

Part 1: The Power of Attraction in ‘Ali

Powerful Attractions

In the introduction to the first volume of *The Seal of the Prophets* (Khatim-a Payambar), it is written concerning the topic of calls to mankind:

"The ‘calls’ that have occurred among humanity have not all been the same, and the rays of their effects have not been of (only) one kind.

"Some calls and systems of thought are one-dimensional, and proceed in one direction; when they appear, they embrace a broad spectrum of people, millions of people become adherents, but then after their time comes to an end they close shop and are entrusted to oblivion.

"Some are two-dimensional, their rays spread out in two directions. While they embrace a broad spectrum of people, and also progress for some time, their range is not confined to the spatial dimension and also extends into the temporal dimension.

"And some others progress in a multitude of dimensions. Not only do we see them attract a broad range of people from human societies and influence them and notice the effect of their influence on every continent, but we also see that they embrace the temporal dimension, that is to say, they are not confined to one time or era. They rule in all their might century after century. Also, they take root in the depths of the human spirit, and the very core of people’s hearts is under their authoritative control; they rule in the profundity of the soul and take the reins of the emotions into their hands. This kind of three-dimensional call is the exclusivity of the chain of the prophets.

"What intellectual or philosophical schools of thought can be found which, like the world’s great religions, exert their authority over hundreds of millions of people for thirty centuries, or twenty centuries, or, at the minimum, fourteen centuries, and sink deep into their innermost core."

Forces of attraction are also like this: sometimes one, sometimes two, and sometimes three–

dimensional.

‘Ali’s power of attraction was of the last kind. Not only did it attract a broad range of human society, but it was also not limited to one or two centuries; rather, it has continued and extended throughout time. It is a fact that it lights up the pages of the centuries and ages, it has reached the depth and profundity of hearts and souls, in such a way that, after hundreds of years, when he is remembered and his moral virtues are heard of, tears of longing are shed, and the memory of his misfortunes is awakened to the extent that even his enemies are affected and their tears flow. This is the most powerful of attractive forces.

From here it can be understood that the link between man and religion is not a material one, but rather of another kind, the like of which link connects no other thing to the spirit of mankind.

If ‘Ali had had no divine colouring and had not been a man of God, he would have been forgotten. The history of man bears traces of many champions, champions of speech, champions of knowledge or philosophy, champions of power and authority and champions in the battle-field, but all are forgotten by people, or else completely unknown.

But not only did ‘Ali not die with his being killed, he became more alive. He spoke well when he said:

هَلَاكَ خُزَانُ الْأَمْوَالِ وَهُمْ أَحْيَاءُ، وَالْعُلَمَاءُ بَاقُونَ مَا بَقِيَ الدَّهْرُ، أَعْيَانُهُمْ مَفْقُودَةٌ، أَمْثَالُهُمْ فِي الْقُلُوبِ مَوْجُودَةٌ

Those who amass wealth are dead even when they are alive, but those with knowledge will remain as long as the world remains. Their bodies may have disappeared, but their images continue to exist in the hearts.¹

He said about his own character:

غَدَا تَرَوْنَ أَيَّامِي، وَيُكْشَفُ لَكُمْ عَنْ سَرَائِرِي، وَتَعْرِفُونَنِي بَعْدَ خُلُوقِ مَكَانِي وَقِيَامِ غَيْرِي مَقَامِي.

Tomorrow, you will see these days of mine and unknown characteristics of mine will be revealed to you, and after my place has been vacated and someone else has occupied it you will know me."²

Iqbal wrote:

My own age does not understand my deep meanings,

My Joseph is not for this market. I despair of my old champions,

My Sinai burns for the sake of the Moses who is coming.

Their sea is silent, like dew,

But my dew is storm-ridden, like the ocean.

My song is of another world than theirs:

This bell calls other travellers to take the road.

Many a poet was born after his death,

He opened our eyes when his own were closed,

And journeyed forth again from nothingness

Like roses blossoming over the earth of his grave.

No river will contain my Oman

My, flood requires whole seas to hold it.

Lightening slumber within my soul,

I sweep over mountain and plain.

The Fountain of Life hath been given me to drink,

I have been made an adept of the mystery of Life.

No one hath told the secret which I will tell

Or threaded a pearl of thought like mine

Heaven taught me this lore,

I cannot hide it from my comrades.^{[3](#)}

In fact, 'Ali is like the laws of nature which remain unchanged by time. He is a well-spring of munificence which is never dry, but which rather increases day by day. In the words of Kahlil Gibran^{[4](#)} he was one of those personalities who was born before his time.

Shi'ism, the Creed of Love

One of the greatest marks of distinction of Shi'ism over other sects is that its-foundation and its bedrock is love. Right from the time of the Prophet who laid the basis of this sect there has been the whispering of love; when we hear from the words of the Prophet the sentence:

Aliyyun wa shi'atuhu humu 'l-fa'izun.

"Ali and his party (Shi 'ah) will be the triumphant ones."^{[5](#)}

We see that there was a group around 'Ali who were devoted to him, extremely fond of him and most affectionately drawn towards him. Thus Shi'ism is the religion of love and devotion: taking 'Ali as one's friend is the way of love. The element of love has completely penetrated Shi'ism, and the history of Shi'ism is joined in name with a chain of entirely unknown people, devoted, full of love and self-sacrificing.

Although 'Ali administered the Divine punishments to some, dealt with them with lashes and occasionally cut the hand of someone off in accordance with what is laid down by the Divine Law, they did not turn away from him and their love for him did not diminish in the slightest. He himself said:

If I strike the nose of a believer with this sword of mine so that he will become my enemy, it will not create hostility and if I pour the (riches of the) whole world on the head of a hypocrite so that he may like me, he will never like me; because this has been decreed and laid down by the tongue of the Prophet when he said: "O 'Ali, the believer will never be your enemy and the hypocrite will never love you!"[6](#)

'Ali is the standard and criterion for assaying human natures and temperaments: he who has a sound nature and a pure temperament will never take offence at 'Ali, even though his sword may come down on his head, while he who has a diseased nature will never show any attachment to him, even if he does him great favours, for 'Ali is nothing but the embodiment of truth.

There was a friend of Amir al-Mu'minin, a good and believing man, who unfortunately fell into error, and who had to be punished. Amir al-Mu'minin cut off the fingers of his right hand. The man took hold of his cut hand, with the blood dripping from it, with his left hand, and went away. Ibn al-Kawwa', a seditious Kharijite, wanted to take advantage of this course of events for his own party and against 'Ali, so he came up to the man with an air of utter compassion and said: "Who cut your hand off?"

"The chief of the Prophet's successors", he said, "the leader of the untainted ones at the Resurrection, the most righteous among the believers, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Imam of right guidance, cut off the fingers of my right hand . . . the first to reach the Gardens of Felicity, the hero of the brave, the avenger against the promoters of ignorance, the giver of zakat . . . the leader on the right and perfect path, the speaker of what is true and appropriate, the champion of Mecca, the steadfast exceller. " "Poor you!" said Ibn al-Kawwa', "He cut off your hand, and you extol him thus!"

"Why should I not extol him", he said, "now that his friendship is mixed with flesh and blood? I swear by God that he did not cut off my hand except with a right that God has established."[7](#)

This love and affection which we see in such a way in the history of 'Ali and his companions, makes us turn to the topic of love and its results.

The Elixir of Love

The Persian poets called love the "elixir" (*iksir*). The alchemists believed that there existed a material in the world which they called the "elixir"⁸ or "the philosopher's stone" (*kimiya*) which could change one matter into another matter, and they searched after this for centuries. The poets took over the use of this terminology and said that the real "elixir" which has the power of transformation is love, because it is love which can transmute a substance. Love, absolutely, is the "elixir" and has the properties of the philosopher's stone, which changes one nature into another, and people also are different natures.

النَّاسُ مَعَادِنٌ كَمَعَادِنِ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ

People are mines, like gold-mines and silver-mines.

It is love which makes the heart a heart, and if there is no love, there is no heart, just clay and water.

Every heart that is not aflame is no heart;

A frozen heart is nothing but a handful of clay. O God! Give me a breast that sets ablaze,

*And in that breast a heart and that heart consumed with fire.*⁹

One of the effects of love is power; love is the power of glory, it makes the coward courageous.

