or compassion felt towards her, be it that she may beget children from him or...due to harmony and familiarity (*ulfa*) between them.<sup>6</sup>

Have ye not read, that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female [Genesis 2:24] and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and

mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?’ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. [Matthew 19:4-6]

Jesus’ above reference to the notion of a pre-existential unity of the sexes in God’s cosmos is also an integral part of the Qur’ānic conception of marriage:

It is He who created you from a single soul (*min nafsin wāhidatin*), and made from it a mate of like nature, in order that you might dwell with her. [al-‘Araf 7:189]

Part of an ancient, universal cosmology,<sup>7</sup> the pre-existential “tri-unity of love, lover and beloved” surfaces in neoplatonic Islamic writings,<sup>8</sup> and the account of the creation of Adam in from clay and the fashioning of Eve from his rib [2:30-34]. The conjugal union signals but a reconstitution of the separated sexes in one flesh/one species (*jinsin wāhidin*), hence the familiarity (*isti’nās*), intimacy, tranquility (*sukūn*), rest (*istiqrār*) and serenity (*tumā’nīna*) retrieved within marriage.<sup>9</sup> The ultimate repose referred to in [30:21] is essentially a “resting of the hearts” (*sukūn al-qulūb*) as al-Razi put it, and is effected by the attracting forces of *mawadda* and *rahma*.<sup>10</sup>

Given that the customary Arabic translation for Christian love (*agápē*) in the Gospels has been *mahabba*, it is particularly relevant to point out that the major medieval Muslim *mufassirūn* in fact equate *mahabba* with the Qur’ānic *mawadda*, while reserving their unadorned opprobrium for *‘ishq* and *hawā*.<sup>11</sup> Such latter, passionate infatuation, while celebrated by many a poet, generally met the censure of classic commentaries as irrational caprice and an

anti-social, “devilish desire”.<sup>12</sup> The chief defect of lust (*shahwa*) and fickle forms of “love” (*hubb*) is that they are more akin to a sexual whim (*nazwa jasadiyya*) which does not lend itself to the continuity of a conjugal union (*dawām al-ishrā*).<sup>13</sup> The Muslim commentators of the Qur’ān would thus readily second Luther’s admonishing advice:

A wife is easily taken, but to have abiding love, that is the challenge. One who finds it in his marriage should thank the Lord God for it. Therefore, approach marriage earnestly and ask God to give you a good, pious girl, with whom you can spend your life in mutual love. For sex establishes nothing in this regard; there must also be agreement in values and character (*ut convenient mores et ingenium*).<sup>14</sup>

Writing half a millennium earlier, Ibn Hazm foreshadows this skepticism towards *shahwa* which he defines as an affection that does not pass beyond the “beauty of the form.”<sup>15</sup> Fakhr al-Din al-Razi makes an analogous distinction between *shahwa* and *rahma* as it is invoked in 30:21. Picturing a mature marriage in which the wife has aged, fallen ill and “left the state of desirability (*shahwa*), al-Razi highlights the importance of *rahma*:

For we may still find between two spouses (*qarīnayn*) mutual respect unbeknownst even among blood relatives. This is not due to the existence of desire (*shahwa*) which indeed may have ended with age, but rather because compassion (*rahma*), which is from God, has remained.<sup>16</sup>

Implicit in *rahma* then is a hierarchical, asexual relationship of commiserating mercy (*shafqa*) or compassion (*rā’fa*), whereas *mawadda* is often interpreted as the pri-

mordial relationship between Adam and Eve. To illustrate the difference, the classic commentators cite a pithy saying by Ibn ‘Abbas: „Love (*mawadda*) befits adults while mercy (*rahma*) is due to the small and weak.”<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, it would be misleading to view *mawadda* and *rahma*, spousal and social love, so to speak, as two unrelated categories. Fakhr al-Din Razi ends up by positing *mawadda* as “the instance which results in *rahma*.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, he hints at a link between private and public spheres in Islam.

Its sharp rejection of heedless devotion does not imply that Islam was inimical towards compassionate love. Nor did the Qur’ānic commentators gloss over sexual desire. Rather, sensuality was relegated to a secondary position within the larger framework of the marital codependency between man and woman:

Thus God established between man and woman love and compassion by means of marriage, an arrangement not known to other animals. The objective being [the establishment of] domestic life...since man is dependent on mutual acquaintance (*ta’āruf*) and cooperation (*ta’āwun*) necessary reciprocal love (*tawadd*) and commiseration (*tarāhum*).<sup>19</sup>

The precondition for procreation, emotional and sexual attraction (*hubb*) to one’s spouse is validated as the natural consequence of the mutual longing for completeness, but subordinated to the active affection (*mahabba*) kindling cooperation between the spouses.<sup>20</sup> This crucial distinction made by the renowned Qur’ānic exegete al-Tabatabai mirrors Immanuel Kant’s differentiation between “pathological love” and “practical love.”<sup>21</sup> The former instinctual attraction may be likened to the passionate, burning *Eros* which has

been lamented as a disease - or lauded as a *Daemon* - in Plato's symposium, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, the famed Arabic couples Leila and Majnun, Jamil and Buthaina, the tragic European couples of Abelard and Heloise, Tristan and Iseult, the Trobadors of the Provence and Aquitaine, the medieval *Minnesaenger*, Juan Ruiz' *Libro de Buen Amor*, or *De Amore* by Andreas Capellaneus amongst countless others. The striking similarities between the European courtly love and the Arab 'Uthrī and Hijāzī love poetry has led a number of scholars to document multiple historical links and literary affinities between the two genres via Muslim Andalusia.<sup>22</sup> Like de Rougemont, Werner Sombart, an economist, locates the beginning of what he calls the "secularization of love" in the early Middle Ages when southern Europe began to exchange goods and ideas with the Near East.<sup>23</sup>

The marks of this unrequited and unrealizable love (*amor de lohn, amour lointaine*) are a usually unreachable beloved pined after by a servile suitor, in part a reflection of the feudal system with its rigid class hierarchies.<sup>24</sup> Insurmountable obstacles only spur the intensity of this passion which is almost always illicit and secret in contradistinction to a public vow of fidelity which constitutes marriage.<sup>25</sup> Tellingly, both in its Oriental and Occidental manifestations, the word for matrimonial love (*mawadda, mahabba, Agápē*) is absent from almost the entire body of this genre of literature extolling extramarital expressions of passion (*'ishq, hubb, hawā, eros*).<sup>26</sup> So too is the role of God as the indispensable lode-star of the matrimonial troth.

The misgiving Christianity and Islam show for this kind of all-consuming love – which at times may be sublimated into a Platonic, spiritualized adulation of the beloved<sup>27</sup>

– are twofold. For one, this kind of love almost always unfolds outside the confines of marriage and thus is predicated on what is perceived as a selfish claim to exclude third parties, neglect social obligations and shut off the private from the public realm.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, from a religious perspective, the command to "be in love" appears nonsensical at best, and detrimental to human freedom and agency at worst.<sup>29</sup> Nor do the religious notions of "mercy and compassion" presuppose any of the "admirable" qualities in the object of love the poets are wont to exalt.<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard underlines that the Gospel's command to love one's neighbor, can, by definition, not be conditioned on subjective tastes and predilections, but on objective human need alone.<sup>31</sup> Care for the person, in other words, must take precedence over the infatuation with passion. In Denis de Rougemont's critique, such *Passion d'amour* – whether it takes the sublimated form of courtly love, the more explicit form of carnal ribaldry, or the literary obsession with (extra-marital) romance - is but a form of escapism fomented by "mechanical boredom" (*l'ennui mécanique*).<sup>32</sup> Yet in tracing the origins of the "heretic" myth to the Troubadors' denigration of conventional matrimony, de Rougemont fails to sufficiently acknowledge that negative views of marriage in fact preceded the advent of any "Carthar heresy": In the early phases of Christianity, St. Paul, Origin and Tertullian viewed marriage as a concession to our carnal nature and made their preference clear for celibate life.<sup>33</sup> Such was the perceived rift separating Christian love (*agápē*) from wedlock that some scholars have stipulated a total alienation of the two up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup>

There is some exaggeration in this thesis, at least as concerns its historical chronology and categorical claim. Augustine's



foundational treatises or the homilies of St. John Chrysostom in the eighth century could display a high esteem for marriage; likewise St. Gregory Nazianzen hailed the “true chastity” of marriage in his writings.<sup>35</sup> Even within the genre of Medieval *Minnesang* and troubadour love lyric, the picture is not always clear. It is true that there are precious few odes to marital love. Yet the ennobling qualities of courtly love may not invariably have been incompatible with Christian love (*agápē*). Saint Francis of Assisi for instance converted the ideals and virtues of courtly romance he sought as a youth into a Christian, and even monastic ideal of self-abasing service to God and those in need. Likewise, the homage paid to love’s ennobling features in the admittedly burlesque Spanish classic *Libro de Buen Amor* – possibly inspired by Ibn Hazm’s earlier, strikingly similar digest of love’s refining power<sup>36</sup> – need not be at odds with marital love:

The man who serves women has many good qualities...he strives to be vigorous, forthcoming, generous; the good man does not flinch from serving women, for with hard work, he will live a life of great pleasure...love makes the ignorant man wise, makes the dumb speak with eloquence, love makes the coward bold, and the lazy sharp and quick. It keeps the young man youthful, and makes the old man’s age fall away.<sup>37</sup>

What is more, the earliest extant lyrical love poetry in German by Dietmar von Aste and Der von Kurenberg, while acknowledging that there is no love without suffering, largely focuses on the joy of communion of the lovers. De Rougemont himself acknowledges that the German mystic Meister Eckardt speaks of a deliberate, voluntary communion of wills (*Einigung*), not a fate-induced, Platonic union (*Ver-*

*einigung*).<sup>38</sup> Even if most of these disquisitions largely pertained to love outside of marriage, they contain a certain ambiguity which precludes a clear-cut categorization within the binary dichotomy of *eros* and *agápē*. Chaucer, for instance, attempts to reconcile the courtly love paradigm with marriage. In his *Franklin’s Tale*, the hero Arveragus vows to be at once “a servant in love, and lord in marriage,” affirming that “love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.”<sup>39</sup> Be that as it may, there is no doubt that by the time of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Erasmus and Luther unequivocally exalt and validate love in marriage. Luther even deems marriage as superior to celibacy, thereby inverting the prior hierarchy of the Church.<sup>40</sup>

In this sense, Islam may be said to have preceded the vindication of the marital state in Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Five centuries prior to Luther, in the most detailed treatise on the origins and characteristics of love, the *Tawq al-Hamama (The Dove’s Necklace)*, the Zahirite jurist (faqīh) Ibn Hazm [d.1064] highlights the causal link between the pre-eternal unity of selves and the growth of an earthly union of the spouses in marriage: “As the cause of [this] cohabitation He made the fact that she is made from him...as for [the genesis of] true love, there is no other reason save the reunion of souls.”<sup>42</sup> Ibn Hazm defines marriage as the restoration of the original state of complementary wholeness, harmony and soothing security (*sakīna*) as outlined in 7:189 and 30:21.<sup>43</sup> While conceding that all ordinary love waxes and wanes according to distance and nearness, he maintains that this is not so for the “true love emanating from the soul (*nafs*).” Hence Ibn al-Hazm is insistent on drawing our attention to an absolute, ontological love between the sexes which is not contingent upon any outer causes such as beauty or even external affinity (*munāsaba*), but rather finds its

real, original cause in the “essential substance of the soul” (*fī thāt an-nafs*).<sup>44</sup>

It thus bears repeating that both in the Christian understanding of marital *Agápē* and the Islamic interpretation of *mawadda* in 30:21, physical love and infatuation between the sexes is not denied its place, but rather framed in a broader cosmic duality of male and female, and subsumed under the spouses’ continual, willed submission (*Islām*) of their selves to God in a spirit of self-renunciation (*Gr.*: *kenosis*). As Muslims supplicate God in the *Fātiha* to guide them, so too Christians pray daily for God’s “will to be done” in the *Our Father*, following the example set by Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsamane: “Not my will, but Your will be done” (Mark 14:36).<sup>45</sup>

Translated to the marital relationship, Islam and Christianity affirm that overcoming the division of the two genders is only possible in an “at-one-ment” with their creator, God. Ibn Hazm affirms that “the noblest love is the love of that pair of lovers who love each other in God.”<sup>46</sup> And Saint Exupéry formulates a parallel insight: “To love is not to gaze at one another but to look in the same direction.”<sup>47</sup> Only such a love which constantly orients itself to its eternal source (as highlighted in 30:21) can aspire to be perpetual in destiny thanks to the unfailing grace of God. The marked agitation of the paramours contrasts with the soothing state of the couple whose relationship is secured by faith in God, for “in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest” [Al-Ra’d 13:28].

This is not to say that marital love need be a somber affair devoid of fervid devotion. Yet despite misleading surface resemblances, a fundamental distinction must be drawn between sacrificial and suicidal loves. While the former is a “love unto death,” the latter may be described as a concealed death-wish masquerading as “love.”<sup>48</sup> If an overflow of pity for one’s spouse, friend

or neighbor may result in the ultimate act of “self-sacrifice” for a fellow human being,<sup>49</sup> suicidal love is consumed in the immolation of the self and other, whether in excessive aggrandizement or servile debasement. Denounced in Greek, Roman, Arab and Chinese traditions as a sickness often associated with melancholy,<sup>50</sup> this egocentric obsession with emotive intoxication lends itself to dramatic poetic expression due to its inbuilt anguish and tragedy as Kierkegaard pointed out.<sup>51</sup> A masochistic yearning for the reprimand of the beloved finds expression in this famous Arabic verse likening passion to a drug-like addiction: “Stop reprimanding me, even if your censure is seductive; Heal me with her who is my disease.”<sup>52</sup> In the West, one of the most famous examples this kind of self-destructive delirium was Goethe’s *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther*. The tragic end of this novel, in which the jilted lover commits suicide after his final rejection, triggered a spat of suicides by German adolescents taken by the storyline. Suicide then stands revealed as the ultimate flight from reality, while sacrificial love is the ultimate act of confrontation. If passionate desire amounts to a form of escapism from the strictures of life and the dread of death, religiously grounded love confronts both and thus liberates man from the clutches of a false deity:

The God *Eros* is the slave of death because he wishes to elevate life above our finite and limited creature state. Hence the same impulse that leads us to adore life thrusts us into its negation. There lies the profound woe and despair characterizing *Eros*, his inexpressible bondage; and in making this bondage evident *Agápē* has delivered *Eros* from it. *Agápē* is aware that our terrestrial land temporal life is unworthy of adulation... but that it can be accepted in obedience to the Eternal.<sup>53</sup>

Both *Eros/Ishq* and *Agápē/Mahabba* may be seen as expressions of the soul's search for immortality. Yet in addressing man's ardent hunger for eternal life, Christianity unmasks the empty promise of avaricious desire by inverting its ideals.<sup>54</sup> Instead of revelling in beauty, riches, showcased virtues and elusive states of spiritual and sexual ecstasy, Christ inverts the order by speaking of lightness in the darkness, a richness in poverty, the salvation of the (penitent) sinners, the blessedness of suffering, the love hidden in affliction and disease. All this is anathema to the hedonist or sentimentalist in pursuit of a fantasy from which the shadow sides of transient life and its suffering are screened out in aloof denial of death and time.<sup>55</sup> Torn asunder by ever-shifting external pursuits and the insatiable desire for rapturous release from our terrestrial, transient state, this mode of *ex-istence*,<sup>56</sup> far from resulting in the desired deliverance, paradoxically reduces us to an animal solely occupied by its surroundings. Ortega calls this falsified mode of externalized life *alteración*.<sup>57</sup> It is to be shed for our authentic, "in-sisting" inner soul (*enismamiento*)<sup>58</sup> which binds us to humanity at large. This transition is comparable to Kierkegaard's journey in *Either/Or* from the peripheral aesthetic life to our personal core, or Heloise's introspection after her conversion from carnal love to spiritual love.<sup>59</sup> Ortega underscores that this transformation rarely if ever can be achieved without suffering.

