

Love in The Relationship between God and Man

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Some of the great Islamic philosophers have said that love is the relationship we have with those things that contribute to the maintenance and completion of our existence. When we experience or meet such things we don't like to be separated from them and we feel a great need for them in our lives. This attachment is what we call love. Thus we find ourselves loving food, loving wealth, loving power, the opposite sex, etc., all of which contribute to the maintenance and completion of our existence. We also love beauty because it is perfection of being, and since perfection is the goal we seek, we love perfection. The highest beauty and perfection is that of Allah. He is the source of our existence and its completion. For these reasons we love and SHOULD love Allah. But why does Allah love us? Why SHOULD He love us? His existence is not in need of any maintenance or completion for He is the most perfect and the most beautiful. Allah loves us because He is the origin of love and love itself so, like everything else; all love goes back to Him. His love springs from that aspect of Himself that is His very mercy and generosity and is encapsulated in the famous hadith that says: 'I was a

Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the creation so I would be known.' This love 'to be known' springs from His knowledge of Himself as a Treasure. A treasure is something that has three prominent characteristics: it is a thing of great beauty, its value is very high, and it is something that enriches the finder. With respect to Allah, these three characteristics are infinite and immeasurable. Therefore, Allah loving to be known is Allah loving to share Himself and to give the joy of knowing Himself to others. This comes from nothing but His overflowing Mercy where Allah, the Self Sufficient creates creation as the object for His mercy and kindness. Only a knower can know, so the phrase 'to be known' is a passive verbal phrase that implies a knower. Thus, Allah saying that he loves to be known can

be understood to mean He loves to be known by one who knows Him.

The word used in the hadith we translate as 'to be known' is (u'raf) from the verb 'arafa. This word means to get knowledge, but in a special way. Whereas the usual method to get knowledge is through the mental faculties and the senses, and by study and research, to become an 'arif is different. Knowledge in Irfan is based on two principles, first, the fact that man is a microcosm of external reality and that all things, even Allah, can be known by knowing oneself, "he who knows himself, knows his Lord". And secondly, true knowledge is, as many hadith say, a light shone into the heart, so arriving at this kind of knowledge requires polishing

the heart through purifying it to know the true reality of the object of knowledge. In this way the heart itself could perceive and reflect that reality through direct illumination. This form of knowledge is called *irfan*. Purifying the heart means obeying Allah in seeking what is lawful and permissible and avoiding what is unlawful and prohibited. It means not only avoiding the impermissible but growing to dislike it. It also involves following the advice and teachings of the Holy Prophet and the Imams (as) in the area of recommended acts of worship, perfecting ones ethical conduct, offering supplications, etc. The relationship between purifying the heart and securing Allah's love can be seen in the following hadith narrated by Imam Sadiq (as)

quoting the Prophet (s) who said:

`Allah the Glorious and the Mighty said, 'There is nothing that the servant can do to approach Me that is more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him. Indeed he draws close to Me by performing extra acts of worship until I love him and when I love him I become his ear by which he hears, his eye by which he sees, his tongue by which he speaks and his hand by which he grasps. When he calls upon Me, I will answer him and when he requests of Me I will give to him. There is nothing I will hesitate in doing than hesitating in the death of a believer. He dislikes death and I dislike upsetting him.'

Love is nothing but the disappearance of the lover into the beloved and the psychological absorption in the latter. It is a kind of death of the individuality and subsistence in an intense identification with the beloved. The more powerful and complete the other, and the more beautiful and perfect he or she is, the more their otherness disappears and the more completely the lover identifies with the beloved. The hadith describes Allah's action when the beloved is the believer and He is the Lover. He becomes the believer by taking over all those aspects of the believer's self that are essential to his individuality: the ears and eyes which are the most important organs for interfacing with the world and acquiring information, and his tongue and hands by which he acts upon the world based upon his knowledge. This is the meaning of annihilation of the self in God or *fanaa* in Arabic. These narrations make us aware of Allah's love for us. When we are aware of this love we will be encouraged to seek it with sincerity, and strive above and beyond what we are obligated to do to get close to Him. If we do this we will find that love, and in finding it we will become His beloved and He will be our .closest Friend, who will guide us in all aspects of our lives and answer ALL our prayers