A hen will keep its wings folded by its side as long as it is alone. It will strut about quite peaceably, looking about to find small worms to swallow. It will start at the slightest noise, and not stand its ground even in front of the weakest child. But when the same hen has chickens, love takes up its dwelling at the center of its being and its character completely changes.

The wings which were folded by its side are now lowered in a sign of preparation for defense, it assumes an aggressive posture, even the sound of its clucking becomes stronger and more courageous. Previously it fled at the possibility of danger, but now it attacks where there is that possibility, and it attacks bravely. This is love which displays the frightened hen in the form of a valiant animal.

Love makes the heavy and lazy nimble and cunning, and even makes the slow-witted astute. A boy and girl neither of whom, when they were single, found themselves thinking about anything except what was directly related to their own persons, see that they have become concerned about the fate of another being for the first time as soon as they fall in love and set up a family environment. The radius of their wants extends; and when they become parents, their spirit completely changes.

That heavy and lazy adolescent boy has now become active and mobile, and that girl who used not to get out of her bedclothes even during the day moves like lightning when she hears the cry of her child in

the cradle. What is this power which has so galvanized the languor and weariness in these two young people? It is nothing but love.

It is love which turns the miser into a benefactor, and an impatient and intolerant person into someone with endurance and tolerance. It is love which gave the selfish bird which collected grain only with itself in mind and looked only after itself, the form of a generous creature which calls for its chickens when it finds a grain of corn; or which, by some wonderful power, makes the mother, who was until yesterday a spoiled child who just ate and slept and was irritable and impatient, persevering and forbearing when faced with hunger, lack of sleep and dishevelment, which gives her the patience to endure the hardships of motherhood.

The bringing into existence of tenderness in, and the removal of heaviness and coarseness from, the spirit, or, put in another way, the purification of the feelings, and also the unification and singleness of purpose and concentration, and the disappearance of distraction and dispersion are the strengths and, in the end, power which is produced by the coming together of all the resulting effects of love.

In the language of poetry and literature, when love is spoken of, we encounter one effect more than any other, and that is the power of love to bring inspiration, and its prodigality.

The nightingale learnt its song by the favour of the rose,

otherwise there would not have been

Any of this song and music fashioned from its beak. [10](#)

Although the favour of the rose is, if we attend only to the words, a matter outside the existence of the nightingale, it is in fact nothing but the force of love itself.

Do you imagine that Majnun became deranged (majnun)

by himself? It was the glance of Layla that transported him among the stars. [11](#)

Love awakens sleeping powers, and frees chained and fettered forces, just like the splitting of the atom and the freeing of atomic power. It fires with inspiration and builds heroes – how many poets, philosophers and artists there have been who were created by a strong and powerful love.

Love perfects the soul and brings out astounding latent abilities. From the point of view of the powers of perception, it inspires, and from the point of view of the emotions, it strengthens the will and determination, and when it rises to its highest aspect it brings miracles and supernatural events into existence.

It purifies the spirit from the tempers and humours of the body; or, in other words, love is a cathartic, it purges the base qualities arising from egotism, or from coldness and lack of warmth, such as envy,

avarice, cowardice, laziness, conceitedness and self-admiration. It removes grudges and malevolence, although it is possible that deprivation of, and frustration in, love may produce, in their own turn, complexes and aversions.

By love, bitternesses became sweet,

By love, pieces of copper became gold. [12](#)

In the spirit, the effect of love is in terms of its development and thriving; in the body, in terms of melting and decomposition. The effect of love in the body is the complete opposite of what it is in the spirit. In the body love is the cause of ruination, and the reason for pallor and emaciation in the body, for indisposition and disorder in the digestive and the nervous systems.

Perhaps all the effects which it has in the body are destructive; but in connection with the spirit it is not so – it depends on the object of love and how the person responds to that object. Leaving aside its social effects, it is predominantly perfecting in the spirit and the individual, because it produces strength, compassion, serenity, singleness of purpose, and determination; it abolishes weakness, meanness, annoyance, uncollectedness and dullness. It removes the confusions which are called *dassa* in the Qur'an (91:10), meaning adulterations of purity with impurity, destroys deceit and purifies the cheat.

The spiritual way ruins the body,

And, after having ruined it, restores it to prosperity:

O happy the soul who, for love and ecstasy,

Gave up hearth and home, wealth and riches,

Ruined the house for the sake of the golden treasure,

And with that same treasure rebuilt it better;

Cut off the water and cleansed the river-bed,

Then caused drinking-water to flow in the river-bed;

Cleft the skin and drew out the iron point –

Then fresh skin grew over it.

The perfect ones who are aware of the secret of reality

Are in ecstasy, bewildered, intoxicated and deranged with love.

Not bewildered in such wise that his back is towards Him,

But so bewildered that (they are) drowned and intoxicated with the Beloved. [13](#)

Breaking down the Barriers

Love brings man out from egoism and self-love, irrespective of what kind of love it is – animal and sexual, animal and parental, or human – and irrespective of what qualities and excellences the loved-one has, whether bold and valiant, artistic or wise, or whether he or she be in possession of a fine morality, social graces or other special attributes.

Self-love is a limitation and a defensive barrier; love completely breaks down this defensive barrier to other than the self. Man is weak until he has gone outside his own self, he is timid, avaricious, covetous, misanthropic, quick tempered, selfish and arrogant; his spirit gives out no spark or brilliancy, it has no vivacity or animation, it is always cold and cut off. However, as soon as he takes a step outside his "self" and breaks down his defensive barriers, these ugly habits and qualities are also destroyed.

Whoever's garment is torn by love

Is entirely cleansed of covetousness or blemish [14](#)

Self-love, in the sense of something which must be eliminated, is not something which really exists. What we mean is that it is not a real, existing fondness for himself which man must do away with so that he can become liberated from "self-love". It makes no sense for a human being to try not to like himself; esteem for oneself which we can call "amour-propre" has not been mistakenly overlooked so that we have to throw that out.

The reform and perfecting of man does not mean that, let us suppose, a series of extraneous matters in his existence are thought up and then that these extraneous and detrimental things must be eliminated. In other words the reform of man does not lie in reducing him, it lies in perfecting and adding to him. The responsibility that creation has assigned to man's charge is in the direction of the course of creation, that is, in perfection and growth, not in decrease and reduction.

The struggle with self-love is the struggle with the limitations of the self. This self must be expanded; this defensive structure, which has been placed round the self and which sees every other thing, apart from what is connected to itself as a person or an individual, as foreign, "not me", and alien to it, must be broken down.

The personality must expand to take in every other human being, if not the whole of the universe of creation. Thus the struggle with self-love is the struggle with the limitations of the self; and therefore self-love is nothing else but a limitation of the conceptual and motivational process. Love turns man's affections and drives towards what is outside his self; it enlarges his existence and changes the focal point of his being. For the same reason, love is a great

Constructive or Destructive?

When affection for an individual or a thing reaches the summit of intensity so that it conquers man's existence and becomes the absolute ruler over his being, it is called love. Love is the peak of affection and the sentiments.

But it should not be imagined that what is called by this name is of only one kind; it is of two completely opposite kinds. Those things which are called its good effects are connected with one of its kinds, but its other kind has completely destructive and opposite effects.

The sentiments *of* man are *of* various kinds and degrees; some *of* them are in the category *of* the passions, especially the sexual passions, and are of those aspects which are shared by man and the other animals, with the difference that in man, for a particular reason the explanation of which cannot be appropriately undertaken now, it reaches its peak and takes on an indescribable intensity; and for this reason it is called love.

It never takes on this form among animals, but, in any case, in its reality and essence, it is nothing but a torrent, a bursting forth, a tempest of the passions. It originates from the source of sexuality, and reaches its end there too. Its rise and fall are, too a large degree, connected to the physiological activity of the genital organs and naturally to the years of youth; it diminishes and eventually ceases altogether with an increase in age, on the one hand, and, on the other, with satiation and separation.

A youth who feels himself a-quiver at the sight of a beautiful face or a tress of hair, or who feels a frisson when touched by a tender hand, should know that there is nothing more operating here than a material, animal process.