Lovers never attain to a love of self abandonment, of true fusion of soul and not merely of body, until the heavy pestle of sorrow has bruised their hearts and crushed them in the same mortar of suffering...if bodies are united by pleasure, souls are united by pain.<sup>60</sup>

The chief mark of marriage, its oath of fidelity, entails the acceptance of the spous-

es to shoulder the loads of life. While *Ishq*/Eros seduces with its promise of release from all earthly ties and bondage, marriage, by contrast, constitutes a pledge to tie a perpetual bond. If passionate love is the dream of a supra-terrestrial existence, marital love connotes a conscious commitment to make the transcendent immanent in the here and now. As such, the marital bond, properly conceived, entails an emancipation of bride and bridegroom, at once from the internal illusion of infinite freedom, as well as from external coercion.<sup>61</sup>

To be sure, despite the great emphasis on marriage being predicated on a fully conscious decision, it would be mistaken to assume too radical a dichotomy between will and vocation. Even the Church, ever since elevating marriage to a sacrament, recognizes marriage as a sacrament, recognizes an element of mystery and divine grace animating and sustaining matrimonial love. Without revisiting the age-old theological debate in Islam between free will and predestination (between adherents of "*jadriyya*" and "*qadriyya*"), we may rest satisfied with the Hadith which establishes a reciprocal relationship between human effort and divine support, thus affirming God's grace without suspending our responsibility: "Anyone who approaches Me by one handspan, I will approach him by one arm's length; anyone who approaches Me one arm's length, I will approach him by a cubit; if he comes to Me walking, I will come to him running."<sup>62</sup> There thus is room for God's soothing serendipity in love. By humbling ourselves before God, we give him space to unfold.

### ***The Maturity of Marital Love: Spousal, Social and Spiritual Realms United***

Even long before Sigmund Freud's seminal psychoanalytic studies, there has been a human penchant to regard the sexual

instinct as just that: a biological inborn natural libido that may be channeled or repressed, but essentially one that lies outside the domain of our human volition and control. Marriage in this sense is reduced to a remedy for concupiscence, a means for stilling man's "sexual thirst."<sup>63</sup> Ortega Y Gasset reveals the fallacy of this pervasive preconception in asserting that sexual desire is overwhelmingly "the work of our magnificent ability to imagine which is no longer an instinct, but precisely the opposite, a creation."<sup>64</sup> As a product of our self-constructed imagination, cupidity and concupiscence are not so much a result of extraneous influences or set bodily functions than of our inner disposition as Jesus points out:

Nothing from outside can defile a man... the things that come from within a man are what defile a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, come evil thoughts, adulteries, immoralities, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, shamelessness, jealousy, blasphemy, pride... All these evil things come from within, and defile a man (Mark 7:18-23).

In a sense, the fraudulent freedom which beckons in passion's sea of enchantments and ecstasies is the antithesis of the often prosaic, quotidian obligations demanded by acts of charity and compassion. Yet the latter are prioritized by religion. We may well recall that Islam and Christianity in many ways began as responses to societies misled by enthralling eloquence. The Qur'an's rebuke of the poets as "those who say what they practice not" (26:226) is analogous to Jesus' denunciation of the hypocrisy of the outwardly impressive, prideful Pharisees.<sup>65</sup> Silver-tongued, supercilious mockers, the Pharisees and the poets embody vainglorious wordsmiths who lead the people astray with a splendid ap-

pearance and captivating words belied by their poisoned hearts and barren deeds.

Beginning with Kierkegaard, nineteenth century European philosophy would find itself in an existential revolt against another form of speculation and sophistic word-play. Kierkegaard was particularly upset with Hegel's hubristic infatuation with abstract reason. Yet in his early years, Hegel in fact too rejected the platonic, cerebral conception of love as mere passive contemplation of (absolute) beauty. Instead, Hegel defined genuine love "existentially" as a "lived bond of virtues."<sup>66</sup> To illustrate his definition of love as enacted charity, Hegel draws an analogy between Arab Bedouin hospitality and the last supper shared by Jesus. Such communal meals, far from being "a mere symbol of friendship" are "an act, a feeling of friendship manifested, an embodiment of the spirit of love."<sup>67</sup> In this very first elaboration of his famous dialectic, Hegel identifies the lived charity of husband and wife as the synthesis of Hellenic beauty (sensuality) and Hebraic moralism (reason).<sup>68</sup> He would thus anticipate his caustic critic Kierkegaard who made it his calling to aver that Christian martial love (*Agápē*) is neither a sentiment nor an idea, but an act.<sup>69</sup>

No less frequently we find a sustained effort on the part of the Qur'anic commentators to emphasize the broad existential and practical implications of love instead of confining it to the private, and at times anti-social emotional satisfaction shared exclusively between lover and beloved as the courtly love tradition – in both its Arab-*'uthrī* and European variants - is wont to celebrate. Tabatabai offers a suggestive interpretation of *mawadda* as emotional love (*hubb*) in practice which finds its analogue in the axiomatic Confucian virtue (*jen/ren*) as concretized emotional love (*ai*), "redeeming the world through human effort."<sup>70</sup>

That Islam defines compassion as an active posture is also evident from Arabic etymology. Edward Lane and the *Lisān al-'Arab* tell us that the Arabic root verb *wadda* – of which *mawadda* is the verbal noun or *masdar* – does not only signify to “love or wish” but also “to do good, to affect.”<sup>71</sup> The English speaker will notice that *affection* in English too is etymologically connected to a verb denoting action: *to affect*. This basic linguistic parallel carries an ethical and religious import as well. For the mark of genuine, marital love is that it will not stop at the satisfaction of the spouses but rather will serve as a main-spring for positive social implications. The state of *sakīna*, the soothing bliss of the marital union alluded to in 30:21, is not an end unto itself - in which case Islam would be reduced to self-sufficient stoicism - but rather the comforting ground of faith from which new deeds of mercy may take root: “It is He who sent down peace of reassurance (*sakīna*) into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith unto their faith. And He placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him.” [Al-Fath 48:4]

Ibn Hazm further insists that authentic marital love will reveal itself as a source of knowledge (*'ilm*), promote the sharing of goods and provide the energy necessary for exertion in work and affection in human relations (*mahabba al-qirāba*).<sup>72</sup> To Fakhr al-Din Razi, the Qur'ānic allusion to *mawadda* and *rahma* emerge as dialectic, disciplining forces which may at once safeguard the sacred and prevent humans from yielding to the loathsome (*makrūh*).<sup>73</sup> Hegel echoes this point of view in concluding that the best antidote against adultery is not merely negative prohibitions, but alerting our consciousness to the holiness of love.<sup>74</sup> Schiller holds up the good Samaritan as a metaphor of gratuitous, freely-disposed philanthropy rather than externally dictated duty. Marriage, in

balancing the respective male and female predispositions of “spirit and sense” (*Geist und Gemuet*), serves to spawn new “men (and women) of integrity” whose inclinations and comportment anticipate the laws of reason and morality.<sup>75</sup>

The (male) intellect and female sensibility need each other in order to connect abstract concepts to the concrete world of nature. In Schiller's worldview, the aesthetic “is” (beauty or “*das Schöne*”) is quintessentially feminine and poetic, while the ethical “ought” (truth or *das Wahre*) is actively discovered by the male intellect and philosophy (see appendix). Willhelm v. Humboldt contends that male spirit (*der Geist*) roams in the ethereal spheres searching for the absolute abstractions of trans-temporal truth, whereas the female feeling (*die Gesinnung*) is prone to rest with the individual, concrete being, the tangible details of the here and now.<sup>76</sup> Humboldt traces this inclination to woman's natural vocation (*die Naturbestimmung*) to receive, give and preserve life, a duty which impels her to remain faithful to immanent reality. Woman teaches man in marriage to not seek pleasure but love, thus enhancing male beauty and dignity which is dependent on active nature prevailing over the pleasure principle (*der Genuss*).<sup>77</sup> While woman is innately reasonable, man must make himself reasonable. Through the matrimonial union, duty and desire (*Pflicht und Neigung*) are reconciled and joined to vanquish the joint enemy of egoism.<sup>78</sup> In Schiller's reflections on the beautiful soul, beauty manifests itself as a female state and a male deed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr cites an Arabic proverb reflecting a similar idea: “Goodness is outward and beauty inward in man, while in woman beauty is outward and goodness inward.”<sup>79</sup> In sum, marriage allows for the mutual temperance of gender-specific exaggerations: man's impetuosity and imperiousness, woman's devotement and abnegation are

refined into an “independent, confident femininity and a gentle, sensitive masculinity.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Conclusion: In the Fulcrum of Faith**

Any attempt to drive a wedge between the sensual, social and spiritual spheres of marital affection will inexorably impair each domain. In Kierkegaard’s vocabulary, the human condition mandates a constant striving for an accord between the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious dimensions of life.<sup>81</sup> It is this third perspective which holds the secret of a synthesis. For only by constantly calling to mind the eternal source and sustenance of our earthly relationships can we prevent passionate inclinations from descending into dissipation and promiscuity while simultaneously shielding our ethical concern from self-righteous conceit and hypocrisy: “Verily we belong to God and to him we shall return” [Baqira, 156]. It is He who is the ultimate guarantor of our integrity.<sup>82</sup>

By relating itself to the absolute, marital love acknowledges human limitation and imperfections and thus implies a constant posture of forgiveness, prayer and compassion. *Eros/Ishq*, by contrast, akin to a drug, derives its vitality from the ceaseless pursuit of intoxicating illusions of ecstasy and rapture, whether mental or physical in nature. The highest form of marital love does – to be sure – make room for the flame of passion, but it does so by embedding these impulses within the broader milieu of *Agápē/Mahabba/Mawadda*. The later is revealed by Islam and Christianity as an epiphany of God’s love for humanity which is gratuitously entrusted to us so that we may pass it on to others. Perhaps the single most significant insight yielded by Sūrat al-Rum 30:21 then is that marital compassion owes its existence and destiny to God’s original gift. The Qur’ān indicates

that its discovery is a sign (*āya*), one which should lead to contemplation and spur mutual completion:

As God put desire in man and woman to the end that the world should be preserved by their union,

So hath he implanted in every part of existence the desire for another part,

Each in love with the other for the sake of perfecting their mutual work.<sup>83</sup>

This spousal love, so majestically announced in the Qur’ān and consecrated in the Gospels, is, once placed between the genders by God, bound to engender further compassions which may aid and animate society at large:

And the equivalence of this [spousal and domestic] love and compassion (*mawadda wa rahma*) is witnessed in the larger civil society between individuals, each of whom takes comfort in the other through empathy as they show pity for the poor, the aged and weak who no longer are able to master the duties of life.<sup>84</sup>

Across the centuries and confessions, the spousal relationship, blessed by God, is enthroned as the supreme sentiment. Thus Ibn Kathir affirms: “There is no greater affection (*ulfa*) between two souls that that which is found between spouses.”<sup>85</sup> Some three centuries later, the same hierarchy is ascertained by Martin Luther:

The love between man and woman is, or should be, the greatest of all loves... Now there are three kinds of love: fraudulent love, natural love and marital love. False love seeks its own, as one loves money, goods, prestige and women outside of marriage and in violation of God’s command. Natural love obtains between a father and a child, between

brother and sister, between friend and in-laws and the like. But transcending them all is matrimonial love which is a spousal affection which burns like a fire and seeks nothing other than the welfare of the husband or wife.<sup>86</sup>

Though on the opposite end of the theological and political spectrum during the Reformation, the Catholic Bishop St. Francis de Sales espoused a similar vindication of marital love:

Above all else I exhort married people to have that mutual love which the Holy Spirit so highly recommends to them O you who are married, it means nothing to say, 'Love one another with a natural love' – two turtle doves make such love. Nor does it mean anything to say, 'Love one another with a human love' – the pagans have duly practiced such love. With the great apostle I say to you, 'Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the Church,' and you wives, love your husbands as the Church loves her savior.<sup>87</sup>

Muslims and Christians of all denominations thus find themselves in full concord that the marital relationship – in order to be sustained – must be recommended to and referred to its creator by husband and wife if it is to endure and withstand both the oscillations of time and our penchant for self-centeredness. In this sense the rich body of writings on marital love found within Islam and Christianity remain well-springs from which we may draw strength and inspiration to fulfill the mandate of compassion decreed for couples, families and society alike. All the writers included in this study would have readily agreed with the following synopsis of the salutary gifts bestowed by marriage which belongs to no confession and no age:

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced.<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, such a marital relationship promises to afford an enlargement of consciousness within the "school of equality" which love is.<sup>89</sup> For in the act of loving, each spouse goes out of him- and herself to discover the truer, deeper identity of self and other.<sup>90</sup> The particular characteristics of each of the genders is preserved in the relationship, yet in jointly confronting the marvels and miseries of daily life, the spouses touch upon their shared humanity: "Love thy neighbor as thyself" does not mean to love him as much as you love yourself, for self-love is devoid of meaning. It means 'love him as he whom you are', i.e. love is to sense a life similar to one's own, not a stronger or a weaker one."<sup>91</sup>

No longer are sorrows and joys of the world indulged in as a means to a self-centred end viewed through the impoverished and myopic vision of the aloof narcissist or the frantic consumerist, but rather they are transmuted by love into occasions of communal celebration and consolation. Far from masking our weakness and embellishing our insufficiencies,<sup>92</sup> outreaching compassion overcomes our mortality by embracing it. Far from blinding us to reality as the arrows of cupid might,<sup>93</sup> responding to the needs of our neighbor, whether child or parent, spouse or stranger, alone opens our eyes to God's incessant and infinite supply of mercy. The more we commit ourselves to love and give, the more we shall see and receive.<sup>94</sup> In the moment

of mercy and in the act of compassion, the tyranny of time is overcome in the communion which is life eternal.

### Appendix: Cross-Cultural Lexica of Love

<b>Greek</b>	<i>Eros</i>	<i>Philia</i>	<i>Agápē</i>
<b>Arabic</b>	<i>'Ishq, Shahwa, Hawa</i>		Mawadda, Mahabba, Rahma
<b>English</b>	Passion, Lust		Compassion, Love, Mercy
<b>German</b>	<i>Leidenschaft, Lust</i>		<i>Barmherzigkeit, Liebe, Mitleid</i>
<b>Chinese (Mozi)</b>	(Self) love 愛 ai	仁; <i>rén</i>	兼愛, <i>jiān ái</i> (universal love)
<b>J. Ruiz, Libro de Buen Amor</b>	<i>Cobdicia</i> (cupidity) <i>Cruel "Don Amor"</i>		<i>Amor de Dios</i> (charity) <i>Misericordia</i>
<b>Hegel</b>	Hellenic Beauty Poetry (Hölderlin)	Hebraic Moralism Philosophy (Kant)	Christian Charity Religion as "Living bond of virtues"
<b>Schiller</b>	<i>Das Schöne</i> /Beauty Freedom	<i>Das Wahre</i> /Truth Necessity	<i>Schöne Sittlichkeit</i> Freely Desired Duty
<b>Kierkegaard (Either/Or)</b>	Aesthetic Life/Love Johannes the Seducer Preferential love	Ethical Life/Love Judge William Love of Neighbor	Religious Life/Love The Knight of Faith Love by vow of Eternal
<b>Ortega Y Gasset</b>	<i>Alteración</i> (life governed by external sensations)		<i>Ensimismamiento</i> (life governed from within)
<b>Wilhelm v. Humbolt</b>	Fantasy in the realm of possible and particular	Geist in the realm of necessary and general	
<b>Miguel de Unamuno</b>	Love of self-alienating abandon in pleasure and ideas "ex-sistere"		Spiritual, Sorrowful Love & Pity in action, consciousness "in-sistere"
<b>Immanuel Kant</b>	Pathological Love	Practical Love	
<b>Denis de Rougemont</b>	<i>Passion d'Amour</i> , Pagan Myth of Desire		<i>Amour comblée</i> , Marital, Christian love
<b>Martin Luther</b>	False Love (money, fame, sex)	Natural Love (children, siblings)	Marital Love



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Susanne Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf: al Abbas b. Al-Ahnaf und das Ghazal*, (Beirut: Orient Institut, 1995), 172.

