

Afaq Asadova

(Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan)

LOVE AS A PATH TO SALVATION

The Qur'an, which has a divine logic and includes divine knowledge, does not appeal only to the human intellect. It was sent down in the form of Revelation to the heart of the Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.), who was also a human being. The Divine Word is not a sort of theoretical information that is acquired as a result of generalized human experiences; quite the contrary, it is a book of action which is realized by human beings as a result of experience. To recite the Divine Knowledge, to memorize and maintain different theoretical reasoning over it, in other words, not to actualize and examine it within the inward spiritual experience is to remain at the periphery of this very knowledge. Then, how can this knowledge be actualized? Many answers may be given to this question according to some Islamic sects (*madhāhib*), Sufi paths (*turūq*) and various scientific and political views. This, of course, indicates both the richness of Allah's last religion and its features, including every sort of specifications in various geographical points, kinds of contemplation, historical and vital situations, where it is not confined. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, who is considered one of the greatest thinkers not only in Islamic history but also in the history of the world and who, by legating us a worldwide famous opus magnum *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, was able to revive his own period, accepted the idea that the knowledge of old women, those who are illiterate and are among common people but at the same time worship Allah in a devoted and sincere manner and fear Him, is superior to his own knowledge.

The following dictum of a famous Sufi, Abū Yazīd Bistāmī, corresponds to al-Ghazzālī's statement: "Even if you see someone who is sitting cross-legged on air, do not accept this act as a miracle unless you realize that he preserves the limits of Divine Order and Revelation, obeys the traditions of the Messenger of Allah, and observes the right of The Almighty."

A scholar, who is accepted as the pole of this era, a certain man who has the miracle of "suspending cross-legged," and an illiterate but sincere old woman in her worshipping; all these people would be rewarded in accordance with their sincerity and purity in their prayers in Divine Presence. The verses (*āyāt*) which refer to knowledge such as "Are those equal, those who know and those who do

not know?”¹ and also the Traditions of the Prophet (*aḥādīth*) state that the ones who have knowledge, in fact, are those who adopt Islamic morality and make it their way of life, who purge their selves and purify their hearts, who fight against their lower selves spiritually, without making any sort of peace with the lower self during their lifetime, who lead a life along the right path in compliance (*riḍā*) and submission (*taslīm*), and have a sincere and purified heart. The knowledge revealed to the heart can be adopted in the heart, by the heart and realized within the heart. How can heat exist unless the sunlight touches the skin and spreads through the other parts of the body, and how can thirst be quenched unless water flows within the cells? Such is the fact with the Holy Qur’an when one keeps it on a bookshelf or keeps it in mind, recites and preserves it within the reason.

“The hearts of disbelievers cannot preserve the wisdom; their hearts turn loose and convey it only to their tongues.” The whole history is witness to this great saying of our Prophet (P.B.U.H). The Word of God will turn to be a means of fight of human beings with each other for the sake of the world rather than a path leading to Allah if it is realized and remains as knowledge learnt only by means of the intellect in a rational manner. Thus, the Qur’an, by stating: “Continue then in the right way as you are commanded,”² gives the life of the Prophet as an example for those who try to be on the right way by the deepest purity that could be reached by human will, and cannot be confined within the frame of rational knowledge.

Therefore, Ibn al-‘Arabī, who, as a teenager, separated his way from such great rationalist scholar as Ibn Rushd (*Averroes*); Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, who realized that the worldly bonds and the knowledge that they brings honour, fame and respect (which, by the age of forty, he had gained to the extent that they were not enjoyed even by the greatest philosophers of his age) are just the opposite of what the religion commands, like many other philosophers, chose the Sufi way — *the path of love*.

In Sufism, the term *‘ishq* (love) is mostly used as the correlative, a synonym or sometimes even as an antonym of *‘ilm* (knowledge).

As William Chittick asserts, “historians have commonly spoken of a gradual development of Sufism that begins in a mysticism of asceticism and fear, slowly changes to an emphasis on love and devotion and then turns to stressing knowledge and gnosis.”³ Sufis believe that it is impossible to define “love” (*‘ishq*) in the fullest sense of the term. As a matter of fact, it is clear that defining the inner spiritual experiences is quite difficult and, in most cases, it is impossible to define them in words. That is why the eastern poetry is extremely rich, powerful

¹ Q. 39:9. Here and later, I quote the Qur’anic verses in the English translation of A.J. Arberry (The Koran. Translated with an Introduction by Arthur J. Arberry. London: Allen and Unwin, 1955).

² Q. 11:112.

