

Loving God; Man's love of his Master and Creator

By Musharraf Hussain

Al wadud is one of the Divine names it means 'the loving'.

“And seek your Lord's forgiveness and then turn to him indeed my Lord is merciful and loving” (11:90)

God's love of his creation is variously expressed in the Quran; the merciful, the forgiving, the patient etc. His kind treatment of his Prophets and righteous people is a clear indication of mankind being the object of Divine love.

However, in this talk I will focus on man's love of God where the Divine the object of human love. The Quran and ahadith emphasize the significance of a loving God. As I will show. This love of God was manifested by Muslim scholars and Sufi's in particular. Professor Nasr says, “The very presence of this vast literature on Divine love in nearly every Islamic language from Arabic to Persian to Turkish and Swahili... is the best external sign of the significance of the dimension of the love in the inner life of Islam”. Professor Nasr goes on to show how this outpouring was so extensive and powerful in expression that it even influenced Jewish, Christian and Hindu writers.(1)

A Jewish poet and scholar of the medieval period Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote about this:

“The Muslim sing of love and passion
The Christian of war and revenge
The Greeks of wisdom and devices
The Indians of parables and riddles
And the Israelites – songs and praises to Lord of hosts.(2)

B. Lewis, Music of distant drum (Princeton, NJ: Princeton univ. Press 2001) P193

I think its best to say no comments on these verses. The Quran alludes to the profound and the intense love of the believers when it proclaims: “Those who believe Love God intensely” (Baqarah: 165).

Before going any further lets define love.

Definition of Love

Love is used to describe several emotions like amiable, feeling warmly and tenderness. However it has a more profound meaning too. Take the legendary maternal love which is the most strongest of all loves and should be classified the first amongst the wonders of the world.

Professor TE Jessop puts it across eloquently when he says its, “chiefly a structure of the whole mind, the entire personality moulded to a certain shape, tilted to a massive bias, organised to think, feel, desire and act in a certain way towards a certain object”(3). (Christian Morality by TE Jessop, pub. Epworth Press 1960). That object maybe a person, an ideal or even a non-living thing. This particular state of mind is then expressed in our behaviour. For example, if a friend who we love gains a promotion we feel happy; if he had failed we would be sad. If his rival had instead gained the promotion we would be jealous. Professor Jessop goes on to further to describe the impact of love on its subject the ‘lover’, He says,

“Natural love then in a full sense ...is the whole self so structured that for its object (the beloved) it will use every one of its passions and powers. It can be gentle and steely, long suffering and aggressive, reticent and voluble, running through the entire gamut of feelings desires and decisions. It can make one now a doormat and now a tiger, here something like a saint and there a savage, at one time as wise as a sage and another time an obvious ass. It can be the loveliest thing in the world, and almost the most terrible”. (4)

What are the marks of divine love? What are the characteristics features of the lover of God?

The prophet (pbuh) said, “There are three qualities whoever posses them will taste the flavour of true faith: that God and his Prophet are more dear to him than anything else; That a person loves another purely for the sake of God; and that he dislikes to return to the state of disbelief as he would dislike being thrown into the blazing fire” (Agreed Upon).

This ‘intense love of God’ leads to Divine proximity, closeness and strong bonding with God. In the following Divine hadith God speaks: “My servant draws close to me most of all by obeying my commandments and he continues to draw even closer by voluntary activities until I love him. When I love him I become his ears by which he hears and eyes by which he sees, and hands by which he grasps and feet by which he walks. An if he were to ask anything from me I would give it to him and if he were to seek protection I would grant it to him” (Bukhari).

So being engrossed in devotion: Prayer, fasting, charity, and other good activities is a clear sign of loving God. Love of course is mutual the Divine reciprocates by protecting the lovers senses, so it does not indulge in the other. The lovers hearing, seeing, and, motor capabilities are all taken care of by God.

God does not keep his beloveds name a secret. A tradition says, “when God loves a person Gabriel is informed of this and told to love him, So Gabriel loves him too! And he announces it amongst the angels in heaven that so and so is God’s beloved so love him! And so they love him and then his acceptance is also established for the people on earth”.

The great poet Rumi (1207-73) so rightly called the troubadour of Divine love in his Masnavi hints to a possible reason for man’s yearning to love God.

He likens it to the lament of the reed-flute as a symbol of the human souls sorrow at being separated from the beloved Lord.

“Listen to this reed, how it makes compliant, telling a tale of separation; ‘ever since I was cut off from my reed bed, all have lamented my bewailing. I want the breast torn asunder so as to reveal the agony of my yearning. Everyone who has been separated from its origin longs to be united with it’.(5)

He goes on to say, “this cry of the reed is fire” and anyone who does not have this fire of love he is naught.