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul, Augustine and St. Gregory deemed celibacy superior to marriage. In an (in)famous, polemical tract against marriage, St. Jerome warned that "too ardent a lover of his own wife is an adulterer" which itself is an expression of earlier Roman and Greek attitudes. Glenn Olsen, ed., *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2001), 118. Ibn Taymiyya adopted a similarly negative attitude towards love in marriage. Joseph Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), 231. In Africa, India and China excessive love, even within marriage, was commonly seen as a "threat to the solidarity of the extended family." Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 15-18. Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Soeren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* [1847] (New York: Harper, 2009), 59.

<sup>4</sup> This too may be contested. The Qur'an invokes words related to *hubb* in no less than twenty-two instances, for instance in [3:31]: „If ye do love God follow me: God will love [yuhbibikum] you and forgive you your sins for God is most compassionate and merciful." Besides the ubiquitous references to God as the compassionate and merciful (*al-rahman al-rahim*) with which every citation is prefaced, *Al-Wadud* (the loving) is one of the cherished ninety-nine names of God. (11:90 and 85:14).

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The Dome and the Rock* (London: Speck, 1964), 150.

<sup>6</sup> Isail Ibn Umar Ibn Kathir, [d.1373], *Tafsir al-al-'Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1983), 368.

<sup>7</sup> On the complementarity of souls, see Plato, *Lysis* 221-220 in *Plato: Complete Works* trans. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, ed. by John M. Cooper (Hackett 1997). Sachiko Murata compares the Qur'anic cosmology with the Chinese notion of a "Great Ultimate" (*Tai Chi*) from which male and female, heaven and earth, *ying and yang* emanate. Sachiko Mu-

rata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (New York: Suny Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Ce Tawhid dont le secret est la tri-unité néoplatoniciennne de l'amour, de l'amant et de l'aimé." Henry Corbin, tr., *Le Jasmin des Fidèles d'Amour. Kitab-e 'Abhar al-'Ashiqin: de Ruzbihan ibn Abi al-Nasr Baqli* (d. 1209) (Teheran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1987), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb al-Mushtahar bi al-Tafsir al-Kabir* (Istanbul: 1881), 472-473. Sayyid al-Qutb, *Fi Zilzal al-Qur'an* vol. 21-25 (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1950), 36. Muhammad Mutawali Sharawi, *Ahkam al-Usrah fi al-Bayt al-Muslim* (Cairo: Makataba al-Turath, 1998), 21. Qurtubi places primary emphasis on woman as the means for *sakan*, which he defines as the abode in which man's sexual thirst (*ghula*) is stilled. Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi [d.1273] *al-Jami li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol. XIV, (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1963), 17. Abu Talib al-Makki in his *Qut al-Qulub* goes even further and elevates sexual satisfaction to the ultimate objective.

<sup>10</sup> Qurtubi, 17; al-Razi, 473. John Milton too saw in marriage a means of "banishing loneliness through agreeable companionship." Cit. in Jeffrey Watts, *The Long Reformation* (Wadsworth, 2004), 294.

<sup>11</sup> al-Razi, 857; Ibn Kathir, 367; Qurtubi, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Kuntze, "Love and God," in *Ghazal as World Literature*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth, (Beirut: Orient Institut, 2005), 163.

<sup>13</sup> Abd al-Salam Tirmanini, *al-Zawaj 'and al-Arab fi al-Jahiliyya wa-al-Islam*, (Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Watani, 1983), 321.

<sup>14</sup> Luther cit. in Steven Ozment, *Protestants: Birth of a Revolution*, (New York : Doubleday, 1992), 162.

<sup>15</sup> Ali ibn Ahmad Ibn Hazm [d.1064] *Tawq al-Hamamah*, (Beirut, Librairie al-Hayat 1960), The Qur'an mentions "love of desires" (*hubb al-shahawat*) as human lust for worldly goods, but ranks nearness to God as superior: "Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle

and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but nearness to God is the best of goals." (3:14)

<sup>16</sup> Al-Razi, 473.

<sup>17</sup> „*Al-mawadda lil kabīr wa al-rahma lil saghīr.*“ Abu al-Fazl Maybudi, Rashid al-Din, *Kashf al-Asrar wa Uddat al-Abrar* (Tehran: Iqbal, 1910), 446. Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi [d.1273] *al-Jami li-Ahkam al-Qur'ān*, vol. XIV, (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1963), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Razi, 473.

<sup>19</sup> Abd Allah Ibn 'Umar al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* (Damascus: Dar al-Rashid, 2000), 243.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Hussein Al-Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: 1970), 166.

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysik der Sitten," in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften, Teil I.* (Gruyter 1975), 671.

<sup>22</sup> The theory of an Arabic origin of romantic love was explored by the likes of A.R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic poetry and its relations with the old Provençal troubadours* (1946); Marie-Rose Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Univ. Of Pennsylvania, 1990); *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Manuela Marín, (Brill Academic Publishers, 2001) amongst many others.

<sup>23</sup> De Rougemont surmises ancient Manichean and Orphic precedents as a source of inspiration. De Rougemont, 62. Werner Sombart, *Economic Life in the Modern World*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), p.171. The zenith of passion was reached in the hedonism of the Renaissance, when one poet exclaims: "love is nothing but pleasure."

<sup>24</sup> Even in its formal rejection of social convention, this poetry often absorbed the language of slave and master: "Do not seek glory ('izz) in love (*hubb*), since only the slaves of love's law are free men....I am your slave, torment you if you will, whatever you will of me, do it, whatever it is! Accept my love, I give it as a gift. Then reward me with rejection – that is love." Abbas ibn al-Ahnaf (d.809) cit. in Boase, 459, 467.

<sup>25</sup> The stipulation of public witnesses to marriage was traditionally more explicit in Islam

(which recognizes marriage as a contract) than in Christianity. At least since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (and probably even before) - mutual consent was officially declared as a sufficient basis for marriage (*consensus facit nuptias*). Febvre, 335.

<sup>26</sup> The "school of love" (*mathhab-i 'ishq*) found in the satiric poetry of Hafiz and the self-deprecatory *malamati* is discussed in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Amongst many a mystic, the dividing lines between human love (*'ishq insani*) and divine love (*'ishq rabbāni or illāhi*) is well-nigh impossible to draw. Ritter tells us that amongst the Muslim mystics who follow the sober school of Junaid, earthly love is seen as a symbolic (*majāzi*) preschool (*Vorschule*) for the true, (*eigentliche/haqīqi*) love of God. Certainly the views expounded by Ibn Dawud (d.909) in his seminal treatise on love, the *Kitab al-Zahra*, as well as the famous 'uthrite poets like Jamil would confirm this thesis, as they extolled chastity in love as a mark of divine martyrdom. Helmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1978), 460ff. Sublimated desire however might still conceal a form of passion. Schiller makes an intriguing observation in this regard, claiming that „however abstract we may think, something sensual lies at the root of our thinking.“ "So abstract wir auch denken moegen, so ist es doch immer zuletzt etwas Sinnliches, was unserem Denken zum Grund liegt." Friedrich Schiller, *Schiller's Saemtliche Werke*, (Stuttgart und Tuebingen, 1847), 135.

<sup>28</sup> When Abelard proposed to marry Heloise, his secret mistress rejected his offer, claiming that both his career and their love would suffer, thus affirming the incompatibility of love and marriage. Cit. in Coontz, 17.

<sup>29</sup> De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1983), 311.

<sup>30</sup> "Christianity has never taught that one must admire his neighbor – one shall love him." Soeren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love [1847]* (New York: Harper, 2009), 67.

<sup>31</sup> "To love the beloved, asks Christianity – is that loving?... 'Do not the pagans do likewise?'" Kierkegaard, 66-67.

<sup>32</sup> De Rougemont argues that Hollywood and the media have further capitalized on this myth. De Rougemont, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Marriage here was seen as a concession to human concupiscence. "But if they cannot contain themselves, then let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." (1 Cor. 7:9). De Rougemont, 85.

<sup>34</sup> "Nowhere do we find in the course of these centuries [16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>] any attempt whatsoever to address the rapport between love and marriage in its depth...Love was but found outside marriage... Everything and everyone rejected love-marriages." Lucien Febvre, *Amour Sacre, Amour Profane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 322. Other scholars have maintained that the alienation of marriage from passion led the latter to be channeled into prostitution, pederasty, adultery, and concubinage – the last fed by Roman prohibition of marriage between classes. (Olsen, 109).

<sup>35</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, tr. John Ryan, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 222.

<sup>36</sup> "A man in love will give prodigally to the limit of his capacity, in a way that formerly he would have refused; as if he were the one receiving the donation...all this in order that he may show off his good points and make himself desirable. How often has the miser opened his purse-strings, the scowler relaxed his frown, the coward leapt heroically into the fray, the clod suddenly become sharp-witted, the boot turned into the perfect gentleman, the stinker transformed himself into the elegant dandy, the sloucher smartened up, the decrepit recaptured his lost youth...and all because of love!" Ibn Hazm, 35. The theme of love's power to purify and transmute is already found earlier in Plato's *Symposium* and later in Ibn Sina's *Risāla fī al-'Ishq* (*Treatise on Love*).

<sup>37</sup> Juan Ruiz, *Libro de Buen Amor* [*The Book of Good Love*], tr. Raymond S. Wills, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 155-156.

<sup>38</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1972), 169ff.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Boase, 468.

<sup>40</sup> "One cannot remain unmarried and chaste." Martin Luther cited in *Fathers*, 189. *Vom Ehelichen Leben und Andere Schriften*

(Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978). The Council of Trent in 1563, in no small part as a response to the Protestant elevation of marriage, re-confirmed a 1184 edict declaring matrimony as a sacrament.

<sup>41</sup> One notes for instance that formal veneration of the Holy Family by the Church only began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Hazm, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Despite invoking the duality of the sexes, Ibn Hazm curiously vehemently rejects Ibn Dawud's neoplatonic notion that souls are "divided spheres"(aruwah maqsuma). For more on Ibn Dawud and his *Kitab al-Zahra*, see Enderwitz, 181.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Hazm, 115.

<sup>45</sup> By the same token, Jesus defines a believer as "anyone who does His Will, the will of Him who sent me." (John 7:17).

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Hazm, 12.

<sup>47</sup> "Aimer ce n'est point nous regarder l'un l'autre mais regarder ensemble dans la même direction ." Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *Terre des hommes*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 225.

<sup>48</sup> There are countless examples in poetry of this close association of passion and death, of which Oscar Wilde's famous sonnet is but one vivid example: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves, but all let this be heard, Some do it with a bitter look, Some with a flattering word, The coward does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword." Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* [1898], (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

<sup>50</sup> Roger Boase, "Arab Influences on European Love-Poetry," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Manuela Marín, (Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 461. The notion of passionate love as a form of "divine madness" precedes Islam and Christianity, appearing in Plato's Phaedrus 265 and Symposium 202. See *Plato: Complete Works* trans. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, ed. by John M. Cooper (Hackett 1997).

<sup>51</sup> "For what the poet shall celebrate must have in it the anguish which is the riddle of his own life: it must blossom, and alas, it must perish. But Christian love abides...but that

which *has being* cannot be sung about – it must be believed and it must be lived.” Soeren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* [1847] (New York: Harper, 2009), 26.

<sup>52</sup> Abu Nuwwas cited in Adonis, *Die Gesänge des Mihyars des Damaszeners*, (Zürich: Amman Verlag, 1998), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1983), 311.

<sup>54</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony Of Christianity*, tr. Reinhardt, (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 15, 97.

<sup>55</sup> Soeren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or. A Fragment of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 373.

<sup>56</sup> Unamuno suggests this etymology to sharpen the contrast between the “*in-sisting*”, demanding nature of a conscious state and the indifferent, distracted and “*ex-isting*” unconscious mode of life. See Unamuno, 182.

<sup>57</sup> José Ortega Y Gasset, *Man and Crisis* (New York: Norton & Company, 1958), 91.

<sup>58</sup> This neologism could be translated as “to be set and centred within oneself.”

<sup>59</sup> “The nature of the conqueror is constantly outside itself; that of the possessor inside itself.” Kierkegaard, 459. “My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love...Those who are Christians are wholly occupied with the inner man.” *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, tr. Radice, (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 153, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony Of Christianity*, tr. Reinhardt, (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 135.

<sup>61</sup> “How can you force the bride to yield to marital and sexual union, how can you compel her to marital accord and friendship when it was God who decreed mercy and love between the spouses? Indeed this can only be done by rousing her anger and aversion towards her husband, and what kind of love and merry is there in that?” Ahmad bin ‘Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Masa’il al-Mardaniyya* (Damascus: 1964), 116.

<sup>62</sup> Hadith by Bukhari cited in *Riyad as-Salihin (The Meadows of the Righteous)*, Al-Imam Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Sharaf An-Nawawi Ad-Dimashqi (Lahore: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1999), chapter 52, no. 440.

<sup>63</sup> Qurtubi, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ortega Y Gasset, *Man and Crisis*, 102.

<sup>65</sup> “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you are like whitewashed sepulchers, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear just to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matthew 23; 27-28) (Mark:7:7).

<sup>66</sup> “*Ein lebendiges Band der Tugenden, eine Lebendige Einheit.*” Hegel, G. W. F., *Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Herman Nohl (Berlin, 1923), 297. See Plato’s Symposia for his ode to the love of the beauty of bodies, souls, knowledge and absolute beauty. De Rougemont notes that this love remains contemplative and restricted to the mind. As such, Platonic love remains a sublimated form of desire (*Eros*). See De Rougemont, 168.

<sup>67</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Herman Nohl (Berlin, 1923), 297. Also see appendix to this article.

<sup>68</sup> “In the spirit of the Hebrews, there stood between impulse and action, desire and deed, trespass and pardon an impassable gulf, an alien court of judgment...what held them together was chains, laws given by a superior power...*a living bond of virtues*, a living unity, is quite different from the unity of concept...just as virtue is the complement of obedience to the law, so love is the complement of the virtues.” Hegel, G. W. F., *Theologische Jugendschriften* [1790-1800] ed. Herman Nohl (Berlin, 1923), 295.

<sup>69</sup> “To be in love is a state; to love, an act. A state is suffered or undergone, but an act has to be decided upon (in marriage).” de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 310-311.

<sup>70</sup> Tabatabai, 166. For more on the Confucian perspective, see the contribution of Tu Wei-Ming in this volume.

<sup>71</sup> Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society: 1984), 293. *Lisan al-‘Arab*, ed. Muhammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzur (Cairo: Dar al-Misriyah, 1966), 468.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Hazm, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, 473.