DIVINE EXPECTATION OF THE SINNER'S RETURN

Allah says in a hadith qudsi: 'My mercy takes precedence over My wrath'. One of the Divine Names of Allah is *Al Ghafoor*, the Forgiver. Many scholars define such Divine Names of Allah

like Creator, Provider and Forgiver, as the divine Names or Attributes of Action. Divine Attributes of Action relate to the outward actions of God. For example, one of the Names of Allah is the Creator, but He can only be known as the Creator by His act of creation. If He did not create, that Name would have no meaning. The Name of the Forgiver, also, requires the existence of a creature that could sin and then ask for forgiveness, if such a creature did not exist, the Name, `Forgiver` would not be realized. Therefore these Names call for the creation of the objects of their action.

So Imam Baqir (as) is quoted to have said that if mankind couldn't sin Allah would have created a being that could. The realization of the Name, therefore, calls for the existence of that act that would bring about this realization and this is what is termed Allah's pleasure, or happiness. It is not that Allah changes state, that at one moment He was unhappy and another moment He was pleased. No, His pleasure and displeasure are really states of potential existence that are brought into actuality by the conduct of the person who will be affected. So, the behaviour of someone could catalyze a chain of events that could result in the emergence of the felicity or wretchedness of that individual. This felicity, we call His pleasure, and this wretchedness we call His anger. We should not underestimate the reality of Allah's love and pleasure by saying that since these states are different to our OWN experiences of love and pleasure, they are not as real. For in the hierarchy of being things that are abstract on lower levels are more real, even assuming forms in a higher world. In this world, love is invisible and abstract; it is only felt subjectively and escapes description. But in the higher realms love is of a higher reality and could be known and perceived collectively. Allah's love is divine and transcendent and it is more truly real and intense than what we experience or could even imagine. This is what these narrations indicate to us, that our love and expectations are only shadows compared to His love and expectation. The Divine readiness to forgive and Allah's patience and care for us represent the nature of this Name in its readiness to forgive us our sins because in forgiving sins, the Divine Name of the Forgiver becomes actualized. This readiness to forgive and to welcome the sinner back to Him in love is represented in the following hadith:

`Allah revealed to David (as) 'O David! if those who have turned away from Me (only) knew how much I wait for them, and how much I care for them and how eager I am for them to abandon their acts of disobedience, they would die out of desire for Me and their joints would rupture out of love for Me. O David! (if) this is My desire for those who turn away from Me, how would My desire be for those who turn towards Me? O David! The servant needs Me most when he feels he doesn't need Me, I am most merciful to the servant when he has turned away from Me

and the highest status the servant achieves is when he returns to Me.`

We also have the same idea in the following hadith as well:

`O Jesus! How expectant and desirous am I when people, while steeped in negligence, do not
(seek to) return (to Me).`

Both hadith say something quite interesting; that when the servant is steeped in forgetfulness and sin Allah is very desirous and expectant for his return to Him. This is reflected in Allah being more merciful towards him and elevating the spiritual status of the servant when he DOES repent and turns back to Allah. Allah says in another hadith Qudsi, "He who seeks Me would definitely find Me. He who finds Me would definitely know Me. He who knows Me would definitely love Me. The religion of Islam is the path revealed by which we could get to love Allah, this love is achieved through the knowledge of Him, HE is the object of this knowledge. And when we know Him we would automatically love Him, because He is the Most Beautiful of the beautiful and the Most Perfect of the perfect. This knowledge is acquired on many levels, on the level of the intellect, which is reflected in the scholastic or theological knowledge about Him, and on the level of the heart which is the direct and unmediated knowledge of Him. This knowledge of the heart is achieved through adjusting our being and conforming our wills to the laws and rules He has prescribed and following the sunnah of His Prophet. We CAN know Allah, to the extent of our human capacity. All we need is to be sincere in seeking this knowledge and Allah would remove the veils between us and Him and let us see
His exquisite reality.

These narrations tell us that we should be aware of Allah's divine expectation for us to return to Him. This awareness would encourage us to repent for our sins and ardently seek His Face and when we do so we will definitely not be disappointed for He is infinitely desirous of our
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