This kind of love comes quickly and goes quickly. It cannot be depended on, nor recommended, it has dangers and it kills virtue. It is only by the help of modesty and piety and not becoming abandoned to it that it may profit a human being; that is, in itself, it is a power which leads man towards no virtue. But it gives a strength and a perfection to the spirit, if it penetrates into a man's being, is met with the power of modesty and piety, and if the spirit tolerates the pressure of it – provided it does not succumb to it.

Humans have another variety of sentiments which, in their reality and essence, differ from the passions; it is better to call these noble sentiments, or in the language of the Qur'an, "love and mercy" (***muwaddah wa rahmah***).[15](#)

As long as man is under the control of his passions, he has not gone out from his self, he seeks a person or a thing whom he is attracted to for himself, and he wants it dearly. If he thinks about a love-object, it is with the idea of how he might profit from being united with it, or at the most how he can derive enjoyment from it. It is obvious that such a state cannot be the perfecter or the educator of man's spirit, or refine it.

However, man occasionally comes under the effect of his higher human sentiments; his loved-one receives respect and eminence in his eyes, he seeks that person's happiness. He is prepared to sacrifice himself for that person's desires. This kind of sentiment brings purity, sincerity, tenderness, compassion and altruism into existence, as opposed to the first kind which creates crudeness, savagery and criminality. The kindness and affection of a mother for her child is of this second kind. Devotion to, and love of, the pure ones and the men of God, as also patriotism and the love of principles, are also from the same category.

It is this kind of sentiment from which, if it reaches its summit and perfection, all the aforementioned good effects result; and it is this kind which gives dignity, distinction and greatness to the spirit, in contrast to the first kind which brings wretchedness. Similarly it is this kind of love which is durable, and which becomes stronger and warmer with union, as opposed to the first kind which is not permanent and whose graveyard union is reckoned to be.

In the Qur'an, the relationship between a man and wife is described as "love and compassion"[16](#), and this is a very great point. It is an indication of the human and higher than-animal aspect of married life. It is an indication that the factors of the passions are not the only natural link in married life. The fundamental link is purity, sincerity and the union of two spirits; or, in other words, the thing which joins the married couple one to the other, and unites them, is compassion, mercy, purity and sincerity, not the passions, which also exist between animals.

In his own subtle way, Rumi distinguishes between the passions and true love; he calls the former animal and the latter human. He says:

Wrath and passion are the attributes of beasts,

Love and compassion the attributes of man.

Thus Love is the characteristic of

Adam, missing in animals, a deficiency.

Materialist philosophers too have not been able to deny this spiritual state which, from several standpoints, has a non-material aspect, and which would not be in conformity with man and what is beyond him being material.

In *Marriage and Morals*, Bertrand Russell writes:

Work of which the motive is solely pecuniary cannot have this value, but only work which embodies some kind of devotion, whether to persons, to things, or merely to a vision. And love itself is worthless when it is merely possessive; it is then on a level with work which is purely pecuniary. In order to have the kind of value which we are speaking, love must feel the ego of the beloved person as important as one's own ego, **and must realize** the other's feelings and wishes as though they were one's own. [17](#)

Another point which should be mentioned and carefully attended to is that we said that even loves of the passions may possibly become beneficial, and that occurs when they become linked to piety and modesty. That is to say, in connection with, on the one hand, separation and inaccessibility, and, on the other hand, purity and modesty, the pains and anguishes, pressures and difficulties to which the spirit is subjected bear good and beneficial results.

It is in this connection that the mystics say that allegorical love is turned in real love, i.e., love of the Essence of the One; and it is also in connection with this that the following tradition is narrated:

He who becomes a lover, who conceals (his love), who is chaste (in his love) and dies (in that state) has died as a martyr.

However the point must not be forgotten that this kind of love, with all the advantages that may, under particular conditions, possibly be brought about, is not to be recommended – it is a dangerous valley to enter. It is in this respect like an affliction, which, if it troubles someone and he opposes it with the force of his patience and will, becomes a perfecter and purifier of his soul; it cooks what is raw in it and clarifies what is turbid in it. But one cannot recommend an affliction. No-one can create an affliction for himself so as to profit from these factors which prepare and train the soul; neither should he bring about an affliction for someone else on this pretext.

Here, also, Russell has something valuable to say:

Suffering fills people with energy, like an invaluable counterweight. Someone who deems himself to be entirely contented will not exert himself any further for happiness. But I do not advocate that this be made a pretext for causing others suffering so that they may tread a profitable path, because it often gives the opposite result and destroys man. Rather, it is better in this case to submit our own selves to chance events that fall in our way. [18](#)

As far as we know, the effects and advantages of afflictions and misfortunes have been much emphasized in Islamic teachings, and they are well-known as signs of God, but this in no way permits anyone to create afflictions for himself or for others on this pretext.

Moreover, there is a difference between love and affliction; and that is that love, more than any other factor, is against reason. Wherever it sets foot, it ousts reason from its governing position. This is why love and reason are well-known in mystic literature as two rivals. The antagonism between the philosophers and the mystics originates from here, the former depending on, and confiding in, the power of reason, the latter in the power of love. In Sufi literature, reason is always condemned and defeated in this field of competition. Sa'di says:

My well-wishers advise me

It is useless to make bricks on the sea.

But the power of yearning prevails over patience:

The pretension of the intellect over love is futile.

Another poet has said:

I drew a comparison for the counsel of reason in the path of love:

It is like a fall of dew trying to trace a pattern on the sea.

How can a force which is as powerful as this, which snatches the reins of the will out of our hands, and which, in the words of Rumi "blows a man here and there like a blade of straw in the hands of a fierce wind", and in the words of Russell "is something with propensity for anarchy", be recommendable?

At any rate, it is one thing to happen to have useful results, but it is another to be advisable or recommendable.

From this it will be seen that the objection and complaint which some Islamic jurists have levelled against some of the Islamic philosophers' who have set forth this matter in their metaphysics and have explained its results and advantages, is invalid. For the former imagined that the opinion of the latter group of philosophers was that this matter is both advisable and recommendable, whereas they only considered the useful effects of this kind of love which appear under conditions of piety and chastity, without recommending or advising it, just as they would have done with afflictions or misfortunes.

Love and Devotion to Those Close to God

We have said that love is not restricted only to an animal love of a sexual or parental kind. Rather, there is another kind of love and attraction which is situated in a more rarefied atmosphere, and is completely beyond the confines of matter or materiality.

It originates from an instinct far above that of the preservation of generations, and is in fact something which separates the universe of man from the universe of animals. This is spiritual, or human, love, falling in love with excellence and goodness, becoming enamoured of the virtues of man and the beauty of reality.

Those loves which are for the sake of a colour

Are not love: in the end they are a disgrace;

Since love of the dead is not enduring,

Because the dead one never comes back to us.

(But) love of the living is every moment

Fresher than a bud in the spirit and the sight

Choose the love of that Living One Who is everlasting,

Who gives thee to drink of the wine that increases life.

Choose the love of Him from Whose love

All the prophets gained power and glory. [19](#)

And it is love which is mentioned in many of the verses of the Qur'an, especially by the word "mahabbah", These verses can be placed in several groups:

1. Verses which describe the believers, and speak of the deep devotion and love they have for God or the other believers,

But those that believe love Allah more ardently. (al Baqarah, 2 : 165)

وَالَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُوا الدَّارَ وَالْإِيمَانَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِمَّا أُوتُوا وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ يُوقِ شَحْنَهُ نَفْسَهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

And those who made their dwelling in the abode, and in belief, before them, love whosoever has emigrated to them not finding in their breasts any need for what they have been given, and preferring others above themselves, even though poverty be their portion. (Al-Hashr, 59:9)

2. Verses which speak of the love of God for believers:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Truly Allah loves those who repent, and He loves those who cleanse themselves. (Al-Baqarah, 2:222)

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And Allah loves the good doers. (Al 'Imran, 3 : 148 and al-Ma'idah, 5 : 13)

نَ اللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Surely Allah loves those who guard themselves. (At-Tawbah, 9 : 4 and 7)

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهِّرِينَ

And Allah loves those who cleanse themselves. (At-Tawbah, 9 : 108)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