<sup>74</sup> Hegel, Schiller and Schleiermacher all lay great emphasis on the individual's interior, pure intent (*Gesinnung*) rather than exterior, communal laws as the best guarantee for a preservation of morality and marriage. They do not deny the validity of the laws of reason, but merely advocate an alignment of disposition with dogma. Hegel pursued a more "scientific" method to arrive at the synthesis via his notion of reason *Verstand* than the German romantics who valorized "sentiment", but in the end both discounted the force of law as a gateway to the absolute, or even as an efficient restraint on immoral behavior. Hegel, G. W. F., *Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Herman Nohl (Berlin, 1923), 398. In this reasoning, they were informed by Luther as well as Romans 13:10: "Love is the fulfillment of the law."

<sup>75</sup> „Ein sittliches Wesen.“ Friedrich Schiller, *Über die Notwendigen Grenzen beim Gebrauch des Schoenen* (1795).

<sup>76</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Werke*, (Berlin, 1841/1988: Walter Gruyter), 258.

<sup>77</sup> von Humboldt, 226

<sup>78</sup> von Humboldt, 258.

<sup>79</sup> S.H. Nasr, "The Male and the Female in Islam," *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, (Suhail Academy, Lahore, 1990).

A similar idea is expressed in the Proverbs: "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects a man." (Proverbs 27:19).

Ibn 'Arabi even goes so far as to say that "God is more perfectly seen in a human being than in any other being, and more perfectly in woman than in man." Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhy ad-din Muhammad, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Beirut: Dar al-Yaqza, 1968), 339.

<sup>80</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, [1795] „Über die Diotima" in *Kritische Schlegel Ausgabe*, Hrsg. Ernst Behler, (Munich: 1967), 91. The complementarity of the sexes in marriage in fact already became a familiar trope in the Middle Ages. Hicmar, Archbishop of Reims, viewed marriage as a mitigation of "woman's cunningness and man's roughness." Duby, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Soeren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or. A Fragment of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 468-469.

<sup>82</sup> "Only the sensing of the whole, i.e. love, is able to prevent the dissipation of the self." "Nur die Empfindung des Ganzen, die Liebe, vermag die Zerstreuung des Wesens zu verhindern." Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, 270.

<sup>83</sup> Reynold Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1975), 123.

<sup>84</sup> Muhammad Hussein Al-Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: 1970), 166.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Kathir, 238.

<sup>86</sup> „Vom Ehelichen Stand," Cited in *Eheglueck und Liebesjoch: Bilder von Liebe, Ehe und Familie in der Literatur des 15. Und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Maria Muller, (Beltz Verlag: Weinheim und Basel, 1988), 208.

<sup>87</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, tr. John Ryan, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 220.

<sup>88</sup> St. John Chrysostom cit. in John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract* (WJK: Louisville, 1997), 21.

<sup>89</sup> "L'amour est une école d'égalité, d'entraide et d'écoute mutuelle. Une école où la découverte de soi est découverte de l'autre, où la découverte de l'autre est une découverte de soi." De Rougemont, *L'Amour et L'Occident*, 338.

<sup>90</sup> Ortega Y Gasset, *On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

<sup>91</sup> Hegel, G. W. F., *Theologische Jugendschriften* [1790-1800] ed. Herman Nohl (Berlin, 1923), 295.

<sup>92</sup> "Love always speaks medaciously, what is crude in itself seems good in the eyes of love." Juan Ruiz, 163.

<sup>93</sup> "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind." William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer-night's Dream*, Act I, Scene I.

<sup>94</sup> "C'est l'amour qui fait voir. La vision est en proportion de l'amour." Corbin, 15.



## The Face of the Praised

**By Rusmir Mahmutćehajić**

I have fashioned thee as  
a work of art for Myself.

*Qur'an, 20:41*

I will raise them up a Prophet  
from among their brethren,  
like unto thee.

*Deuteronomy, 18:18*

Verily of an immense magnitude  
is thy nature.

*Qur'an, 68:4*

Out of the depths have I cried  
unto thee, O Lord!

*Psalms, 130:1*

Almost as a rule, one finds the following text inscribed calligraphically in the mihrabs of Bosnian mosques: "Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the mihrab."<sup>1</sup> One finds similar inscriptions in the mosques of other areas, but little detailed research has been done on them. The Zachariah in the inscription is the prophet of God and priest at the Temple in Sion,<sup>2</sup> the father of the prophet John [the Baptist], and the person upon whom he enters is the Virgin Mary, the mother of the Messiah Jesus. The inscription is one part of a Qur'anic verse that refers to Mary as being in the mihrab of the Mosque or Temple.<sup>3</sup>

For the Muslim tradition, the mihrab is the symbolic centre or focus of the mosque

or place of worship and so of all human life. What does the inscription mean and why is it found at this central place?

Those who first inscribed this unfinished sentence in their mihrabs must have had clear answers to these questions. Their descendants today do not. They have either lost or forgotten them. What has been forgotten can be recalled, however, as true forgetting does not exist, at least within the human self or for the real. Forgetting is simply a condition of the self where its indestructible core is obscured by false representations and false knowledge.

The core is cut off from the periphery, which comprises the body, analytic Reason, the passions, and so forth. We then mistake the periphery for the self as a whole. What is lost can be found, however, so long as it is true. The truth cannot be lost. Only human beings can be lost. When we find ourselves, we also find the truth that has been hidden from us. The inscription at the heart of the mihrab offers us signs with ontological, cosmological, anthropological, and psychological references. To understand them, we must have recourse to the framework of traditional intellectuality and perennial wisdom.

The disclosure of these signifiers is of crucial importance for the process of liberation from forgetting or oblivion. Liberating ourselves, we disclose or discover our hearts as treasuries of immediate knowledge – knowledge which does not depend on anything external, but on which human self-realisation itself depends.<sup>4</sup> In this way, we may realise ourselves in line with our authentic nature. Memory or recollection is therefore our highest possibility. In it, we find both our beginning and our end.

Finding our beginning and end entails the discovery of both arcs of our existence – the first marking universal descent from the One, the other ascent to the same One.

This descent begins in the Light of the Praised, the universal “seed”, the maternal prophecy, and the principle of reception in absolute purity, quietude, and service. The end of the ascent is also the Praised as the universal “fruit”.

## 1

The mihrab inscription we are discussing is from the Recitation, the Word God sent down through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Holy, to the Praised.<sup>5</sup> That Word captures all of existence in verbal form as it relates to God, the only true Being. In this way, existence and its relationship to God are brought together in human language. The focus of the entire discourse is the name of God. Nothing can contradict or equal it. Human being, however, is duality, being both male and female, and is the obverse of that revelation of Unity. This is why it is in the Recitation that we should look for answers as to why Mary was in the mihrab.

God told the prophet Moses that He had shaped him as a work of art for Himself.<sup>6</sup> He told him that He would raise up a Prophet like him.<sup>7</sup> All the prophets swore oaths in pre-existence to this Prophet who was like Moses.<sup>8</sup> That Prophet’s nature is of an immense magnitude,<sup>9</sup> and he is our most beautiful example.<sup>10</sup> This is why the Word was revealed to him in the form of the Book from which the text on the Virgin was copied.

The Recitation describes many and complex forms of relationship between God and humankind. God is the first cause and the source of all existence. Human being reflects and focuses existence. God owes nothing to anyone. We owe our existence to God. Our relationship is of creature and Creator.

God and human beings are always related in one way or another. God partakes

of this relationship as both absolutely near and absolutely far, alike and incomparable. He has every claim on us, but indulges us and counterbalances our ability to sink to the lowest depth in the existential battlefield with his offer of redemption and return to Him. This bond takes on form both in and outside of language and may be in either direction.

The bond in language descends from above, from God to humanity, as the Revelation. Ascending from below, from humanity to God, it can assume various forms of address – witness, praise, prayer, repentance, sacrifice, etc. The non-linguistic bond from above includes signs on the horizons of the world and in history. The bond from below involves various forms of human duty, ritual, and art.

God is the Lord to Whom the most beautiful names belong. We are His servants, and, as such, it is ours to receive and put on that through which our Lord reveals Himself. To be worthy to serve our Lord, we must display absolute humility, quietude, loyalty, and openness to receive and bear what He gives us. In this way, we find ourselves between the abnegation of mere appearance and rising up through reality as received from and revealing our Lord. Where we stand is determined by our voluntary reception of confidence as the form of our relationship with God. Acting without this faith in God we become violent and ignorant, in arrogance, rebellion, resistance, and closedness.

God extends two possibilities to us, His perfect and most rebellious servants. On the one hand, He is infinitely good and merciful, clement and kind, loving and forgiving of His servant who is bound to Him in a bond of peace. On the other hand, God is wrathful and severe, jealous and chastising, but always absolutely just. These two possibilities in our relations with God take the

forms of being-at-peace, faith, and beauty, on the one hand, and rebellion, concealment, and idolatrous association, on the other.

## 2

Although undergoing constant revelation, the human self as a whole remains concealed.<sup>11</sup> Revelation and concealment come together and are reflected in the face. What is revealed speaks of what lies hid, as its higher reality. From moment to moment, we turn our faces to the world and to other people, searching for this higher reality. But our faces find rest nowhere. We cannot find that peacefulness and rest in which we might be absolutely peaceful, before the Face. This is because, no matter where we direct our face or what we encounter in the world, we cannot abide there for ever. We are searching for more than is in all the world. It is only through this eternally higher world and what it contains that our path towards our object has any sense at all.

This being so, we change from moment to moment, as the self alters with each new moment. Our face also changes, as in each new moment it engages with some aspect of the Divine Face Which is both revealed and hidden from us. And so we may well ask: where does it lead, this change in our face?

The answer to this question remains hidden from us, so long as we look for it in terms of our being-within-change. In fact, no final answer is possible, even though it become the focus of our life, will, knowledge, power, and our faculties of hearing and sight. None of the potential answers can transcend the difference to which our inability to turn our faces to and abide in Peace testifies.

This invincible difference appears in the form of a relationship between the seeker





and the Sought, between the face and the Face. There are always two, but we yearn after the One, revealed in and affirmed by that pair. We find ourselves always within duality, constantly reminded of our higher and more beautiful faculties. No matter how high we rise, this higher and more beautiful state remains out of reach, but we want to unite with it, nonetheless.

This aspirational desire emerges as will. We desire the Face of our Lord, in which we will find everything our original and final potential promises us. Our life and our death, ritual and sacrifice, these are the way of virtue on which we are guided by our desire for the Lord's Face.<sup>12</sup> In our quest for the Face, through which we may overcome duality, we are constantly faced with the terrible void of oblivion or forgetting. Our need to overcome the void leads us to fill the world with the expectation of receiving God and returning to Him through linguistic and ritual communion with the face. This quest takes on the form of witness: "All that dwells on the earth is undergoing annihilation, and there subsists the Face of your Lord, Possessor of Majesty and generous giving."<sup>13</sup>

### 3

As individuals, we experience the duality that runs throughout existence primarily in terms of the opposition between the self

and the external world. We are turned towards this world with all our being. This turn would seem to be focused in our face. It is through our face that we address the world as a whole. That world is a mirror image of our face, just as our face is a mirror image of world.

Everything we learn in our relationship with the world comes about, or perhaps is quickened, within us. Our face expresses this interior, as well as the exterior with which it is constantly related. Consequently, one may say that existence as a whole is the obverse of the human face. We and the world are two sides or two aspects of one face, as every pair affirms and reveals the One.

Both the horizons of the world and the self are differentiated into an infinity of signs in continuous flux. Each sign has two sides and a contrary, as everything in existence is part of a pair.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing within the horizons of the world or the self that is not part of a pair. The members of a pair can never be reduced to each other, obliterating the differences between them. Only absolute unity can encompass them and the differences between them. It is the same with the human face. Everything brought together and reflected in it takes on a different aspect with each new moment, irreducibly different from that which has just past and that which is com-

ing. Whatever its condition, the human self always partakes of the pair of the face and the Face.

Having turned our faces towards the horizons of the world to gaze at the heavenly expanse, we return to our own selves tired and confused, for the majesty and beauty of what we have seen does not reveal itself to us as showing the Face clearly oriented towards us, the Face Which is to unite everything that spurs us on to ceaseless searching and turning, the Face in Which all duality will be resolved. But we desire that orientation. No matter what we seem to be looking at, it is ourselves we are searching for. Return from the expanses of the horizons to the self recalls us to our own inner self as the likely habitat of the Face we seek. As a result of this act of recollection, the horizons and the signs they contain lose their role as sources of knowledge. They become reminders of what we already hold within ourselves.

#### 4

The beauty revealed to us by the horizons and other people's faces does not last. It calls to us continuously, only to fade. It appears briefly, but the memory of it stimulates us all the more to search for it. Our experience of beauty in the horizons of the world recalls us to the self as beauty's real habitat. Nowhere in the world can it take root and become permanently available. It resides within us: we belong to beauty and bear witness of it. But the signs in the world do recall it, as well as the veil of forgetting which covers it.

What we see as beautiful is in fact how we would like to see ourselves from the point of view of the Beautiful. This desire pervades our entire being, inside and out, beginning and end. We are always somewhere between inside and outside, beginning and end. These are pairs in the fullest

sense, which is to say they reveal the Unity towards which we aspire.

We and the world are a pair. Nothing in our selves or the external world is so stable or all-embracing that our quest can be brought to an end: there is no level we can reach which is not a depth in comparison to the One and the Most-High. The human face is continuously turning to look for the Face Which will unite and bring fulfilment to all, before Which we will be alone before the Alone, standing before Him Who Stands, sufficient before the All-Sufficient, and praised before the All-Praised.

So, we are continuously searching for our own face, in which to find and realise all that our highest moment entails, that we may take on the aspect of the Face in undifferentiated fullness, in union with what we know as beauty. This endeavour steers us towards the horizons, which nonetheless remind us of the core or heart of the self. There is nothing in the external world which is not related in some way to our core, as the point of confluence where all distinctions disappear and differences appear as Unity. This possibility is above and beyond all finitude. Only Unity is independent of everything but itself, while what is outside Unity depends on It. To return and ascend to the self means to find one's all in Unity.

#### 5

Experienced by the self as news that arises from its own core, majesty and beauty are worthy of praise. Whenever we find full confirmation in either the world or the self of identity that transcends duality, we recognise in what we have found that self for which we are looking. When we find it, it appears to us as a flash of the absolute. As soon as we see it, it disappears. We bear witness, however, as we recall that it came from our own centre. In the indestructible

core of our being, we know that what has been shown us in the world and in our own self is the one truth. This is why our consciousness is always discovering and recovering the crucial confession that there is no self but the Self, no face but the Face.

Revealing and remembering beauty speak of the human heart as comprehending beyond time and space, as comprehending all time and all space. Drawing our attention to this possibility, to our return to it, God spoke to us through the Praised, commanding him to say: "Say: 'Believe in it, or believe not; those who were given the knowledge before it when it is recited to them, fall down upon their faces prostrating', and say, 'Glory be to our Lord! Our Lord's promise is performed.' And they fall down upon their faces weeping; and it increases them in humility."<sup>15</sup>

We all have knowledge of this thanks to the act of our creation. We all have one and the same original nature, pure and endowed with everything we need to return to God, as He told us: "So set thy face to the debt, of the pure – God's original upon which He originated mankind."<sup>16</sup>

Whenever that which we already know within ourselves is revealed to us in the course of our quest for the self, it becomes all our desire to abnegate this pair, to realise ourselves in Unity as the source and end of all things manifest, and to abnegate our own face before the Face, which is our greatest promise in eternity and infinity. Thus, we bear witness that there is no face but the Face and that we can realise ourselves only in the Face.