In another place he tries to describe the nature of Divine love all be it cryptically. Rumi tells about a young lover who eventually gets to sit close to his beloved. He pulls out a letter and begins to read it to her. Praising her and lamenting about the misery of their separation. The thoughtful lady abrasively responds, “I am not your beloved. I am here in Russia while your desire is in China. You are in love with me and with a certain emotion together, and the emotions dodge your grasp, young man. So I am only a part of your aim. I am the dwelling place of the beloved, not the beloved herself. True love is fixed on Gold and not on the coffer”. (6)

Rumi sees people either as lovers of God or lovers of the world. In a story about a prince and his servant he points to the fact that each is a captive. Early one morning a prince wanted a bath so he summons his servant Sunqar, ‘go and get my basin the towel and clay’. They at once set off for the baths. On the way there was a mosque, and Sunqar could hear the sound of congregation at prayer. So he humbly asked the Prince to wait whilst he goes to prayer. After a while the Imam and the people come out-Sunqar remained in the mosque. The prince waited and waited for a long time. He got impatient and shouted ‘Sunqar replied “Accomplished master, he will not let me. Just be patient. “Seven times the prince contained himself! And then shouted again. Sunqar’s reply was, “he will not let me come out yet your reverence”’.

Why? Shouted the prince ‘no one is left in the mosque. Who is keeping you back?

“The same one who has chained you outside, Sunqar answered, has chained me inside. He will not let you in and not let me out’.(7)

Here I would like to present the thoughts of Hafiz Abdul Karim (1848-1936) On Divine Love. In his book ‘Journey to God’ he devotes a whole chapter to: “An explanation of the fact that: Allah is to be loved more than anything else”, he says:

The entire Ummah is in agreement that loving Allah and his messenger is obligatory. Infact this is the very purpose of human creation. A heart that is empty of this love is dead. Various religious devotions and rituals have been instituted for developing this love as the lord says:

" I only created man and jinn for my worship" (Zariyat: 56).

Worship is tasteless without the divine love and since love is the reason for worship it surpasses it in significance. This love further deepens the faith as the verse says:

"Those who believe are deeply in love with Allah" (Baqarah: 165) (8)

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani says: You so often say: "No matter whom or what I Love, my love does not last long. Something always comes between us, whether through absence or death or hostility, or, in the case of a material objects, through destruction or loss." Well this maybe said to you: Do you not know, O beloved of the Lord of Truth, so cared for and looked after, so jealously watched and guarded, do you not know that Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He) is jealous? He has created you for himself, and you are yearning to belong to someone other than Him! Have you not heard his words (Almighty and Glorious is He):

“ He loves them and they love Him... ”(5:54)

The messenger (saw) made this love the requirement and precondition for faith when he said:

"None of you can be a believer until he loves Allah and His messenger more than anything else"

And on another occasion he said:

" None of you can be a believer until I am more dear to him than his father and children infact all the people" (Agreed Upon)

This fact is reiterated again in the Glorious Quran:

" Say if your fathers, children, brothers, wives, relatives, your hard earned wealth, the business about whose damage you are always apprehensive, the house you love (if all these worldly things) are more dear to you than Allah, his messenger and jihad in his path wait for the (severe punishment) that will be meted out.

(Tauba: 24)

The love of Allah is inclusive of the love of messengers, the companions and the auliya. The love of Allah can be practically illustrated by following and obeying the messenger.

" Say! If you love Allah then follow me and Allah will love you"

(Ale Imran: 31)

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani says in one of his speeches:

“It is reported that a man came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) one day and said to him: “I love you for the sake of Allah (Almighty and

Glorious is He!)” So he replied: “Clothe yourself in misfortune! Clothe yourself in Poverty!” Meaning since you want to acquire my attributes, to possess my character, because a prerequisite of love [mahabba] is conformity [muwafaqa]”.