Surely Allah loves the just. (Al-Hujurat, 49:9 and al-Mumtahinah, 60:8)

3. Verses which include two-way affections and reciprocal love: the love of God for the believers, the love of the believers for God; and the love of the believers for each other:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ

Say "if you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you, and forgive you your sins." (Al 'Imran, 3 : 31)

فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ

Allah will assuredly bring a people He loves, and who love Him. (al-Ma' idah, 5: 54)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

Surely those who believe and do deeds of righteousness - unto them the All-merciful shall assign love. (Maryam, 19:96)

وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

And He has sent between you love and compassion. (Ar-Rum, 30: 21)

And it is love which Ibrahim wanted for his offspring,[20](#) and which the last Prophet also sought by the order of God for his kinsmen.[21](#)

From what we have been told from *hadith*, the spirit and essence of religion is nothing but love. Burayd al-'Ijli said: "I was in the presence of Imam al-Baqir (as), and there was a traveller from Khurasan who had traversed that long journey on foot. He had the honour of meeting the Imam. His feet, which were showing through his shoes, were cut, and he had taken his shoes off. He said: "By God, the only thing that brought me from whence I have come is love of you, the Household (of the Prophet)." The Imam

said: "By God, if a stone loved us, God would unite it with us, and join it to us. Is the religion other than love?" [22](#)

A man said to Imam as-Sadiq (as): "We have named our children after you and your fathers; will this action be of any benefit to us?" He said: "Yes, by God; is the religion other than love?" Then he gave the verse If you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you as evidence. [23](#)

Basically, it is love which brings obedience: the lover does not have the power to refuse the wishes of the one he loves. We have seen this with our own eyes when a youth who was in love left everything when faced with his loved one, his beloved, and sacrificed everything for her.

The obedience and worship of God is in proportion to the love which man has for God, as Imam as-Sadiq (as) said: "Disobey God and show that you love Him; by my life, that is something amazing. If your love were true, you would have obeyed Him, for the lover is submissive before the one whom he loves."

The Power of Love in Society

The power of love is a great and effective force in relation to society; the best societies are those which are administered by the power of love: both the love of the leader and the ruler for the people, and the love and devotion of the people for the leader and ruler.

The feeling and love of the ruler is an important factor in the stability and longevity of a government, and until that factor exists the leader cannot, or finds it very difficult to, lead the society, train people to be law-abiding individuals, and even establish justice and equality in that society. But once he does so, people will be so lawfully minded that they will see the affection of their ruler and it is this affection which will attract them to obedience and dutifulness.

The Qur'an addresses the Prophet and says to him that he has a great power in his hands to influence people and to administer society

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ

It is by some mercy of Allah that thou art gentle to them; hadst thou been harsh and hard of heart, they would have scattered from about thee. So pardon them, and pray forgiveness for them, and take counsel with them in the affair. (Ali 'Imran, 3: 159)

Here it is made clear that the cause of the people's coming to the Prophet is the affection and love which he has bestowed on them. Then it orders him to forgive them and to ask for forgiveness for them and to consult with them. These are all among the effects of love and friendship, just as tolerance, patience and forbearance are also among the degrees of love and kindness.

By the sword of clemency he (Ali) redeemed so many throats

Of such a multitude from the sword.

The sword of clemency is sharper than the sword of iron;

Nay, it is more productive of victory than a hundred armies. [24](#)

The Qur'an also says:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

Not equal are the good deed and the evil deed. Repel with that which is fairer and behold, he between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal friend. (Fussilat, 41:34)

Forgive, o son, that man can trap

By goodness and do savage deeds with fetters,

Chain the neck of the enemy with mercy,

Which noose no blade can cut.

In his firman to Malik al-Ashtar, when he appointed him to the governorship of Egypt, Amir al-Mu'minin also explained how his behaviour with the people should be:

..... وَأَشْعِرْ قَلْبَكَ الرَّحْمَةَ لِلرَّعِيَّةِ، وَالْمَحَبَّةَ لَهُمْ، وَاللُّطْفَ بِهِمْ

فَأَعْطِهِمْ مِنْ عَفْوِكَ وَصَفْحِكَ مِثْلَ الَّذِي تُحِبُّ أَنْ يُعْطِيَكَ اللَّهُ مِنْ عَفْوِهِ وَصَفْحِهِ

Awaken in your heart mercy for (your) subjects and love for them, and kindness towards them.... So give them of your forgiveness and your pardon, just as you would like Allah to give you of his forgiveness and pardon. [25](#)

The heart of the ruler must be a focus of affection and love towards the nation; power and force are not enough. People can be driven like sheep by power and force, but their inner strengths cannot be awakened and put to use. Not only is power and force not sufficient; even justice, if it is lifelessly enforced, is not enough.

Rather the ruler must love the people from his heart like a loving father, show his affection towards them and also have an attractive personality which fosters devotion, so that he may make use of their wills,

their ambitions and their great human strengths in furthering his own divine aim.

The Best Means For Refining The Soul

The previous discussion on the subject of love and affection was an introduction, and now we want gradually to draw a conclusion. The most important part of our discussion – it is in fact the foundation of our discussion – is whether love and affection for those near to God, and devotion to persons of excellence, is an aim in itself, or whether it is a means for refining the soul, reforming one's morals, and acquiring human virtues and excellences.

In animal love, all the interests and endeavour of the lover is towards the form of the loved one and the harmony of the loved one's limbs and the colour and beauty of the skin, and these are instincts which pull and attract man. However, after the satisfying of the instinct, these fires have no brightness, become cool, and are eventually extinguished.

But human love, as we have said, is life and vitality; it engenders obedience and loyalty. This is the love which makes the lover resemble the loved one, makes him try to be a manifestation of the loved one and a copy of the loved one's behaviour, just as Khwajah Nasiru'd-Din at-Tusi says in his commentary to Ibn Sina's *Kitabu 'l-isharat wa 't-tanbihat* (Book of Directives and Remarks)

(*The love of*) the soul is that whose source is the essential resemblance of the soul of the lover with the soul of the beloved. Most of the lover's delight is in the characteristics of the beloved which proceed from the soul of the beloved . . . It makes the soul tender, yearning and ecstatic and gives it a delicacy of feeling which detaches it from the distractions of the world.[26](#)

Love pushes towards similarity and resemblance, and its power causes the lover to assume the form of the beloved. Love is like an electric wire which joins the being of the beloved to the lover and transfers the qualities of the beloved to him; and it is here that the choice of a beloved is of fundamental importance.

Thus Islam has given much importance to the subject of finding a friend and taking a companion. There are many verses (of the Qur'an) and sayings (of the Prophet and the Imams) in this domain, because friendship causes resemblance, creates beauty and brings imprudence. Where it shines its light it sees the defect as art, and the thorn as rose and jasmine.[27](#)

In some of the verses (of the Qur'an) and sayings (of the Prophet and Imams) a warning is given about frequenting and befriending unwholesome and rotten people, and in some of them a call is made to pure-hearted friendship.

Ibn 'Abbas said: "We were in the presence of the Prophet when it was asked: 'Who is the best companion?' He replied: 'That person who when you see him, you are reminded of God; when he speaks, your knowledge increases; when he acts, you fall to thinking of the hereafter and the

Mankind is in dire need of the elixir of love for pure and virtuous people, so that love may be cultivated, and so that love for such people may create a resemblance and similarity to them in mankind.

A variety of ways have been recommended for reforming one's morals and refining the soul, and various methods have come into existence, one of which is the Socratic method. According to this, man must reform himself by way of his intellect and his own devising. A man should first of all find complete faith in the benefits of the purification of, and the harm of confusion in, the morals, and then, one by one, find the blameworthy qualities with the instrument of his intellect – like someone who wants to pick out the hairs from inside his nose one by one, or like a farmer who, by his own hand, pulls out the tares from the furrows of his land, or like someone who wants to clean his wheat of small stones and soil by his own hand – and then cleanse these bad qualities from the harvest of his being.

According to this method, one must gradually remove moral depravities by patience, perseverance, careful reckoning and applied thought, and purify the gold of one's being from false coin. Perhaps it should be said that it is not possible for the intellect to acquit itself of this task.