## 6

The world reveals us to ourselves. The horizons are in our image writ large, while we are the image of those same horizons writ little. Whatever we comprehend in the external world is comprehended in our heart.

The visible world is our face. In this way, we and the world are a pair, one term of which reflects the other.

We find ourselves in the world, so that whatever confirms our expectations is worthy of praise. But we also bring together within our own selves whatsoever is worthy of praise in either ourselves or the world. We bring it together, firstly as the recipients of the praise by which God reveals His being All-Praised and then as givers of what we have received through Praise of the Giver.

No matter how high we raise ourselves in the heavenly heights or how low we descend within ourselves, we are always within the boundaries and we can never do away with them. This is why existence as a whole appears to us, in both the world and in our own selves, as twofold – as a world within reach of our sensory perception and another beyond its reach. We cannot overcome this duality, no matter what our condition. We cannot, because it is through it that Unity is revealed as both source and end of everything in existence.

While the first world seems closer to us, it is not. The principle of the second is higher in value: everything visible derives from the invisible. The invisible and the inaudible are the principles of the visible and the audible. Whatever our condition, we are always "suspended" between two possibilities: falling into the material depth or rising to the height of the Spirit. On each level we reach there is a visible sign of its essence. This sign is, in fact, there to remind us of our essence. The Praised said:

This House (*Ka'ba*) is one of 15, seven in the heavens up to the throne and seven up to the limits of the lowest Earth. The highest one, which is near the throne, is the 'visited house'. Every one of these houses has a sacred territory like that of the *Ka'ba*. If any one of them fell down,

the rest would fall down, one upon the other, to the limits of the lowest Earth. And every house has its heavenly or earthly worshippers, like the Ka'ba.<sup>17</sup>

Knowledge is the relationship of the knower to the known. Unity, even if known, cannot be limited by anything. If we want it, there is no knowledge which might limit the approach to Unity. No point on the path of approach or ascent is final. As long as we are in the world of duality, the upward path to Unity remains open. This ascent depends on the heart, which contains all the points or degrees, from the lowest to the highest. Once the heart falls, the entire revelation of the One has fallen.

## 7

We want to be what we know and to know what we are. This will is a desire for union. As knowing subjects, we need that which we know. Nothing can remove this need. This is because the Known is always out of reach of our knowledge and, consequently, irresistible and unfailingly attractive. The name for this inextinguishable desire of the human self is love. Unity is constantly attracting to Itself whatever serves to reveal It in the world of duality. It attracts because there is nothing real in all existence that does not come from It and belong to It. In this process of attraction, the pairs wish to become manifest and return to the One. Our love for what we know is made manifest in the confession that there is no self but the Self.

Through the continuous discovery of beauty and majesty the self which seeks the Self shows its inexhaustible nature and consequently both its concealment and its disclosure. It cannot be reduced to any of its appearances, any more than any of those appearances have any reality without It. Every manifestation of the One, however, includes two. The impossibility that

this couple be reduced, either to the other, takes on the form of witness of the One and of their irresistible attraction for the One. In any such act of witness, both are turned to Peace as the Goal in Which all differences will be resolved. Consequently, one can say that each thing is a recipient and a revelation of Peace, just as being-at-peace is our way of relating to both our beginning and our end.

The Face we seek, in and through Which we want to see ourselves, is irresistibly attractive. We love this perfect Face, but It remains always out of our grasp. It reveals and then conceals itself before us. To attain It, it is not enough to be completely at peace before It; we must set out on the upright road, the road of the fortunate, on which the Praised or real individual is our example and our guide. As such, he reveals duality as the non-differentiation of perfect masculinity and perfect femininity in the same self.

## 8

The One confirms the not-One as the ineffable principle of all things. Duality and limitless multiplicity also confirm the One. Given that multiplicity announces the One, it also announces the most beautiful name of the One. The most beautiful names are scattered throughout the cosmos, but brought together in human being. To complete this gathering of the names, their own created principle, the Breath of the Creator was inspired into us, that we might bring them together again and return them to the One, and so even to the not-One.

It is through our imagination that we transcend boundaries, and it is this which enables us to seek the Named among the names and so return to or discover Him in His own Breath at our core. The earth and the heavens extend before us, far exceeding us in magnitude, but we have our place within them and another beyond them, in

our consciousness and our imagination. There is in them nothing real but the Real. Consciousness of this is our most profound content, as is clear from the words God spoke through the Praised: "My earth and My heaven embrace Me not, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace me."<sup>18</sup> The heart of the faithful servant mentioned in this holy tradition is that essential place in which all contradictions are reconciled.

Faith is our relationship, as beings of faith, with God the Faithful. This relationship takes place on the basis of what can only be a little knowledge, regardless how great it may appear, as it is subject to constant change in both its object and form. Even such knowledge, however, is sufficient for us to recognise the Face which irresistibly attracts our own faces, as its essential nature is to intimate the Unchanging. This force of attraction is love. In faith, knowledge and love are one.

In this mutual attraction of the human face and the divine Face, our external horizons and the self and the world of scattered signs are oriented along an axis that passes through all the worlds towards the throne of the One. Through the Praised, God said of this: "We have seen thee turning thy face about in the heaven; now We will surely turn thee to a direction that shall satisfy thee. Turn thy face towards the Holy Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it."<sup>19</sup>

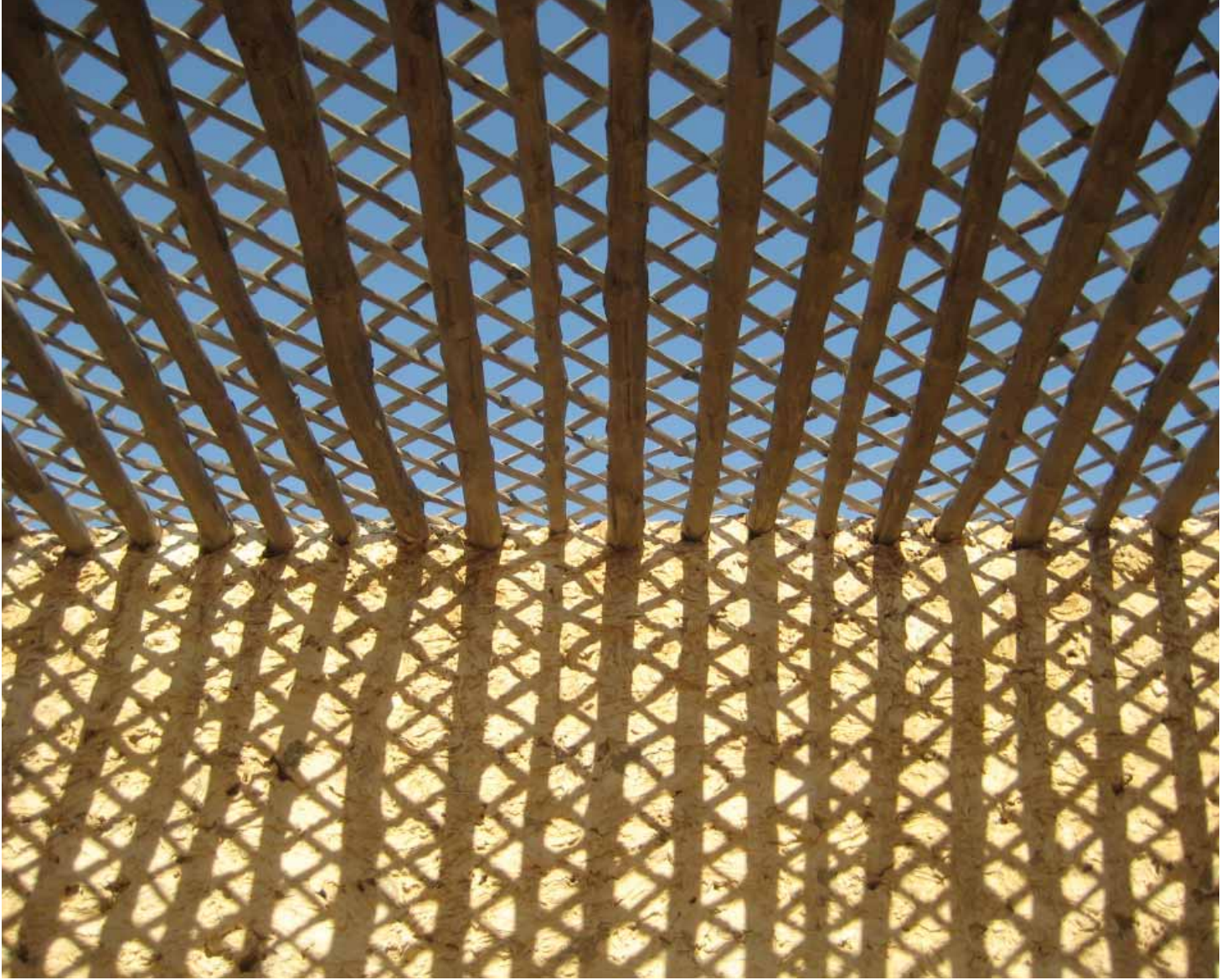
## 9

Human beings are both male and female. Our form of being is manifest in or through this split in two which together reveal the One. The full discovery of humanity requires that we transcend this division. To transcend division is to be on the path of return to the One. The full manifestation of the One is the fullness of humanity. For we

are fullness; not male or female, but male and female. This means that the full human being is the union of all divisions. This is shown at the level of signs in the praise of the One as the All-Praised.<sup>20</sup> When individual things, and therefore also their contraries and so existence as a whole, praise their reason and end, they are returning the praise with which the One as the All-Praised revealed Himself. The All-Praised is beyond all difference, even though He reveals Himself through differences.

When an individual reaches perfection and recognises in him or herself the vicegerent, which is to say a follower of the complete human being, it is in and through the perfect balance of the male and female aspects. God is the All-Praised. His Self-revelation is like an emanation of His praise. This emanation is creation as the reception of praise and being from the All-Praised. Everything through which God reveals Himself as the All-Praised receives His praise. As this revelation contains nothing that has not been received from God as the All-Praised, praise is the mode of existence for all things. The most sublime sign of this praise is the Praised as the maternal prophet who corresponds to the maternal book, in terms of his simultaneous priority and finality in creation.<sup>21</sup>

God's first manifestation is in Praise and the Praised, mindful always that none are praised but the All-Praised. What we find on the lower levels of existence is a series of images of the Praised as revealing the All-Praised. They are bound by the relation of praise. When praise is focused and flows in the self, human being is perfected and reaches its fullness. Such a one is a perfect example to all others in all their circumstances and conditions.<sup>22</sup> Through such an individual, the Light is sent down from on high to the lowest level of existence<sup>23</sup> to be a shining lamp to every self



on every level of existence.<sup>24</sup> The path back to God, the All-Praised, lies through this perfect individual.

## 10

God the All-Praised spoke plainly of this revelation through the Praised and we may read in the Recitation of the universal individual as the first recipient of praise and of the Praised as the fairest example, as well as of the sending down of praise into all the worlds and of how they are gathered in our essence:

To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth. We have charged those who were given the Book before you, and you, to remain conscious of God. If

you conceal, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God is All-sufficient, All-praised.<sup>25</sup>

And it is He who sends down the rain after they have despaired, and He unfolds His mercy. He is the Protector, the All-Praised.<sup>26</sup>

All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies God. His is the Kingdom, and His is the praise, and He is powerful over everything.<sup>27</sup>

And He is God; there is no god but He. His is the praise in the former as in the latter; His too is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned.<sup>28</sup>

Proclaim thy Lord's praise, and be of those who prostrate themselves, and serve thy Lord, until the Certain comes to thee!<sup>29</sup>

Surely thou art before Our eyes. And proclaim the praise of thy Lord when thou arisest, and proclaim the praise of thy Lord in the night, and at the declining of the stars.<sup>30</sup>

But those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what is sent down to the Praised – and it is the truth from their Lord – He will acquit them of their evil deeds, and dispose their minds aright.<sup>31</sup>

The Praised is not the father of any one of your men, but the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the prophets; God has knowledge of everything.<sup>32</sup>

## 11

When it is a woman who is addressing this sought after Face as the perfection of the self, then she perceives it as the Praised in male form. When it is a man who is the appellant, then he addresses it as the Praised in female form. As the Face brings together and meets all expectations, It is beyond all distinction. It is neither the female nor the male Praised; It is both. The Face resolves all differences: "And call not upon another god with God; there is no god but He. All things perish, except His Face."<sup>33</sup> This is the Face Which is before and beyond everything in existence. In and through It we accomplish our ascent and return to our highest moment.

This return includes realisation of the witness that there is no face but the Face. Conscious of this and mindful of the Unity which encompasses all things in Its revelation, we abnegate ourselves before the Face that we might be made in Its fullness. God said of this in the Recitation: "Hast

thou not seen how to God prostrate all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many of mankind?"<sup>34</sup> This abnegation is the rejection of mere appearance for the sake of the Real, the annihilation of the face to reveal the Face. In this way the self shows its dissatisfaction with all its conditions except that of being a face before the Face, of looking upon the Beloved and being looked upon by His eyes alone.

In this process of discovery, the world appears as glory thanks to the praise of the Lord. This discovery is expressed perfectly by the ascent through the night to the Light, through the flesh to the Spirit. The path is trod from the lowest depth to the highest height. One who has experience of standing before the Upright and being praised before the All-Praised can fall to the lowest depth again and from it call the self to embark upon the upright path towards the realisation of our authentic potential.

The One affirms Suchness or Essence, while duality affirms the One. As the first revelation of the Lord as the All-Praised and as the universal man, the Praised must be fully dual, for nothing can affirm the One that is not such a duality. Such a duality is made up of the perfect or first reception and the perfect or first giving, perfect femininity and perfect masculinity. The One sends down and publishes His Word through the Praised. This Word is the Book. Having received it, the Praised is a maternal prophet. The book he has received is maternal. It contains everything that reveals the One.

This same One sent down and revealed His Word through the Virgin. This perfect word was the Anointed. He contained nothing he had not received: like the

Praised, the Anointed said nothing on his own account.<sup>35</sup> The nature of the Praised and that of the Virgin are determined by the Book and the Anointed, respectively. The only woman mentioned by name in the Book sent down to the Praised is Mary. She is therefore a sign of the perfect duality through which the One is revealed. The Praised and the Virgin are one and the same revelation of the One at the beginning of the arc of descent and at the end of the arc of ascent.

## 12

To glorify and praise the Lord means standing before the Face and the Praised and willing exit from duality: to become That Which one stands in front of and regards and nothing more. This desire is affirmed symbolically by falling in prostration, denying any form of self but the Self, and sacrificing all mortal things for the Living.

The world is continuously revealed within us in ever-changing ways, as it itself changes from moment to moment. Duality cannot be mastered, but we do not accept this. For us, the world becomes a battlefield on which to master duality and realize ourselves in the One and the Beautiful. Attaining the goal of our endeavour can seem impossible. But that is precisely what we desire. We launch a war against the impossible, for no incomplete apprehension of existence can satisfy any self open to the Self. In this way, we are always struggling with what appears before us, as we crave the Real Which nothing can mimic or reduce to seeming.

All our powers are trained on that goal. All who obstruct this endeavour are our enemies. Our greatest enemies are those conditions of the self which imprison us in our sensual nature, the passions which take the form of enjoyment in the beauties of the world, separated from their authen-

tic Owner, for the sake of whom they are present and towards Whom they lead.