Abu Bakr was so sincere in loving the Messenger that he spent his entire fortune to support him. He assumed his character and became partner in poverty, to the point where he did not even have a cloak to wear. He adapted himself to him outwardly and inwardly, in private and in public. As for you, O liar, you claim to love the righteous, yet you hide your dinars [gold coins] you're your dirhams [small silver coins] from them, while wishing to get close to them and to enjoy their friendship. Be sensible! This is false love. The lover keeps nothing hidden from his beloved, whom he prefers above all else. Poverty was the constant companion of the prophet (PBUH)”. This is why he said:

“ Poverty flows more rapidly toward someone who loves me than a flood of water towards its destination” (10)

In fact the messenger (saw) himself used to pray like this:

"O Lord give me your love and the love of him whose love will benefit me"

In the narration by Mustadrik and Tarmazi he says:

" O Lord give me your love and the love of him who loves you and the works that will lead to your love. O Allah! Make your love dearer to me than my self and family and the cold water"

Once a man asked,

" O messenger! When will the Day of Judgment come?" He replied "What have you prepared for it?" The man asked "I haven't got many prayers or fasts but I love Allah and the Messenger" He replied: "You are with him who you love." (Muslim)

Sirri Saqti (may Allah bless him) Said " On the Day of Judgement those who love Allah will be called by the names of prophets for example:

"O people of Moses, O people of Jesus, O people of Mohammad;" however the auliya Allah will be called like this.

"O Friends of Allah come close to Allah" Then their hearts will be touched when they meet Allah, and they will be told to enter paradise without giving any account. Apart from the prophets, the martyrs and the friends of Allah, everyone else will be drenched in his own sweat. The friends of Allah will be told to bring into paradise whoever they want. How wonderful is the reward of a loving God.

Hafiz Abdul Karim (1848-1936) asks why does one love someone else? These are the four possible reasons:

1 Everyone loves himself most and foremost and struggles for his survival and hates anything that will harm him. This is an instinct in every living thing.

Let me ask you who created you? In whose hand is your life? Who has given you all the things? If he wishes to end your life who can save you? In reality you neither own nor control anything, your very existence depends entirely on Him, the everlasting.

How can it be that you love yourself but not the pure being? Divine love is the result of Gnosis. i.e.: Divine knowledge. If you don't have Gnosis there will be no love. If Gnosis is weak then the love will be weak. Hassan says " Whoever knows his lord he will love him too and when he understands the nature of th world he will try to avoid it". In conclusion we can say, if man has to love himself he must also love Him who has given him life and sustains it. For he is the cause and source of the entire creation. Therefore there is no escape from loving Allah.

2. Secondly a person loves someone else because he may benefit from his wealth, support and protection. Here again Allah is the real benefactor of man, most deserving of love. When he looks around him he will see that he bestows all the favours.

He says:

" If you count the favours of Allah you will not be able to count them"
(An Nahl: 18)

The real benefactor is Allah, whilst all others are relative and secondary. It is Allah who has created them, made them generous and turned them to your help. So again, there is no one more deserving of love besides Him the almighty.

3. Third reason for loving someone could be his/her attractiveness. The attractiveness could be in moral virtues like kindness and generosity and physical beauty. Again you will notice that Allah is the creator of these virtues in people and makes them attractive. This also means that the most deserving of our love and attention is Allah, the creator of these attractions.

4. Fourth reason for loving someone could be because of his knowledge and power. If we look around the extent of all the accumulated knowledge of mankind it is relatively tiny compared to the Lord's knowledge?

The Quran says:

" Nothing is hidden from your Lord not even an atom in the earth or the heavens nothing small or big is excluded from the divine tablet "(Younus: 61)

If all the brilliant minds of the world of science were to get together to make a mosquito they will not be able to do so. True are the divine words:

" And you have only been given a small amount of knowledge "
(Bani Israel:85)

Man's knowledge is limited; Allah's is unlimited and his power infinite. Since there is no one more knowledgeable and powerful than Him, He therefore deserves most love. The Quran tells us about the rule of Alexander,
" We gave him a kingdom on earth " (Bani Israel:)

He ruled over two continents, which is only a tiny amount, compared to the vast universe. So even the most powerful man who rules in this world, his power is derived from Allah in the first instance and secondly it is only a tiny fraction of the universe. How great is the Lord's power and kingship then? Is there any comparison?

How can it be that you love the worldly kings but not the king of all kings? Yet all these are under his control, they belong to Him. All Praise is His.

In Brief: The beautiful is beloved, Allah is the most beautiful who is matchless and alone and unique. He is generous, the most generous and capable of doing whatever he wishes, knower of everything, the dominant, such that all the kings are under His rule. He has no beginning and no end, the eternal. Self-existing, who gives life to the rest. The alone, the unique we cannot imagine His power and Majesty. The messenger (saw) said:

" I couldn't Praise you enough. You are as you have described yourself "
(Muslim)

Abu Bakr the closest friend of the Messenger said:

" The admission of inability to understand him is an understanding in itself."

Glory to Allah! How can man fail to love Him who is the most beautiful, Most beneficent, Most powerful?

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