³ Chittick W. Sufism: A Short Introduction. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000. P. 61.

and metaphorical. The feelings experienced on the path towards Allah and, generally, the things experienced in other manner than those experienced during our lives in this lower world, cannot be explained in terms of common speech, for it is designed for the expression of experiences belonging to this world. By means of these metaphorical words, another poetic language is created. This language is the language of love and this logic is the logic of love. In fact, the entire Sufi literature speaks of love and depicts love. However, it cannot define what love is. As the great Sufi thinker and poet Rūmī wrote:

*A man asked, "What is love?"
I said do not ask me about it.
You know it if you happen to become me.
If it calls you, then you will tell your story.⁴*

Or:

*Failing to explain it (love),
Reason fell in the mud like a donkey
Only Love can fully describe how to fall in love.⁵*

The great German philosopher Hegel says that to know something and to have knowledge about it is the same as to determine its limits in reflection. It is possible to determine the limits of the material things that surround us and also non-material thoughts in contemplation. As a result, the essence of this determination can also be called "science." Thus, the determination and definition of scientific understanding is clear in this context.⁶ While determining the confines of the human intellect, Immanuel Kant states in his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* that "the positive value of the critical principles of pure reason in relation to the conception of God and of the simple nature of the soul, admits of a similar exemplification; but on this point I shall not dwell. I cannot even make the assumption — as the practical interests of morality require — of *God, freedom, and immortality*, if I do not deprive speculative reason of its pretensions to transcendent insight."⁷ Even when approached by a rational intellect, the word *'ishq* has close relations with these words and it is not difficult to understand that it is impossible to define it within this logical frame.

⁴ *Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*. *Kulliyāt-i Shams*. Ed. B. Furūzānfarr. Verses 29050–51. The English translation by W.C. Chittick is taken from: *Chittick W. The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983. P. 195.

⁵ *Jalaluddin Rumi*. *The Mathnawi*. Books 1–6. Ed. R. A. Nicholson. London: Luzac and Co, 1925–1940. Book 1, verse 115. The English translation by W.C. Chittick is taken from: *Chittick W. The Sufi Path of Love*. P. 223.

⁶ Гегель Г.В.Ф. Энциклопедия философских наук. Ч. 3. Философия духа. Пер. Б.А. Фохта. М.: Наука, 1956. С. 95.

⁷ *Kant I. Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood. Cambridge: CUP, 1998. P. 37.

Similarly, the great Azerbaijani poet Nizāmī wonders what love means:

*Love is the highest point of heavens
You are worth nothing, oh world, without it.*⁸

And Fuzūlī says:

*To think that higher ranks are gained by knowledge
Is an impossible desire.
It is love that merely exists in the universe
The rest is only hearsay.*⁹

The scope of love cannot be defined from existing philosophical, psychological, para-psychological points of view. For, today's science that depends on experience describes human being as a single physical being with his/her essence, pure conscience or collective sub-consciousness. This science generalizes facts and teaches the general relations which occur between matter and events, and are stable and repeated. But as many philosophers inquire, "how is it possible to learn these states and the events which are special and never repeated but at the same time more valuable than other general facts?" If this science can provide general results by examining the biological instincts of millions of people, while it cannot explain how these very people have particular nature and aptitudes superior to these instincts, or understand these aptitudes only as the psychological stimulations or neurosis, experienced as a result of the restraint of biological instincts, then to what extent does it deserve trust? In some cases, there are attempts to study the facts and events linked with Sufism within the frame of various sciences. Of course, as Carl Jung stated, human being is the great experiment of nature and it can bring required experience over the essence to a great extent.

However, the same philosopher asserts about the human soul that contemporary western scientists, the analytic psychology created by them and thus the Freudian psychoanalysis is like the enthusiasm of a young person who has recently begun learning when compared with existing knowledge from the early times in the East. Jung at the same time points out righteously :

"Is it again a mere coincidence that modern thought had had to come to terms with Einstein's relativity theory and with ideas about the structure of the atom which lead us away from determinism and visual representation? Even physics volatilizes our material world. It is no wonder, then, in my opinion, if modern man falls back upon the reality of psychic life and expects from it that certainty which the world denies him."¹⁰

These observations of Carl Gustav Jung, one of the greatest scholars and psychologists, were answered by Shams Tabrīzī — who, according to Mawlanā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī is the spiritual sun (*shams*) — more than seven centuries ago:

⁸ *Nizāmī*. Haft paykar. Ed. Wahīd Dastgardī. Tehrān, 1934. P. 57.

⁹ *Fuzulī*. Rindū zahid. Ankara, 1956. P. 32.

¹⁰ *Jung C.G.* Modern Man in Search of a Soul. London: Routledge, 2001. P. 217.