In each instant of our existence we imprint our individual face upon the Cosmos. This imprint is an image in constant change. No such image can be identified with the Face, though each bears witness of It. The Cosmos thus provides the frame of the mihrab or battlefield on which we strive to attain the Face. There are countless instances of the mihrab and only confidence in the permanent presence of the Face is sufficient to fill them. Only with the Face can the multiplicity of Its Revelation be re-offered to Him as total victory over the Gap that subsists between the face and the Face.

The battlefield (*mihrab*) is therefore a key symbol of our effort to overcome this Gap and to see ourselves as the Beloved sees us, as beloved by the Beloved. The attractiveness of the Beloved, whether experienced as male or female, is movement towards Peace and being-at-peace. The further from the manifestation and the closer to that by which He is manifest, the closer we are to Peace and so to union as our goal. Union means sacrificing duality for realisation in the One.

One should stress that the mihrab, in all of its forms in all the different types of mosque or place of worship, necessarily involves the act of sacrifice. This is because every ritual is at heart a sacrifice. The human self is split between two poles – death and immortality. Presence in the world of disorder and suffering is an aspect of the mortal self. Transcending the mortal self via immortality entails leaving the world of death and suffering for the triumph of eternity over all forms of appearance. This is effected by suffering that loosens the self's attachment to sensation and the things of the world, an attachment that has become unmindful of the Beauty they reveal.



What the self of the lower levels experiences as suffering and pain is the passage from closure to individuation and realisation in the Self, the move from the signs to the Signified. Bearing witness that there is no self but the Self and dying in our mortal self, we are born to erectness in the Self. The battlefield within both ourselves and the world involves sacrificing the mortal to attain the Eternal. In this way, the Praised, as the goal, as the model followed, becomes an example of dying to attain life, of giving to receive, of leaving to return.

In the mihrab, we are alone. It is a place for the individual to withdraw from his or her own diversity, from being in duality, so as to return to Unity as the Real. We ascend to the mihrab for the sake of the Beloved, to be with Her alone and that She might be with us alone, rapt in mutual regard.

### 13

That the world glorifies its Lord through praise means that it reveals what it has received. The act of praise thus relates God the All-Praised with the world as praised. God is the Possessor and the Giver of praise, while the world is its recipient and promulgator. God alone possess and gives, so that what He is not is nothing, save it be His Face. Both the world and man are essentially or ontically poor in comparison to God the All-Sufficient. The truth of this cannot be altered. It cannot wane, but it may be that forgetting covers it with a veil of ignorance.

There is nothing in the self that has not been received from God. We are fully in debt, and God is our Creditor. We are bound by debt.<sup>36</sup> In this way, God's absolute claim on us is established, so that we have a duty towards God, which means towards all of existence with all its contents. But, we did not arrive in existence of our own will. That was the will of the Creator.

His will is to lead us to our goal. Everything comes from God and it all returns to Him as the Gatherer-in and the Goal of the journey being taken by all of existence and each thing within it. This all, each and every particle, is under a debt to what is other, in the fullest meaning of that term. There is no atom or butterfly, no animal or constellation, no angel or spirit that does not participate in this com-union whereby every thing is at once alone and with all the rest.

Human will is also involved in how we relate to God. We have countless duties towards God. But we also have one claim on Him. This claim is the right to return and to self-realisation, and it is both absolute and perfect, and each and every self was made for it in accordance with our original nature. God has opened to us the path to Himself: to see Unity in duality as Its perfect revelation, in that duality that appears as the union of male and female in pure and full self-realisation through return to the original Unity.

We recognise what we have received in the world only by rejecting any illusion of possessing it other than through the Giver. When this relationship to the totality of existence as the recipient of praise from God, its Giver, finds expression in human being, as the focus of existence, then we can speak of human being as both praised and praiser of God the All-Praised. For God and human beings relate through the act of praise.

The perfect reception of praise from God and the restoration of life, will, power, knowledge, speech, hearing, and sight to the Giver is our highest faculty. It affirms the Praised as source and refuge of all existence. All prophecy is discourse on this faculty of humanity. Through such discourse we receive news and are reminded of that part of the self in which God resides. In

our constant quest for the One we turn towards the horizons, the ends of the earth, and the heavenly heights, but none of this satisfies us. We are just reminded of our highest and most sublime faculty, so that we ask: Where is God? And the Praised has an answer to this question: "In the hearts of his faithful servants."<sup>37</sup> He also says: "The hearts of all of Adam's children are as one heart held between the fingers of the All-Merciful. He turns it where He will."<sup>38</sup>

## 14

The Praised is the most beautiful example to us all and a mercy to the worlds. He is therefore our highest moment. As the most sublime and the mightiest pattern, the Praised is, accordingly, important for each of us as we realise our selves after his mighty pattern. To do this we must follow the Praised on the path from the periphery to the core of humanity, in which all differentiation fades. This is the confession of Unity and return.

Nothing can satisfy us but attaining this sublime moment. It may appear to lie outside the self, somewhere in space and time, in culture and history. If anything of the sort is to be found there, it is only as a sign for the self that it cannot attain realisation anywhere but in the self, but only through, above, and beyond all sensible things. But we are fitted by our authentic nature, the principle given to us at creation, to find and realise ourselves. Each of us is aware of this possibility of self-realisation in our original nature which is equivalent to the oath sworn to God in pre-Existence to bear witness to what we know, namely our highest faculty – the Praised as the mighty pattern and the light sent down.

Prophets are people who swear to God that they will bear witness amongst their fellows, with whom they live, of that which they know in their hearts as God's news. By

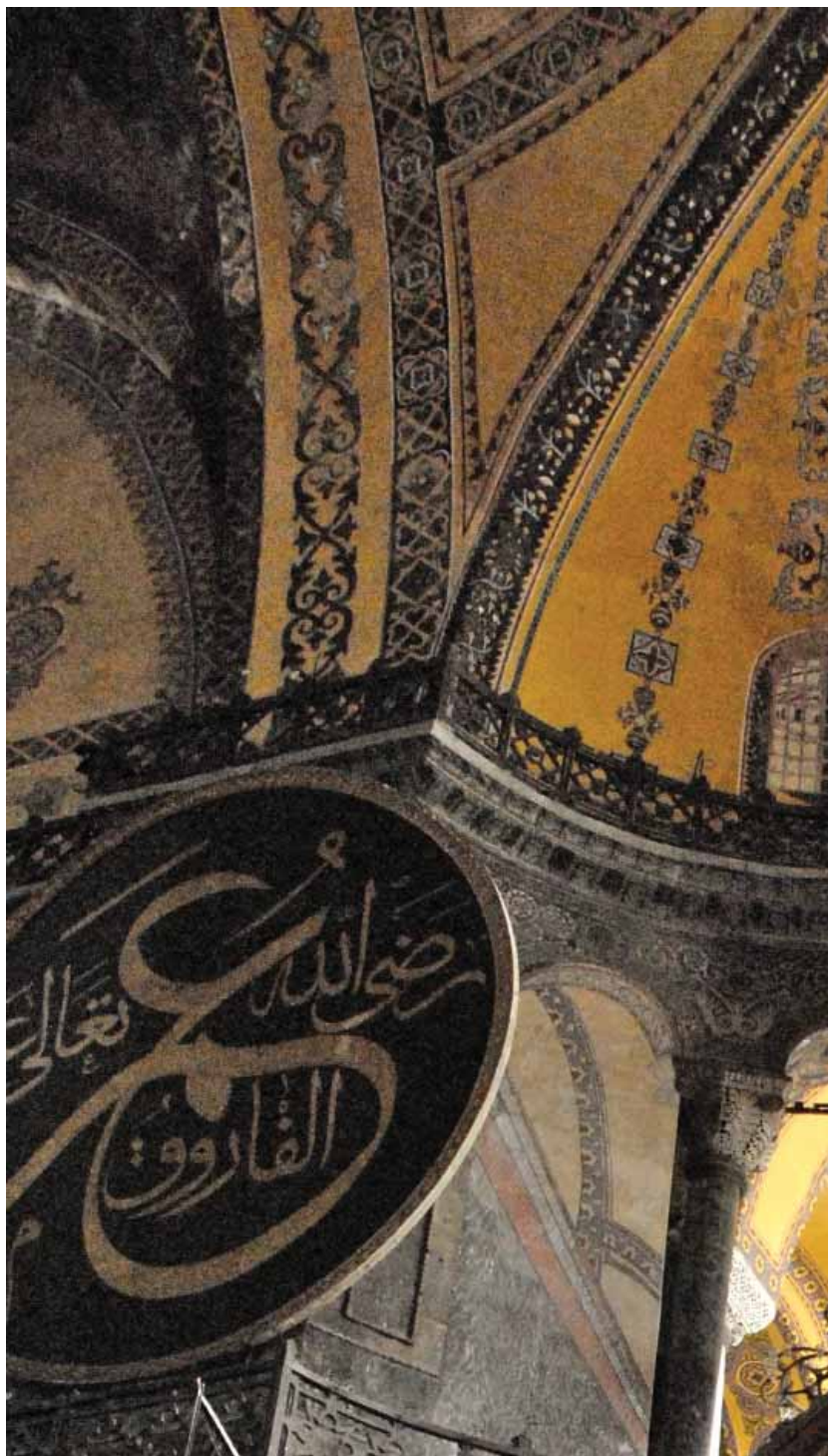
making this oath they accept God's choice that they remind others of their primordial oath and so help free them from oblivion. Through this act of liberation, they are revealed as free agents, undetermined except by their authentic nature, for there is nothing in the heart but this fullness for which and with which we were made to travel through the worlds. They are witnesses of the Praised as a mercy to the worlds, as the Apostle who is always and everywhere the best example imprinted in the self.

While there have been one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, none of them is before or after the Praised. He is their seal in pre-Existence, when we were all just intentions of the Creator. The Praised remains the seal of all the prophets, even now that they have all entered existence and borne witness to that which they swore an oath in pre-Existence.

## 15

The Praised is that individual and prophet who testifies from the fullness of human nature that one can pass from the battlefield in this world of duality to the fullness of Peace. And so, he is the champion of the people-of-peace. This does not mean his condition can be distinguished from his desire, as peaceful and a person-of-peace, to connect with Peace through being-at-peace.

The Praised is in the world of duality, but as perfect reception of God and the restitution of what has been received in accordance with His will. Receiving, he reveals the Giver; giving, he reveals the God to whom all returns. Standing in the mihrab, he gazes upon the Virgin Mary as the best of all women in all the worlds. In her, he regards himself, and through her he sees himself as she sees him out of that perfect duality which is the revelation of the One. The Word was sent down into



Peace and the resolution of duality. In this perfect example, our division into male and female is unriddled as duality that reveals the One. Mary looking at the Praised and his looking at her share the form of perfect human recollection of God.

The faces of Mary and the Praised, turned to each other, reveal the perfection of the One and the unity of the Perfect. These two know each other by means of their original perfection and the Unity their faces reveal, through the same single heart held in the fingers of the All-Merciful. Neither Mary nor the Praised seek in the byways of the world the Face of Him they praise, to whom they return what they have received. They are before the Face, looking at It and through It alone, bearing witness of It in all they do. God said of this: "To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God; God is All-embracing, All-knowing."<sup>39</sup>

As the perfect example of being in the mihrab, the Praised is both alone and together with all of existence. The Holy Spirit came down to him there, on account of his perfect receptivity, which is

the world – once as the Anointed or Christ, then as the Recitation.

The Word was sent down into the world through Mary and the Praised so that whoever received it might arise through its agency to his or her authentic nature in which everything has been received in all fullness. The Praised and Mary regard each other without cease, as in the eyes of the other they see their own self-realisation in

marked by the face of Mary, just as It did to her, bearing the word of God. Through this Word that descended, the Praised rose up to Peace. To those who desire that path of ascent, God said through his Apostle: "Say: 'I turn in Peace my face to God, and whosoever follows me.'"<sup>40</sup> Turning his face to God, the Praised sees Mary. And Mary, turning her face to God, sees the Praised. This is how the One is revealed in

perfect duality through the confession that there is no face but the Face.

God enlightens the face of the Praised with the Light of heaven and earth. This same Light bathes Mary's face. Those who seek the Face yearn for this Light revealed through the face of the Praised, who said of such seekers: "My people most loved by me from my community would be those who would come after me but everyone amongst them would have the keenest desire to catch a glimpse of me even at the cost of his family and wealth."<sup>41</sup>

## 16

The Praised and Mary, as a pair, are the perfect revelation of the One. The reference to the prophet Zachariah in the inscription in the mihrab relates to the word of God: "So remember Me, and I will remember you."<sup>42</sup> Whenever we are such that we remember God, then God remembers us. When we remember God, we are following the most beautiful example of the Praised as the perfect apostle and the incarnation of the fullness of humanity. This remembrance and this following are our path to self-awareness and flourishing in knowledge.

The Praised is the perfect example for those who have hope in God and the Last Day and who remember. It was to them that God said: "I am with My servant whenever he remembers Me and his lips move."<sup>43</sup> Remembering God is the discovery of the beauty at the core of the human self. This discovery draws us irresistibly to union with the beautiful as our means of ascent out of duality. The Praised is perfect in remembrance and so in his love of God. The Virgin Mary is also perfect in remembrance, and so in her love of God. Facing each other, the Praised and Mary reveal the Face in contrast to Which everything in existence fades and with Which the many is revealed as union.

God promised us that we will find Him, on condition that we seek Him with all our heart and all our self.<sup>44</sup> When we attain that level of full seeking, then we are turned towards the Face, enlightened by It, and through It we see ourselves. Then, the Face is all there is for us. This is why the Praised sees himself through Mary's face. He is in the world, but always turned towards God. In this way, he is the example of perfect seeking and of being on the path back to God. Only love, the yearning to be united, can guarantee that the traveller will find what he or she seeks.<sup>45</sup>

## 17

God is the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. His mercy encompasses all. The Praised, as his first revelation, is the most beautiful example to us all, a mercy to the worlds. This mercy takes the form of the receiving and passing on of Peace. God speaks of this in the Recitation:

We have not sent thee, save as a mercy unto all worlds. Say: "It is revealed unto me only that your God is One God; are you then people of Peace?"<sup>46</sup>

Say: "My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying – all belongs to God, the Lord of all worlds. No associate has He. Even so I have been commanded, and I am the first of those that are in Peace."<sup>47</sup>

Peace is our highest possibility. God is Peace and Peace comes from Him.<sup>48</sup> All of His creation and everything in it reveal Peace. They are at-peace and relate to God through being-at-peace.<sup>49</sup> This is also the case for us, in our authentic and original condition, and so also as we finally resolve our involvement in the world of duality. In realising or discovering our original nature-in-peace, we discover the Praised as our highest moment, the moment of the self for which we should be willing to give everything – our family and all our wealth.

Any turn towards God on the upright path leads us to bear witness to the Praised as our champion and our highest possibility. The Praised, as servant to his Lord, says "I". His "I" is dual, as it was created to reveal the uncreated "I" as the One. The dual "I" of the Praised bears within itself the Virgin as perfect and so the feminine aspect of perfect masculinity. This pair is made one in the mighty nature of full humanity.

Being a person-of-peace is a reflection of our will. Although we always remain such in our original nature which is realised through return to God, it is within the bounds of our will to deny this aspect of our being. Once we have brought our will into line with our nature and assumed the mantle of a person-of-peace, our little knowledge never ceases to grow with regard to God the All-Knowing, Who encompasses everything with His knowledge. This orientation reflects faith as the mode whereby the person-of-faith relates to God the All-Faithful.

In our little knowledge, we bear witness of the One, turning towards Him. Only in union with Him are we satisfied. This is why we are always striving to be beautiful, in order that the Beloved will look upon us and see that we are so. We are always looking at ourselves through the eyes of the Beloved. We look and we hear. In equating ourselves thus, we do nothing that God does not do.