Philosophers seek to reform morality by thought and reckoning. For example, they say that purity and continence are the cause of man's honour and character in the eyes of people, and greed and avarice are the consequences of hardship and inferiority; or they say that knowledge is the consequence of power and ability, knowledge is like this and like that, knowledge is "the seal of the kingdom of Solomon", knowledge is the light along man's path which illuminates the pitfalls in his way; or they say that envy and malevolence are spiritual sicknesses, from which evil consequences will result as far as society is concerned; and so on.

There is no doubt that this way is a correct way, and this means is a good means; but we are talking about the balance of the value of this means in comparison with any other means. Just as a car is, for example, a good means, but when it is compared to an airplane we must examine carefully the extent of its value.

First of all, we have no argument with the value of the way of the intellect as regards guidance, that is to say from the point of view of how far so-called intellectual reasoning reveals reality in the matter of ethics, how far it is true, and in conformity with the facts, and is not faulty and erroneous. We will only say this much, that there are countless philosophical schools of ethics and education, and this problem has still not passed beyond the boundaries of discussion and argument as far as reasoning is concerned. Moreover we know that the Sufis are all in agreement when they say:

The leg of the reasoners is of wood;

A wooden leg is very infirm. [29](#)

At the moment, our discussion does not concern this aspect, instead it concerns how far this way can reach.

The mystics and people of the spiritual journey have recommended the way of love and fellowship in place of following the way of the intellect and reasoning. They say that one should find a perfect being and hang the halter of love for, and fellowship with, him round one's heart, since this is both less dangerous than the way of the intellect and reasoning, and also swifter.

By way of comparison, these two paths are like the old-fashioned way of doing something by hand and the way of doing it by machine. The effect of the power of love and fellowship on the doing away with moral vices from the heart is similar to the effect of chemicals on metals; for example, an etcher removes what is unwanted on his plate by the application of strong acid, not by using a nail, or the point of a knife, or anything like that.

However, the effect of the intellect in reforming moral evils is like the work of someone who wants to separate iron-fillings from dust by hand; how excruciating and troublesome that would be! If he had a powerful magnet to hand, perhaps he could separate them with one sweep. The force of love and fellowship gathers the vicious qualities like the magnet and casts them away. The mystics believe that love of, and fellowship with, purified and perfect individuals is like an automatic apparatus which gathers the vices together by itself and ejects them. If the state of being attracted finds the right object, it is one of the best states, and it is this which refines and bestows exceptional qualities.

Truly those who have taken this path want to reform their morality through the strength of love, and they have relied on the power of affection and fellowship. Experience has shown them that companionship with **the pure and fellowship** and love for them has affected their spirits to an extent which reading hundreds of volumes on ethics has not.

Rumi has related the message of love by the complaint of the reed; he says:

Whoever saw a poison and antedote like the reed?

Whoever saw a sympathiser and a longing lover like the reed?

Whoever's garment is torn by love

Is entirely cleansed of covetousness or blemish.

Hail, O Love, that bringest us good gain –

O physician of all our ills. [30](#)

Sometimes we see some great person whose followers imitate him even in the way of walking, dressing, meeting with people and gesturing. This imitation is not voluntary, it is automatic and by the force of

nature. It is the strength of love and fellowship which has influenced all the elements of the lover's existence and has made him resemble his beloved in every one of his states. This is why every human being must search for a man of reality and truth for his own reformation, and devote himself to him so that he can truly reform himself.

If there is the desire for union in your head, O Hafiz,

You must become like clay in the craftsman's hands.

When a man who, however much he may at first have decided to be pious and do good deeds, again falls prey to weakness in the fundamentals of his aspiration, finds love and fellowship, that weakness and lethargy will then go away, and his resolution will become firm and his ambition strong.

Love of the good ones unscrupulously took away heart and religion;

The rook in chess cannot take as much as a beautiful face can capture.

Do you imagine that Majnun became deranged by himself ?

It was the glance of Layla that transported him among the stars.

I did not find my way alone to the source of the sun,

I was a mote, and love for you bore me up.

It was the curve of your eyebrow, it was your heavenly hand,

Which circled round in this revelry and drove my heart insane.[31](#)

History tells of great persons in whose spirit and soul a revolution was created by love and fellowship with a perfect one – at least according to the idea of their followers. Mawlana Rumi is one of such persons. He was not from the first so consumed (by love) and full of commotion. He was a scholar, and was calmly and quietly engaged in teaching in a corner of his town. But from the day that he encountered Shams—a Tabrizi and the desire for fellowship with him seized his heart and soul his manner completely changed and a fire flared up inside him.

It was like a fuse which has fallen into a gunpowder store and bursts into flames. He was, apparently, a follower of Ash'arism, but his *Mathnavi* is without doubt one of the greatest books in the world. All the poetry of this man is surging, in movement. He composed the *Divan of Shams* in memory of his desire, his beloved; and in the *Mathnavi* too, he mentions him a great deal. We see Mawlana Rumi in the *Mathnavi* searching after something, but as soon as he remembers Shams a wild storm brews up in his spirit, and roaring waves surge up in him; he says:

At this moment my soul has plucked my skirt;

He has caught the perfume of Joseph's vest.

(He said :) "For the sake of our years of companionship,

Recount one of those sweet ecstasies,

That earth and heaven may laugh,

That intellect and spirit and eye may increase a hundred fold. "

I said: "The one who is far from his beloved is Like an invalid who is far from the doctor.

How should I describe (not a vein of mine is sensible) That Friend who hath no peer.

The description of this severance and this heart's blood Do thou at present leave over till another time.

Do not seek trouble and turmoil and bloodshed:

Say no more concerning Shams—a Tabrizi.[32](#)

And this is the fitting meaning of what Hafiz said:

The nightingale learnt its song by the favour of the rose, otherwise there would not have been

Any of this song and music fashioned from its beak.

From this we can infer that exertion and being drawn, or action and attraction must go together. Nothing can be accomplished from effort without attraction, just as being drawn where there is no effort will not reach its aim.

حُبُّ الشَّيْءِ يَعْمي وَيُصِمُّ

Love of anything brings a blindness and a deafness.

وَمَنْ عَشَقَ شَيْئًا أَعْشَ بَصَرُهُ وَآمَرَضَ قَلْبُهُ

Anyone who loves something, his sight becomes defective and his heart sick.[33](#)

Sa'di wrote in his *Rose Garden* (Gulistan):

For everyone it is the same, one's own mind seems perfect and one's own child beautiful.

This bad effect is not inconsistent with what we said earlier on, i.e., that the effect of love is a

sensitization of the intelligence and perception; sensitization of the intelligence means that it brings man out of slow-wittedness, and actualizes his potential. However, the bad effect of love is not that it dulls man's wits but that it makes man heedless and the question of intelligence is different from that of heedlessness. Very often, as a result of the preservation of a balance in sensibilities, dim-witted persons are less prone to heedlessness.

Love makes the understanding more keen, but the attention one-sided and one-tracked. Thus, we said before that the property of love was singleness, and it is as a result of this singleness and focality that the defect arises, and attention to other things diminishes.

What is more, not only does love cause defectiveness, but it shows the defects as something good; for one of love's effects is that wherever it shines its light, it makes that place seem beautiful, it turns one speck of goodness into the sun. It even makes black seem white and darkness light. As Vahshi said:

If you sat in the ball of my eye, Naught would you see but the goodness of Layla.

And it is perhaps for this reason that love is unlike knowledge, which is completely a function of what is known. Love's inward and psychic aspect is greater than its outward and real aspect; that is to say, the equilibrium of love is not a function of the scales of goodness, but more a function of the scales of the potentiality and essence of the lover.

In fact, the lover has an essence, a matter, a latent fire which is seeking an excuse, an object. Whenever it happens to encounter an object and finds compatibility – the secret of this compatibility is still unknown, and that is why it is said that love is unreasonable – this inner potentiality manifests itself and creates goodness according to its own ability, not according to what exists in the beloved. This is what the sentence above refers to when it says that the lover sees the defect of the beloved as art and the thorn as rose and jasmine.

Examples from the History of Islam

In the history of Islam we find distinguished and unprecedented examples of the strong love and devotion of Muslims for the person of the Prophet. In fact, one difference between the 'school' of the prophets and the 'school' of the philosophers is just this, that the pupils of philosophers are just students, and philosophers have no more influence than that of a teacher; but the influence of the prophets is like the influence of someone, a beloved, who has entered into the depths of the spirit of the lover, caught him in his grasp, and taken a hold on every element of his life.