“To attain the beauty of Spirit and to be able to see the spirit is a further state. After seeing the spirit, one needs to follow the path to Allah so that he/she may witness Him. I do not say he/she witnesses Him ‘here or in this world.’ If the worldly essences have veils, it means each essence has a light, which shines outwardly. Those who are perfect can see this very light. However, it is not surprising that they can see the light, which is not reflected outwardly. But it is surprising that some people cannot see the light whether it be in their hands or before them. The opinions and ideas of Socrates, Hypocrites, Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*’), and Greek philosophers do not resemble that of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), his descendants and those who follow him sincerely and devotedly...”¹¹

“Caliph Omar was reading a passage from the Torah. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) took the piece of paper from him and said, ‘If that holy person (Moses) to whom the Torah was revealed was here, he would follow me.’”¹²

The path of the Prophet Muhammad — the path of love — is the path by which Shams of Tabriz — the sun (*shams*), which rose in Tabriz of Azerbaijan and who was among the holiest people in the world, inspired the great Sufi Mawlanā Jalal ad-Dīn Rūmī in Konya by his entire heart and showed by the eye of the heart and saw in the mirror of his heart. The seekers of this path are the seers of the light “behind the veils of the substances” in the world two thousand years ago and have “that certainty which the world denies him,” as it was observed by Carl Jung a thousand years later.

The 21st century does not promise a beautiful and blissful future for humanity as a result of the rapid development of contemporary science and technology — the environment increasingly becomes polluted and global heating results in catastrophes, the decrease of natural resources on our planet may provoke some forces to use nuclear and mass destruction weapons, the differences between the standards of life in various countries keep increasing... As a result of the development of contemporary information technologies, the world becomes smaller and smaller. And the nano- and robo-technologies substitute the organs of human beings with artificial organs; they are likely to replace the human species called *homo sapiens* with robots and cyborgs. The lower world seems to cast more and more veils of matter upon the soul. Scientists speak of new thoughts and new horizons of thought. However, how much potential there remains for the change of cogitation? To what extent is human intellect urged? The intellect does not give up antinomy; it does not give up duality. On the contrary, it increases antinomy and leads reality to multiplicity. The intellect leads the world and its es-

¹¹ *Shams-i Tabrizī*. Maqālāt-i Shams. Ed. M. ‘A. Movahed. 4th edition. Tehrān: Nashr-i dānišgāh, 1378/1999. P. 311. Quoted from: *Chittick W. Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*. 2nd edition. Tehrān: Murwārid, 1386 S.H. P. 142.

¹² *Shams-i Tabrizī*. Maqālāt-i Shams. P. 313. Quoted from: *Chittick W. Me and Rumi*. P. 143.

sence to destruction by changing the world and its essence. Today, the world is something created by rational thought and positive science. Humanity is on the path of love. Love suppresses the antinomies and keeps the truths alive. It removes the duality and leads it to oneness; it destroys the incomplete and transient side and leads to the eternal subsistence (*baqā'*). Shams and Rūmī's — who, in fact, shine as spiritual sun and reflect in each other and survive in each other for the sake of God in the dimness of history — spiritual love and passion for human is a reflection of divine love and its functions are models in sustaining the vital functions of humanity; “the model of tolerating the creation for the sake of The Creator.”

The current stage, which humanity has reached today, indicates once more that the path of love held by a few chosen people among humanity for centuries — the way of beatific morality, the purification of the self, and refinement of hearts — is the straightest way. Friendship, brotherhood and love are the fruits of purification and morality. Strife, hatred are the fruits of evil morality. Nowadays the social diseases and catastrophes that engulf our world are the fruits of relations among human beings who depend on selfishness, ambition and excessive worldliness for centuries. The saying of the last Messenger of Allah (who was a possessor of superior morality, according to the Qur'anic verse: “And lo! Thou art of a tremendous nature”¹³): “The most beneficial thing given to human beings is the beautiful morality,” testifies to the lasting significance of his prophethood even thousands of years later. Friendship, which is a fruit of beautiful morality, is such a great bliss that Allah explains His vast Mercy by bestowing such an important bliss on humanity: “And (as for the believers) hath attuned their hearts. If thou hadst spent all that is in the earth thou couldst not have attuned their hearts, but Allah hath attuned them. Lo! He is Mighty, Wise.”¹⁴

Today, humanity can solve its vital problems by this great bliss, bestowed by Allah. The axis of the highest sky, *'ishq*, is also the activator of human relations on the earth. If only history would turn its face towards the love's sun of the East and remember the following words of Rūmī:

*Through Love all that is bitter will be sweet.
Through Love all that is copper will be gold.
Through Love all dregs will turn to purest wine.
Through Love all pain will turn to medicine.
Through Love the dead will all become alive.
Through Love the king will turn into a slave!*¹⁵

¹³ Qur'an, 68:4.

¹⁴ Qur'an, 8:63.

¹⁵ *Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*. Kulliyāt-i Shams. Ed. B. Furūzānfarr. Verses 11030–32. The English translation by Annemarie Schimmel is taken from: *Schimmel A. The Triumphal Sun: The Life and Works of Mowlana Jalaloddin Rumi*. London–Hague, 1980. P. 216.