## 18

That the Praised was sent as a mercy to the worlds and a witness to the unity of God was revealed through him, as God's servant. It is as such that he is revealed in full perfection through his other aspect, through the perfect pair and the full witness of Peace. Each self is constantly turning. This means that the face is in constant quest for peace or for the condition in

which there will be no further turning, nor any face but the Face of the One.

When the face and the Face are related in this way, it is the most beautiful state achievable, the mighty nature of the Praised. God, the angels, and all His friends testify to this. Acceding to this witness is the only proof for his followers. When the Praised, as the maternal prophet, is denied and insulted, he cannot be hurt by it. Denial and insult only harm the deniers and insulters, as by it they remove themselves even further from their higher aspects.

No condition of the human self on the path of ascent and return can supplement the model of most beautifully standing before God. This is why the Praised is the seal of the prophets. He is the true self of the faithful which is satisfied only by identification with the Praised, the servant and the apostle of God. The faithful recognise the condition of their selves as insufficient for what is needed to follow the Praised as the closest and dearest of humankind.<sup>50</sup>

Our knowledge is constantly growing. However little it may be, it is always enough to point us towards God and the Praised. Ignorance is never an excuse for denying and insulting our higher possibilities. It cannot be, because, independently of everything outside, we bear within ourselves knowledge of our Lord and redeemer. Given that we recognise our higher possibilities in the Praised, our love for him transcends all others.

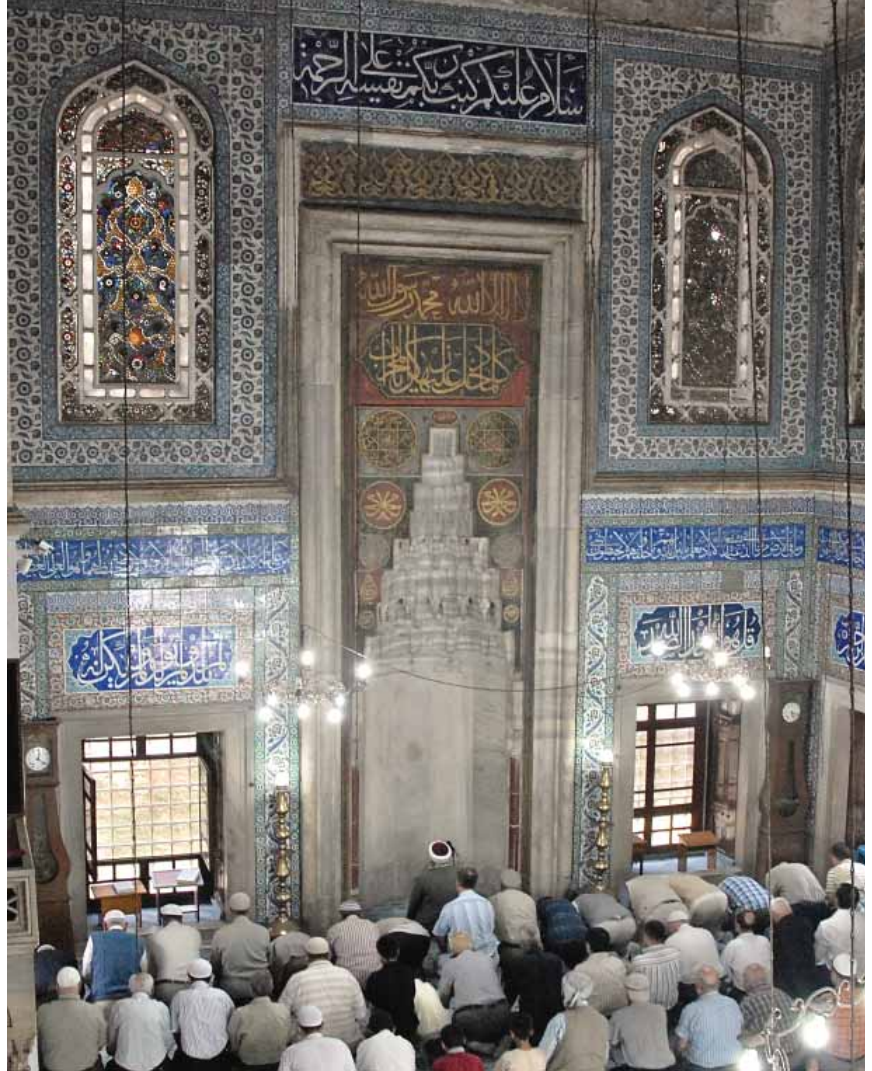
This is a conscious choice which transforms the meanings of everything within the horizons or in the self. "None of you are faithful," said the Praised, "unless I am dearer to him than his child, his father, and all others."<sup>51</sup> Following the Praised cannot be separated from the love of the faithful servant for the Faithful Lord. Only in this love and discipleship does the Faithful Lord love His faithful servant.<sup>52</sup>

Zachariah was a man remembered by God and therefore mindful of God. He saw human perfection in the Virgin Mary. What he saw in her was just the image of the Praised as the sublime potential in each of us. Her reception of perfection was revealed in the Teaching: "And when the angels said, 'Mary, God has chosen thee, and purified thee; He has chosen thee above all women in the worlds. Mary, be obedient to thy Lord, prostrating and bowing before Him.'" <sup>53</sup>

## 19

The war in the world of the manifold can never be brought to a close on the basis of human confidence in our own powers. This is because we realise ourselves in and through Beauty, against which we cannot war. We can love It, because Beauty attracts us irresistibly. It increases us in knowledge by means of this attraction. The closer we are to It, the better we know It, and the better we know It, the more we love It. This is why the Praised, who wants to see us attain perfection, says we are not named under sign of war, but of beauty. It is in relation to God as the Beautiful that we discover the beauty in our own selves and act in all things we do on the basis of our connection to Beauty as the Owner of all beauty. <sup>54</sup>

However close we come to the boundaries of the world, piercing ever higher, they remain, so that in our feeling of weakness new veils fall upon our face. Unwilling to remove these veils and confess that our love has made that of which we can only know but a little everything to us, everything without division, we become opponents of the Praised. And so we



turn against ourselves. The more resolutely we oppose the Praised, the servant and apostle of God, the higher the dark tide rises within the self, urging us on to evil. The Praised, who is the mercy sent to the worlds, never abandons us, remaining as witness to our discipleship and our apostasy.

God has not left one of us bereft of the possibility of meeting the purpose for which we are in the world. His mercy exceeds His wrath. <sup>55</sup> This mercy comprehends everything that is, and all things end in it, but with the just distinction of the righteous and the guilty, with just wages for both good and evil. As the mercy to the worlds, the Praised will be our advocate on that day, as he himself told us, on that day of resurrection when we shall all be in fear:

I shall start off and come below the Throne and prostrate myself before my Lord; then God will reveal to me and in-

spire me with some of His Praises and Glorifications which He will not have revealed to anyone before me. Then it will be said: "O, The Praised! Raise your head; ask and it will be granted; intercede and the intercession will be accepted." I will then raise my head and say: "O my Lord, my community, my community." It will be said: "O, The Praised! Bring in by the right gate of Paradise those of your community who have no account to render." They will share with the people some other door besides this door.<sup>56</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The full verse runs as follows (Qur'an, 3:37): "Her Lord received the child with gracious favour, and by His goodness she grew up comely, Zachariah taking charge of her. Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the mihrab, he found her provisioned. 'Mary', he said, 'how comes this to thee?' 'From God', she said. Truly God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning.'"

<sup>2</sup> The mosque at Sion or the Remote or Farther Mosque (ar. *al-masjid al-aqsā*) is one of the key symbols of our being placed between two extremes – the most beautiful height and the lowest depth.

<sup>3</sup> The Arabic noun of place *masjid*, derived from the verb *sajada* ("to prostrate oneself") and whose derivative form in English is "mosque," has cognate forms and a long history in most Semitic languages (See: Mahmutćehajić, *The Mosque*, 84n11). Its basic use is to designate a place of worship or temple, such as exist in all the Abrahamic religions. Each mosque has its focal point or mihrab at which the battle for the soul is fought out. The mosque being referred to is known in Arabic as *al-masjid al-aqsā* ("the Farther Mosque").

<sup>4</sup> The heart is one of a few key concepts for this discourse. Its immediate reference is the physical heart, the central organ of the individual through which the blood, as the bearer of life, must pass. In the modern period, this meaning has become practically the only one, while for traditional intellectuality it has

always been peripheral to the semantic field. In all traditional teachings, the heart is considered the core of the self and the principle of the unity of human existence. As such, it is both source and end. All existence comes from it and returns to it, less in a temporal sequence than in absolute unity. The entire self is a manifestation of the heart. The human self entirely depends on the heart, but the reverse is not true. Whenever one of the countless multitudes of possible conditions of the self is taken to be independent of the heart and sufficient in itself, an apparent hindrance may arise to the harmony of the one in the many. In such a case, a departure continues within the self, as it travels down towards its lower and darker parts. Then consciousness and power are without guidance, and they are applied as a violence and ignorance: between the heart and the self there lies a boundary which appears in the form of hardening, rusting, and corruption. Consciousness and power lack connection to the source and the mouth, and so lack guidance. That the heart is the principle of the self, its source and issue, does not mean that it gives birth to phenomena nor that any phenomena gives birth to the heart. It is at the same time in and with all things, and beyond them. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Confidence descends upon it and within it, so that it reveals the Living, through all His Names that are scattered across the horizons and focused within the self. As both source and issue, the heart is precisely the Flux, the coincidence of coming into being and going out of being, of giving and receiving, waning and waxing, of inhalation and exhalation. It is Intellect as the recipient of knowledge and the maximum of closeness to God as the One.

<sup>5</sup> See Qur'an, 16:102. The Bosnian translation of the Arabic noun *qur'an* is *Učenje*, for which the normal English equivalent is the Recitation. This was the revelation made to the Prophet, the Praised (ar. *Muhammad*), which after having been received was uttered or recited in Arabic, and only then written down in the Book.

<sup>6</sup> See Qur'an, 20:41. Martin Lings has translated God's words to Moses into English as follows: "I have fashioned thee as a work of art for Myself." (Lings, *Splendours of Qur'an Calligraphy and Illumination*, 17)

<sup>7</sup> See Deuteronomy, 18:18.

<sup>8</sup> See Qur'an, 7:157.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 68:4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 33:21.

<sup>11</sup> The term the Self as used in this text corresponds to the Arabic *nafs*. The noun is here used to signify the "human self or sense of self" and the "entire personality" of a being that comprises body and the ineffable life substance, somewhat opaquely designated as "soul." The creator gave the self inner harmony and such qualities as its role in creation required. God breathed into its heart His Spirit. Accordingly, the self is everything comprehended by the extremes of "absolute physicality" and "Spirit." Any form lying between these extremes which does not belong exclusively to one of them but is related to both is "soul."

<sup>12</sup> See Qur'an, 2:272–73. The prophet David said: "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger." (Psalm, 27:8–9)

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an, 55:26.

<sup>14</sup> See Qur'an, 43:12.

<sup>15</sup> Qur'an, 17:107–109.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 30:30.

<sup>17</sup> Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, 6, 10; cited in: Wensinck, "The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth", 51–52. It is appropriate at this point to recall the architectural and symbolic form of the Temple of Sion (*al masjid al-aksā*). There are on the plateau of Sion, which is the location of the Second Mosque, two buildings of crucial significance – the first is the Dome of the Rock, while the other has 15 doors. In this way, the goal of return is signified by the Dome – that is, self realisation within the heart and passage from the lowest depths to the most beautiful height.

<sup>18</sup> Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulum al-dīn*, 3:12. This sacred tradition is generally accepted among Sufis, but is not to be found in the exoteric collections of the prophet's sayings. See : Hakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-sufi*, 1265–66.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an, 2:144.

<sup>20</sup> The most important semantic field in the

discourse given in this text is formed around the divine name of the All-Praised (ar. *al-Hamīd*). This field also contains the human name of the Praised (ar. *al-Muhammad*) as the first revelation of God's being praised. The relationship between God being the All-Praised and his revelation through the Praised is the act of praise (ar. *al-hamd*). These forms correspond to the verb "to praise" (ar. *ha-mi-da*). In this relationship, God is the Creator, while human being is created. This relationship does not change. This is why every semantic field in any discourse on this relationship is subordinate and dependent on the field centred around the name of God. (See further in: Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 75–77)

<sup>21</sup> The translation "maternal prophet" is for the Arabic *nabiyy ummiyy* (See Qur'an, 7:157); the concept of the "maternal book" corresponds to *umm al-kitāb* (Ibid., 13:39). On the semantic fields and the chains which link them back to the verbal root *umm* and the reasons for interpreting them as they are in this discourse, see: Denny, "The meaning of the *ummah* in the Qur'an" and Goldfeld, "The Illiterate Prophet (*Nabī Ummī*): An inquiry into the development of a dogma in Islamic tradition."

<sup>22</sup> See Qur'an, 33:21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7:157.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 33:46

<sup>25</sup> Qur'an, 4:131.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 42:28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 64:1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 28:70.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15:98–99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 52:48–49.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 47:2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 33:40.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 28:88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 22:18.

<sup>35</sup> See: John, 7:18, 14:10 and Qur'an, 26:192–95, 16:102.

<sup>36</sup> In modern times, it has been usual to translate the Arabic term *dīn* as "religion." This captures only the derived meaning of the term. "Debt" or "obligation" would seem to be a more comprehensive and exact transla-



tion of this key concept of Qur'anic discourse.

<sup>37</sup> This tradition may be found in: Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulum al-dīn*, 3:1238.

<sup>38</sup> Muslim, 4:1397.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'an, 2:115.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3:20.

<sup>41</sup> Muslim, 4:1478.

<sup>42</sup> Qur'an, 2:152.

<sup>43</sup> These traditions are given in: Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 130.

<sup>44</sup> See Deuteronomy, 11:13. Referring to this command, Mary's son said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." (Mark, 12:30) The addition "with all thy mind and with all thy strength" reflects the condition of humanity in the end times of this period. (On this see more in: Lings, *A Return to the Spirit*, 29–43)

<sup>45</sup> God revealed to man, according to Deuteronomy (6:5): "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." This sequence of "with all thine heart", "with all thy soul", and "with all thy might" represents the condition of humanity after the Fall. In the condition of original purity, the heart, as the centre of being, represented the perfect balance of everything peripheral. In similar fashion, Intellect, as the unification of everything in existence, is the link of everything revealed with the Revealer. Once the limits of the world in which we had been placed had been violated, the periphery, and so the self and power, came to appear separate and independent of the heart, and so there was a process of falling or "development." The heart remains the unquailing core of the self, that lies in a twilight of forgetting and somnolence. For the self to be turned towards the heart as its core, there must come some stimulus from the self, from the will, and from the power still at our disposal. This possibility is from time to time reinforced by the direct sending down of additional aids in this endeavour: through the prophecies by which we are reminded of all the heart comprehends. (See further in: Lings, *A Return to the Spirit*, 29–43)

<sup>46</sup> Qur'an, 21:107–108.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6:162–63.

<sup>48</sup> See Qur'an, 59:23. The Praised said: "My God, You are Peace, and Peace is from You; You are blessed, the Possessor of majesty and honour!" (Muslim, 1:292)

<sup>49</sup> See Qur'an, 3:83.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 33:6.

<sup>51</sup> Muslim, 1:31.

<sup>52</sup> See Qur'an, 3:31.

<sup>53</sup> Qur'an: 3:42–43.