One of those who dearly loved the Prophet was Abu Dharr al-Ghifari. The Prophet had given the order to march to Tabuk (a hundred farsangs – about four hundred miles – north of Medina, close to the border with Syria). Some made excuses, the hypocrites tried to disrupt things, but eventually a powerful army set out. They had no military equipment, and they were in difficulties and in need as regards food too, so

that sometimes some of them would make do with a single date; however they were all full of vigour and cheerful. Love created their strength and the force of attraction of the Prophet gave them their power.

Abu Dharr was also marching towards Tabuk with this army. On the way three persons, one after the other, fell behind, and the Prophet was informed about each one as he dropped back. Each time he said:

If there is any good in him, God will make him come back; and if there is no good in him, it is better that he go.

The thin, weak camel of Abu Dharr fell back, and then Abu Dharr was also seen to be behind. "O Messenger of Allah! Abu Dharr has fallen back too!" Then the Prophet repeated the same sentence:

If there is any good in him, God will return him to us; and if there is no good in him, it is better that he go.

The army then continued on its way and Abu Dharr stayed behind; but there was nothing to be done – his animal stayed in the same state. No matter what he did, it would not move, and he had now dropped several miles behind. He set the camel free and took the pack on his own shoulder, and in the hot weather he set out over the scorching sand. He was thirsty and it was killing him. He came across some rocks in the shade of a hill and among them some rainwater had gathered, but he said to himself that he would never drink until his friend, the Prophet of Allah, had drunk. He filled his water-skin, slung it also on his back, and hastened off in the direction of the Muslims.

In the distance they espied a figure. "O Messenger of Allah! We have seen a distant figure coming towards us! "

He said that it had to be Abu Dharr. He came nearer –yes, it was Abu Dharr, but exhaustion and thirst took his feet away from under him. He was afraid he would collapse. The Prophet said to give him some water quickly, but he said with a feeble voice that he had water with him. The Prophet said:

"You have water, but you are near to dying from thirst!"

"Yes, O Messenger of Allah! When I tasted the water I refused to drink any before my friend, the Messenger of Allah. "[34](#)

In all truth, in which of the world's religions can we find such a state of captivation, such restlessness and such unselfishness?

* * *

Another of these enamoured and selfless people was Bilal al-Habashi. The Quraysh were subjecting him to insupportable torture in Mecca, and they were tormenting him under the burning sun by laying him on scorching stones. They wanted from him that he say the names of the idols and declare his belief in

them, and that he renounce, and say he would have nothing to do with, Muhammad. In the sixth part of the *Mathnawi*, Rumi has related the agonising story of Bilal, and he has justly made a masterpiece out of it. He says: Abu Bakr counseled him to hide his belief, but he did not have the fortitude for dissimulation for "love was ever rebellious and deadly."

Bilal was devoting his body to the thorns:

His master was flogging him by way of correction,

(Saying:) "Why dost thou celebrate Ahmad?

Wicked slave, thou disbelievest in my religion! "

He was beating him in the sun with thorns

(While) he cried vauntingly "One!"

Till when Siddiq (Abu Bakr) was passing in that neighbourhood,

Those cries of "One!" reached his ears.

Afterwards he saw him in private and admonished him:

'Keep thy belief hidden from the Jews.

He (God) knows (all) secrets: conceal thy desire. "

He (Bilal) said: "I repent before thee, O prince."

There was much repenting of this sort,

(Till) at last he became quit of repenting,

And proclaimed and yielded up his body to tribulation,

Crying: "O Muhammad! O enemy of vows and re-pentance! O thou with whom my body and all my veins are filled!

How should there be room therein for repentance?

Henceforth I will banish repentance from this heart.

How should I repent of the life everlasting?"

Love is the All-subduer, and I am subdued by Love:

By Love's blindness I have been made bright like the sun.

O fierce wind, before Thee I am a straw:

How can I know where I shall fall?

Whether I am Bilal or the new moon,

I am running on and following the course of Thy sun.

What has the moon to do with stoutness or thinness ?

She runs at the heels of the sun, like a shadow.

The lovers have fallen into a fierce-torrent:

They have set their hearts on the ordinance of Love.

(They are) like the millstone turning round and round

Day and night and moaning incessantly. [35](#)

* * *

Islamic historians have given the names of the Raid of ar-Raji 'and the Day of ar-Raji' respectively to a famous historical event and the day on which it occurred, and there is an interesting and fascinating story attached to it.

A group from the 'Adal and al-Qarah tribes who were apparently from the same ancestral stock as the Quraysh and who dwelt in the proximity of Mecca came to the Messenger of Allah in the third year of the Hijrah and said: "Some people from our tribe have chosen Islam, so send a group of Muslims to us that they may instruct us in the meaning of the religion, teach us the Qur'an and inform us of the principles and laws of Islam."

The Messenger of Allah sent six of his companions along with them for this purpose, and he entrusted the leadership of this group to a man called Marthad ibn Abi Marthad al-Ghanawi, or else to a man called 'Asim ibn Thabit ibn Abi 'l-Aqlah.

The envoys of the Messenger set out in the company of this mission that had come to Medina, till they reached the area which was where the Hadhil tribe lived, and there they halted.[36](#)

The friends of the Messenger had settled down to sleep without leaving anything from anywhere, when all at once a group from the Hudhayl tribe fell upon them like a thunderbolt with their swords drawn. It became clear that the mission that had come to Medina had either had the intention of acting deceitfully from the beginning, or else had become despondent on reaching this place and had had a change of

heart. At any rate, it is known that these people sided with the Hudhayl tribe with the aim of seizing these six envoys.

As soon as the– friends of the Messenger were aware of what was happening, they swiftly dashed for their arms, and got ready to defend themselves; but the Hudhayli swore that they did not intend to kill them. They wanted to deliver them to the Quraysh in Mecca and get something for them, and they were prepared to make a pact with them there and then that they would not kill them. Three of these men including ‘Asim ibn Thabit said that would not accept the shame of a pact with polytheists, and fought until they were killed. But the three men by the names of Zayd ibn ad–Dathinnah ibn Mu’awiyah, Khubayb ibn ‘Adiy and ‘Abdullah ibn Tariq showed themselves more flexible and surrendered.

The Hudhayli bound these three men firmly with cord and set out towards Mecca. Near Mecca, ‘Abdullah ibn Tariq managed to get his hand free of the bonds and reach for his sword, but the enemy did not let him take the opportunity and killed him by hurling stones. Zayd and Khubayb were carried to Mecca, and they traded them in exchange for two captives from the Hudhayl who were held in Mecca, and then they went away.

Safwan ibn Umayyah al–Qurashi bought Zayd from the person to whom he belonged so as to kill him to avenge the blood of his father who had been killed in Uhud (or Badr). To kill him he took him outside Mecca. The people of the Quraysh assembled to see what would happen, and they brought Zayd to his place of execution. He came forward with his courageous gait and did not tremble even the slightest in his walking. Abu Sufyan was one of the spectators, and he thought he would take advantage of the circumstances of the last moments of Zayd’s life: perhaps he could get a statement of contrition and remorse or an avowal of hatred of the Messenger from him. He stepped forward and said to Zayd:

"I adjure you by God, Zayd, don’t you wish that Muhammad was with us now in your place so that we might cutoff his head, and that you were with your family?"

"By God", said Zayd, "I don’t wish that Muhammad now were in the place he occupies and that a thorn could hurt him, and that I were sitting with my family."

Abu Sufyan’s mouth stood agape with surprise. He turned to the other Quraysh and said

"By God, I swear I have never seen a man who was loved as Muhammad’s companions love him."

After a while, Khubayb ibn ‘Adiy’s turn fell, and he too was taken outside Mecca for execution. There he requested the assembly to let him pray two *rak’ah* of prayer. They agreed, and he recited the prayers in all humility, respect and absorption. Then he spoke to the crowd, and said:

"I swear by God that were it not that you would think that I only delayed out of fear of death, I would have prolonged my prayer."

They condemned Khubayb to crucifixion; and it was then that the sweet voice of Khubayb ibn ‘Adiy was

heard, with a perfect spirituality which held everyone in its spell and caused some to caste themselves down on the earth in fear, entreating God with these words:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا قَدْ بَلَّغْنَا رِسَالَةَ رَسُولِكَ فَبَلِّغْهُ الْغَدَاةَ مَا يُصْنَعُ بِنَا. اللَّهُمَّ أَحْصِهِمْ عَدَدًا ۖ وَاقْتُلْهُمْ بَدَدًا وَلَا تُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا.

O God! We have delivered the message of Thy Messenger; so tell him tomorrow what has been done to us. O God! Reckon them by number and kill them one by one, let none of them remain.[37](#)

* * *

As we know, the incident of Uhud ended in a sorrowful way for the Muslims. Seventy Muslims were martyred, including Hamzah, the paternal uncle of the Prophet. The Muslims were winning at the beginning, but later, as a result of the lack of discipline of a group who were placed atop a hill by the Prophet, the Muslims were subject to a surprise attack by the enemy.

One group were killed, another group was scattered, while the small group round the Prophet remained. The only thing this reduced group could do was to gather their forces once again and become an obstacle to the further advance of the enemy, especially when the rumor that the Prophet had been killed was a further cause for the scattering of the Muslims. But as soon as they heard that the Prophet was still alive, their spirits returned to them.

A number of wounded had fallen on the ground and they did not at all know what their fate would be. One of the wounded was Sa'd ibn ar-Rabi', and he had received twelve mortal wounds. In the middle of all this one of the escaping Muslims reached Sa'd, when he had fallen on the ground, and told him that he had heard the Prophet had been killed. Sa'd said:

Even if Muhammad has been killed, the God of Muhammad has not;

the religion of Muhammad remains too.

Why do you not stay and defend your religion?

Away from this, after the Prophet had collected and verified his companions, he counted them one by one to see who had been killed and who was still alive. He did not find Sa'd ibn ar-Rabi', so he asked who would go to find out what had really happened to Sa'd for him. One of the Ansar said he was ready. When the Ansar found that Sa'd was at his last breath, he said to him: "O Sa'd! The Prophet has sent me to find out for him whether you are alive or dead." "

"Give my greeting to the Prophet," said Sa'd, "and say that Sa'd is a dead man, for no more than a few breaths are left of his life. Tell the Prophet that Sa'd said: 'May God reward you by us better than he has rewarded any prophet by his people.' "

Then he spoke to the Ansar and told him: "Convey a message too from me to my brothers of the Ansar and the other companions of the Prophet. Tell them that Sa'd said: 'You have no excuse with God if anything has happened to your Prophet while you can flutter an eyelid.'" [38](#)

* * *

The pages of the early history of Islam are full of such acts of devotion, deeds of love and episodes of beauty. In all the history of mankind, no-one can be found who was loved so much as the Messenger, and the object of so much affection from his friends, companions, wives and children, who loved him so deeply and sincerely.

Ibn Abi l-Hadid writes in his *Sharh* (commentary on) *Nahju 'l-balaghah*:

"No-one heard him (the Messenger) speak without love for him taking a place in his heart, and without becoming inclined to him. Thus the Quraysh called the Muslims round Mecca "*subat* " (the infatuated ones) and said: 'The fear is that al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah give his heart to the religion of Muhammad; and if Walid, who is the cream of the Quraysh give his heart, all the Quraysh will pledge their hearts to it.'

They also said: 'His speech is magic, it inebriates more than wine.' They forbade their sons to sit with him in case they might be attracted by his speech and the pull of his countenance. Whenever the Prophet sat down beside the Ka'bah near the Stone of Isma'il and recited the Qur'an in a loud voice, or fell to remembering God, they would stick their fingers firmly in their ears so as not to hear and so that they would not fall under the spell of his speech and be "bewitched" by him. They gathered their garments over their heads and covered their faces so that his attractive appearance would not draw them. Nevertheless, most people believed in Islam just by hearing him once or seeing his face and his appearance and tasting the sweetness of his words." [39](#)

Of all the facts of Islamic history which should cause the amazement of every anthropologist or sociologist, reader or researcher, is the revolution which Islam created among the pre-Islamic Arabs. By any ordinary reckoning and with the usual devices of education and training, the reform of such a society should have required the passage of much time so that the old generation habituated to vice could have been extinguished and the foundations of a new generation laid afresh; but the effect of the power of attraction must not be neglected, for we said that like tongues of fire it burns away the roots of evil.

The majority of the companions of the Messenger were deeply enamoured of this great man, and it was by riding on the steed of love that such a long way was covered in such a small time, and that in a short period his community became completely changed.

The wings of my flight became the noose of love for him,

Dragging me all the way to his mountain.

How can I have a lamp before me or behind

When the light of my beloved is not before me or behind?

His light shines on the right, on the left, above and below

It is on my head and round my neck like a crown and a yoke.. [40](#)

Love for 'Ali in the Qur'an and Sunnah

What we have said so far has shed light on the value and influence of love and it has incidentally become clear that love for the pure ones is a means for the reform and refinement of the soul, not that it is an end in itself. Now we must see whether Islam and the Qur'an have chosen someone we should love or not. When the Qur'an relates what the previous prophets have said, it points out that they have all said: "we do not ask a wage from people, our only reward is from God." However it addresses the Seal of the Prophets thus:

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

Say: "I do not ask of you a wage for this, except love for (my) relatives." (ash-Shura, 42:23)

Here there is a need to ask why the rest of the prophets looked for no wage but the most noble Prophet asked for one for his message; why did he want friendship for his near relatives as a requital for his message?

The Qur'an itself provides an answer to this question:

قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنَّ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ

Say: "I have asked no wage of you; that shall be yours. My wage falls only upon God. "(Saba', 34:47)

That is to say, that which I ask for as a wage accrues to you, not to me; this friendship is a halter for your own perfection and reformation, and it is called a wage. Otherwise it is in fact another good which I recommend to you from the point of view that the Household and relatives of the Prophet are people who do not gather round defilement, and whose hems are clean and pure.

Love and devotion to these people brings no other result apart from obedience to the truth and adherence to virtues, and it is friendship for them which transmutes and perfects like the elixir.

Whatever the meaning of "relatives" may be, it is certain that the most obvious person to whom it is

applicable is 'Ali. Imam Fakhru'd-Din ar-Razi says:

"Zamakhshari relates in his (Qur'anic exegesis) *al-Kashshaf*: 'when this verse was sent down they said: "O Messenger of Allah! Who are the relatives to whom our love is due?" He said: "'Ali and Fatimah and their sons." '

"It is thus established from this tradition that these four persons are "relatives" of the Prophet, and that they should enjoy the respect and love of the people, and this matter can be reasoned out in a number of ways:

"1 – The verse: *except love for my relatives*.

"2 – There is no doubt that the Prophet dearly loved Fatimah, and he said: 'Fatimah is a part of my body; what harms her harms me.' he also loved 'Ali and the Hasanayn (Hasan and Husayn), since a great number of *mutawatir* traditions (those which are narrated by so many as to make doubt impossible) have reached us on this subject. Thus friendship of them is obligatory on all the community,⁴¹ because the Qur'an commands:

وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

And follow him (the Prophet), haply you will be guided. (al-A'raf, 7: 158)

"It also commands:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

You have a good example in Allah's Messenger. (al-Ahzab, 33:21)

"These (considerations) prove that love for the Family of Muhammad – who are 'Ali, Fatimah and the Hasanayn –is obligatory on all Muslims. "⁴²

There are also many traditions from the Prophet concerning love and friendship for 'Ali:

1: Ibn al-Athir narrates that the Prophet spoke to 'Ali and said: "O 'Ali, God has embellished you with things, no dearer embellishment than which exists before his slaves: resignation from the world has been; appointed for you in such a way that neither do you profit from the world, nor it from you. On you has been bestowed the love of the wretched; they are proud of your leadership, and you also of their following you. Content is he who loves you, and is a true friend to you. And woe betides he who shows enmity towards you, and lies about you."⁴³

2: as-Suyuti relates that the Prophet said: "Love of 'Ali is faith, and enmity towards him is sedition."⁴⁴

3: Abu Na'im narrates that the Prophet addressed the Ansar and said: "Shall I guide you to something which, if you grasp it after me, you will never go astray?" They said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah!" He said: "It is 'Ali: love him with the love (you have) for me, and respect him with the respect (you have) for me. For God has ordered me through Gabriel to tell you this."[45](#)

The Sunnis have also narrated traditions from the Prophet in which observing 'Ali's face and talking of his virtues is counted as a form of worship.