<sup>54</sup> Imam 'Ali, the son of Abu-Talib, said: "When the Beautiful One (*Hasan*) was born, I gave him the name of War (*Harb*). God's Apostle came – may he always be with the Peace of God! – and said: 'Show me my son! What name have you given him?' I said: 'War.' He said: 'No, for he is the Beautiful One.'" (Ibn Hanbal, 2:164, tradition 730)

<sup>55</sup> God says: "My mercy exceeds My wrath." (Bukhari, 9:482)

<sup>56</sup> Muslim 1:131–32.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

**Review of Paul L. Heck. *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009, 240 pages.**

By Leo D. Lefebure

In this wide-ranging, engaging, and informative survey of Muslim-Christian relations, Paul L. Heck of Georgetown University searches for what he hopes will be “common ground,” but he also issues a chilling warning: “The common ground may be there one moment and gone the next” (6). Nonetheless, he ventures the hope that even in the most difficult moments, “it [the common ground] is still there, potentially if not always actually” (6). In light of this wager, H. explores various points of contact and convergence between Islam and Christianity, ranging from divine revelation to moral and social teachings to perspectives on God and politics. Areas of disagreement and divergence are frankly acknowledged but are accorded relatively less significance.

The German Protestant theologian Paul Tillich famously used the image of ground

(*Grund* in German) to describe God as “the ground of Being.” But Tillich had been shaken so profoundly by the catastrophes of twentieth-century Europe that he knew the *Grund* could often appear as an *Abgrund* (abyss); for Tillich, the experience of God always involves negativity, the shock of non-being that shakes the foundations of all our usual assumptions. While H. does not invoke Tillich’s image of the ground that can also be an abyss, the questions posed by Tillich hover around H.’s discussion, as in H.’s apprehension that the common ground between Muslims and Christians may vanish at any moment. The contemporary encounter of Muslims and Christians has indeed been profoundly affected by the shock of non-being, by catastrophes and violent conflicts. Many both past and present would frame the relationship between the two traditions in harsh, irreconcilable terms. In this horizon, H.’s search for common ground is fundamentally an act of hope that the convergences between the two traditions will prove to be of greater and more lasting importance than the divergences and disagreements. H. moves on the boundary between two great traditions, trusting that in the long run the common ground will hold firm.

The foundation of his hope is that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share “commonality of purpose” (35), which H. describes as “reception of the word of God in the human heart” (36). He interestingly proposes that both Christianity and Islam can be understood as “rooted in the book of Isaiah” (36). Judaism, for H., “stands at the heart of both Christianity and Islam. . . . the common ground is ultimately tripartite” (2). Despite this strong affirmation, H. focuses principally on Islam and Christianity, relegating Judaism for the most part to the margins of the discussion. The silence of the unheard Jewish interlocutor provides an evocative, elusive framing of all that is said, raising further questions and challenges.

Indeed, much of H.’s discussion is tentative and exploratory, often beginning and concluding in the interrogative mood. He refuses to pin down religions into “distinct cages of identity” (6), preferring to view them as active, dynamic subjects in motion. The chapter titles are all questions. Again and again, after comparing various aspects of the two traditions, H. draws no definitive conclusion but rather poses questions for further reflection, questions that are left to hang in the air, intriguing and inviting the reader to think further along the lines that H. has suggested. As a result, no strong thesis emerges from H.’s discussion; every perspective can be considered from a different vantage point.

For the Western Christian reader who is unfamiliar with Islam, H. provides a wealth of introductory material that is of great value. H. devotes relatively less attention to instructing the Muslim reader on the background of Christianity; as a result, some of H.’s generalizations about Christianity could raise questions for those familiar with the variety of often conflicting Christian perspectives.

H. bases his claim for a shared common ground in the scriptural heritage, which is interpreted as prophecy calling forth sanctity, beginning and ending in the one God. Following Tarif Khalidi, H. argues that since the Qur’an speaks of Jesus, it is “a gospel in a certain sense even if not squaring with Christian belief” (34). There has been much discussion in recent biblical scholarship over the genre of the gospel and the role of Mark in its origin. In terms of literary form, to characterize the Qur’an as yet another gospel may seem to be a bit of a stretch; in terms of theological perspectives, this interpretation could reinforce the age-old Christian interpretation of Islam as the last and greatest of the Christological heresies. Nonetheless, H.’s provocative claim stimulates reflection on what a gospel is or is not and also on how to relate the multiple meanings of *euangelion* in Christianity to what Muslims mean by the *Injil* received by Jesus (Isa).

Some of H.’s claims about the Christian tradition are open to question. He rightly points out that it is only the Gospel of John that explicitly calls Jesus God, but he rather puzzlingly argues that this is “not as God the Creator” (35). Given the Johannine affirmation that all things were created through the Word which became incarnate in Jesus (Jn 1:3, 14), the basis for H.’s distinction between “God” and “God as Creator” remains unclear; his claim would not be accepted by the later mainstream Christian tradition, which understood each of the three Persons of the Trinity to be Creator. H. also asserts that in Christian history prior to John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, “the state had been understood to enforce religion but not define it” (137). Again the basis for H.’s distinction is unclear. The first seven ecumenical councils of the Christian Church were all synods of the Roman Empire, convened by the Byz-

antine Emperor and presided over by him or his delegate. Emperors from Constantine to Justinian to Heraclius I to Leo III and Constantine V involved themselves directly not only in enforcing Christian dogmas but in deciding and defining them.

After proposing a certain common ground in belief in divine revelation, H. cautions: "But the common ground is not solid" (40). This in turn introduces a very thought-provoking discussion of the place of doubt in the life of faith. Christian theologians have long reflected on the relation of doubt and faith, from Peter Abelard in the twelfth century to John Henry Newman in the nineteenth to Paul Tillich and the crisis of existentialism in the twentieth. For Christian readers, H. introduces the important voice of the medieval Sufi theologian, Ghazali, who insisted that religion is not a matter of intellectual definitions alone but rather an enthusiastic embrace with the heart. H. compares Ghazali's insistence on the necessary roles of both reason and revelation to various Christians ranging from early modern Jesuits to Pope John Paul II. H. concludes his discussion

with an affirmation reminiscent yet again of Tillich's approach to faith: "Doubt is integral to religion" (72).

Throughout the discussion H. wishes to problematize the meaning of and approach to religion itself; but his framework remains resolutely theistic, even Abrahamic. In his conclusion he writes: "Religion holds the human soul to be sacred. Religion also speaks of God as sacred" (222). Buddhists traditionally do not believe either in a human soul or in a creating God; accordingly, they would have difficulty recognizing their place in H.'s notion of "religion." Thus H.'s reflections on "religious pluralism" remain within a theistic horizon and would need to be reframed to include non-theistic traditions of South and East Asia. Nonetheless, H. has surely accomplished his goal of provoking further reflection on what common ground Muslims and Christians do and do not share. This work merits the attention of all those interested in the relationship between Islam and Christianity.

**Review of Kenneth Cracknell,  
*In Good and Generous Faith:  
Christian Responses to Religious  
Pluralism, Cleveland, Ohio: The  
Pilgrim Press, 2006, 265 pages.***

By Akintunde E. Akinade

There are perhaps few other subjects in our contemporary world that deserve urgent attention as interreligious relations. Scholars continue to explore some of the hard questions in the relationship of Christians with people of other faiths from different perspectives. The answers to these questions are not simple and clear-cut, but the subject is unavoidable. In the context of present day globalization and transnationalism, Christians are inevitably thrown into the context of religious pluralism.

In the twenty-first century, the global landscape is a patchwork of many religions. Our world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent—almost to the point of becoming a global village. Religious traditions that used to be self-enclosed and accustomed to living in isolation from one another now find themselves in a situation where they can no longer ignore the presence of others. With increased migration, missionary activities, and refugee movements, religions have also shifted their counties of origin. For example, there are mosques in the so-called Bible belt regions, Hindus in California, Sikhs in Boston, Buddhists in New York City, and Christian churches in Pakistan. Thus, one of the pressing challenges in this millennium is how to critically respond to this inevitable religious diversity.

Kenneth Cracknell is pre-eminently qualified to write on the subject of interreligious engagement. His academic odyssey in Nigeria, England, and the United

States provides the useful the necessary intellectual and experiential framework for dealing with issues and themes connected with interreligious relations. He writes as a scholar who has invested so much time and effort in developing useful paradigms that can allow Christians to develop interreligious dialogue that is sustained by love, compassion, and friendship.

*In Good and Generous Faith* is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with salvation history for religious pluralism. Cracknell encourages Christians to move beyond a skewed understanding of salvation history. He advocates for a new understanding of salvation history that is relevant to religious pluralism. The next chapter deals with a Christology for religious pluralism. Through a cross-cultural analysis and exploration, Cracknell deals with the universal presence of the Word in this chapter. His intention in these two chapter is provide an inclusivist salvation history and an inclusivist Christology that will “enable Christians to behave with a new openness and generosity towards others in light of their understanding of the purposes of God”(p. 97).The third chapter provides an excellent articulation of an ethic for religious pluralism. This is an ethic that is based on friendship and humility. The hubris that is usually associated with religious exclusivism only creates an atmosphere of monologue and thrives on caricature and faulty hermeneutics. The fourth chapter deals with the spirituality of religious pluralism. The last chapter deals with a missiology for religious pluralism. This chapter ultimately reveals that Christians have created a false dichotomy between mission and interreligious dialogue. Cracknell maintains that this is a spurious bifurcation. For him, Christians in the twenty-first century must regain the courage to share the good news of Jesus Christ

with their neighbors and friends with great humility and deep courtesy.

The book concludes with two appendixes. The first one entitled "Ambivalent Theology and Ambivalent Policy" deals the contributions of the World Council of Churches to Interfaith Dialogue from 1938-1999. The second appendix deals with religious plurality and Christian self-understanding. These two studies provide helpful theological insights for dealing with religious pluralism. Through the office of Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies and the Office on Interreligious Relations, the World Council of Churches has been at the fore-front of interreligious dialogue and has formulated an impressive Christian theological response to religious pluralism. These two appendixes underscore the ambivalence of the World Council of Churches toward interfaith dialogue for over five decades.

In a world that is sated with existential nihilism and interreligious apathy, this book

provides a balm in Gilead that can heal our world. Our contemporary global landscape is punctuated by several events of sacred fury and violence. In recent times, violence and conflicts in the name of religion have reached an appalling crescendo. Rigid, dogmatic, and exclusive understanding of theological categories have also exacerbated existing fragile relations. In times like this, Cracknell's position concerning 'good and generous faith' provides compelling insights that can engender peace, reconciliation, and peacemaking. His voice radiates with hope for our new global village we now call home. This book encourages Christians embrace and celebrate religious pluralism. This is not a position that water down Christian theological categories. Rather, it compels them to be the harbinger of God's love for all people all over the world. This message is at the heart of the Christian Gospel.

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**Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz** is an internationally renowned scholar, philosopher, social critic and author. In 1988, *Time* magazine praised him as a «once-in-a-millennium scholar.» Born in Jerusalem in 1937, Steinsaltz studied sciences at the Hebrew University, in addition to rabbinical studies. He has served as scholar in residence at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Rabbi Steinsaltz has authored some sixty books and hundreds of articles on subjects including Talmud, Jewish mysticism, Jewish philosophy, sociology, historical biography, and philosophy. Many of these works have been translated into English.

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# ABSTRACTS OF ARABIC ARTICLES

## ***Complexity of the Concept of Charity by Frithjof Schuon***

The love of God must translate into the love of the neighbor because it consists in removing from our soul that which obstructs the Presence of God, thereby abolishing that which separates us from our neighbor. In this sense the love of God is not a sentiment but a whole spiritual and moral attitude that makes room for Divine Love. Thus, love of God and the neighbor is neither contrary to the love of oneself nor to fear. In fact love of God as our Cause and that of others implies that one should love both oneself and the neighbor. As for fear it is the precondition of love because it is a necessary basis for any understanding of God. With respect to the neighbor this fear translates into respect. The basis for all authentic love is love of God because, in the author's words: "The first act of charity is to rid the soul of illusions and passions and thus rid the world of a maleficent being; it is to make a void so that God may fill it and, by this fullness, give himself. A saint is a void open for the passage of God."

## ***Love and Mercy in the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Qur'ān by George Tamer***

The concept of love is as essential to Christianity as the concept of mercy is to Islam. In Christianity, God is love and loving; in Islam, He is merciful and compassionate. To believe in God means, in both religions, not only to provide a verbal confession, but also to practice love and charity towards human beings. Both the Bible and the Koran present love and charity among human beings as an indispensable response to God's original love and mercy towards man.

Based on the biblical definition of God as love, the Trinity can be seen as divine love flowing between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Beyond this, in Christianity, love is the most sublime form of divine revelation and forms the very essence of God's attitude towards man from the beginning of creation onwards. Humans are, thus, expected to reciprocate God's love for them by mutually loving each other; love becomes, therefore, the main

component of Christian identity and a distinguished rule of life.

Similarly, in the Koran, the faithful, in order to be rescued on the Day of Judgment, must be committed to God's universal mercy. Believers are called to mutually practice charity which, thus, appears as a communicative action in which all human beings should participate. By doing so, they respond appropriately to God's immense mercy – it is this mercy which is the *raison d'être* of the creation and all God's actions, encompassing everything that has been and that will be in this world and in the Hereafter.

Both Christianity and Islam consider love and mercy to be divine graces granted to human kind in order to form human bonds, not only within the boundaries of the religious community, but also within humankind as a whole; indeed, in contrast to the Aristotelian tradition, both religions share the important principle that human society is not established on the necessity of fulfilling the material needs of humankind. From the theological standpoint of both Christianity and Islam, human society is based on the belief that God – loving, merciful and compassionate – has created all human beings of one soul and grants to humanity, from His immense love and mercy, what makes them love Him as well as what makes them treat each other with love and mercy.

### ***Compassion and Charity in the "Abrahamic" Traditions: A Study in Inter-religious Dialogue and Discourse (Message and History) by Ali Mubarak***

In this paper, the author studies and discusses some definitions relevant to the concepts of mercy and charity in Abrahamic religions, in reference to the fundamental scriptural sources, i.e. the Torah, the Bible

and the Coran. The starting point is the paradox that we find in the principles of each religion: Although the Abrahamic religions call for charity and mercy, the practices of some groups and individuals among the faithful tend to incite to violence and the rejection of the other. It is argued that there is need for rethinking the meaning and nature of religions so that they may become the foundational good and ultimate goal of mankind.

### ***The Other In the Perspective of al-Amir Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi by Abd-al-Baqi Meftah***

Al-Amir Abd al-Qadir's (1808-1883/ 1222-1300 AH) perception of the other is rooted in his deep understanding of the truths of Islam, and in the signs the Quran bears. Al-Amir's perception of the other was further embodied in his own behavior towards both friends and enemies, whether during his long struggle to defend his country for more than twenty five years, the five years he spent in prison in France with more than a hundred members of his family and friends, or in Damascus where he finally settled. The most important principles on which al-Amir's perception of the other rest are the following: being a *mujtahid* in the fundamentals of faith, the necessity of protecting freedom of faith, the recognition that people are different in denominations, beliefs, and ways of life should be a vehicle for the synthesis of knowledge and the enrichment of communication, beholding *al-Haqq* (the Truth) exalted in every belief system out of respect for the different convictions people hold and their diligence in seeking *al-Haqq*. Al-Amir summarized his understanding of religion by saying: "all religions rest on two fundamentals: exalting the Almighty God, and being compassionate towards His creatures. The rest are all secondary details and without much importance. The Muhammadian *Shari'ah* is what gives the biggest value to respect, mercy and compassion, and all that promotes harmony and rejects discord."