1: Muhibb at-Tabari narrates from 'A'ishah that she said: "I saw my father (Abu Bakr) gazing often at 'Ali's face. I said: 'O my father! I see you gazing often at 'Ali's face.' He said: 'O my daughter! I heard the Prophet say: "Looking at the face of 'Ali is worship."[46](#)

2: Ibn Hajar narrates from 'A'ishah that the Prophet said: "The best of my brothers is 'Ali, the best of my paternal uncles is Hamzah and remembrance of 'Ali and speaking about him is worship."[47](#)

'Ali was the most loved person before God and the Prophet, and thus naturally the best of those who are loved. Anas Ibn Malik says: "Every day, one of the children of the Ansar would do some task for the Prophet. One day my turn came. Umm Ayman brought a chicken dish before the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of Allah! I have caught this chicken myself and cooked it for you.' He said: 'O God! Send the best of (Thy) slaves that he may share with me in eating this chicken.' At that very moment someone knocked on the door and the Prophet said to me: 'Anas! Open the door.'

I said: 'May God make it a man of the Ansar!' But I found 'Ali in front of the door, and I said: 'The Prophet is busy.' Then I returned to stand in my place. Again there was a knock at the door, and the Prophet said: 'Open the door.' Again I prayed that it would be someone from the Ansar. I opened the door and again it was 'Ali. I said: 'The Prophet is busy.' Then I returned to stand in my place. Yet again there was a knock at the door, and the Prophet said: 'Anas, go and open the door, and bring him in. You are not the first person to love your own people; that are not one of the Ansar.' I went and brought 'Ali in, and he ate the chicken dish with the Prophet."[48](#)

The Secret of 'Ali's Force of Attraction

What is the reason for the friendship and love for 'Ali in people's hearts?

Nobody has yet discovered the secret of this love, that is, no-one has been able to formulate it, and say that if it were like this then that would follow, or if it were like that then this would happen. However it does of course have a secret. There is something in the love which dazzles the one who loves and draws him towards it. This attraction and love are the highest degrees of love; 'Ali is the one whom people's hearts adore, whom humanity loves. Why? In what does 'Ali's extraordinariness lie, that it incites love and draws hearts towards itself, that it plays the tune of eternal life and lives forever? Why do all hearts find out about themselves through him, and do not feel him to be dead but find him living?

Certainly the basis for love for him is not his body, because his body is not now among us and we have not perceived it with our senses. Love for 'Ali is also not hero-worship, which exists in every nation. It is a mistake, too, to say the love for 'Ali is by way of love for moral and human excellence, and that love for 'Ali is a humanistic love.

It is true that 'Ali was the manifestation of the perfect man, and it is true that man loves great figures of humanity; but if 'Ali had had all those human excellences that he had – that wisdom and knowledge, that self-sacrifice and altruism, that humility and modesty, that courtesy, that kindness and mercy, that protection of the weak, that justness, that liberality and love of freedom, that respect for humanity, that generosity, that bravery, that magnanimity and mercy towards his enemies, and, in the words of Rum!

In bravery you are the Lion of the Lord,

In generosity who indeed knows who you are?[49](#)

That munificence, benevolence and beneficence – if 'Ali had had all these, which he did have, but had not had the divine touch in him, it is quite certain that there would not have been the feeling of sympathy and awakening of love that there is today.

'Ali is loved in the sense that he had the divine link; our hearts are unconsciously completely involved with, and connected to, the Truth, right in their depths, and since they find 'Ali to be a great sign of the Truth and a manifestation of the attributes of the Truth they are in love with him. In reality, the basis for the love for 'Ali is the connection of our souls with the Truth which has been laid in our primordial natures, and since our primordial natures are eternal, love for 'Ali is also eternal.

There are many outstanding features in 'Ali's being, but that which has assigned him a resplendent and shining place for ever is his faith and morality, and it is that which has given him his divine charisma.

Sawdah al-Hamdaniyah, a self-sacrificing and devoted follower of 'Ali, extolled 'Ali in front of Mu'awiyah and among other things said this verse

May the blessing of God be vouched to him

Whom the grave took away and with whom justice was interred.

He had a pact with God that he should put no substitute in His place,

Thus he was joined with Truth and Faith.

Sa'sa'ah ibn Suhan al-'Abdi was another one of those lovers of 'Ali. He was one of those who took part on that night with a few others in the burial of 'Ali. After they had buried 'Ali and covered his corpse with soil, Sa'sa'ah put one of his hands over his heart, threw earth over his head and said:

"May death be agreeable to you, whose birth was pure, whose patience was firm, whose holy struggle

was great! You attained your aim and your commerce was fruitful.

"You fell down before your Creator, and He gladly accepted you and His angels appeared around you. You were placed near the Prophet, and God gave you a place near him. You reached the degree of your brother, Mustafa, and you drank from his overflowing cup.

"I beseech God that I may follow you and that I may act according to your ways; that I may love those who love you, and be the enemy of those who are your enemy, that I may be gathered in the pavilion of your friends.

"You saw what others did not see, and reached what others did not reach; you pursued the holy struggle beside your brother, the Prophet, and you rose up for the religion of God as was worthy of it, till age-old habits were done away with, confusion curbed and Islam and the faith put in order. May the best of blessings be upon you!

"Through you the backs of the believers were made firm, the ways made clear and habits broken. No-one could amass your virtues and excellences in himself. You answered the call of the Prophet; you jumped ahead of others in accepting him: you hurried to help him, and protected him with your life. You struck with your sword, Dhu' l-fiqar, in places of fear and savagery, and you broke the back of oppression. You caste down the structures of polytheism and vileness, and you pulled down those who were astray into dust and blood. So may you be well pleased, O Amir al-Mu'minin !

"You were the closest of men to the Prophet, you were the first person to follow Islam. You were overflowing with certainty, strong of heart and more self-sacrificing than any, your share in good was greater. May God not deprive us of retribution for your suffering, and may He not despise us after you have gone!

"By God, I swear that your life was the key to good, the lock against exile; and your death is the key to every evil and the lock against every good. If the people had accepted you, blessings would have showered on them from the heaven and the earth; but they preferred this world to the next."[50](#)

Truly they preferred this world, and as a-consequence they could not endure the justice and unwaveringness of 'Ali. In the end the hand of stiffness and stagnation came out of the sleeve of the people and martyred 'Ali.

'Ali – may peace be upon him – is without equal in having totally selfless friends and people who loved him, who have given their lives in the path of friendship and love for him. Their wonderful, absorbing and stunning biographies honor the pages of Islamic history. The criminal hands of such despicable people as Ziyad ibn Abih and his son 'Abdullah, as Hajjaj ibn Yusuf and Mutawakkil, and at the head of them all Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, are stained with the blood of these human lives up to their elbows.

[1.](#) Nahju' l-balaghah: Saying no. 47

[2.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah, Sermon no. 149

3. Muhammad Iqbal: The Secrets of the self, translation of R. A. Nicholson, 2nd revised ed., Lahore 1940.

4. Jubran Khalil Jubran [1300/ 1883 – 1349/1931]

5. In ad-Durru 'l-manthur, under the seventh verse of surah al-Bayyinah (90), Jalalu'd-Din as-Suyuti narrates from Ibn 'Asakir that Jabir ibn 'Abdillah al-Ansari said that he was in the presence of the Prophet when 'Ali also came in to him.

The Prophet said: "I swear by He in Whose hand is my life that this man and his followers (Shi'ah) will be saved on the Day of Resurrection." al-Manawi relates this in two traditions in Kunuzu 'l-haqai'iq, and al-Haythami in Majma'uz 'zawa'id and Ibn Hajar in as-Sawa'iqu 'l-muhriqah relates the same substantial meaning in different forms.

6. Nahju 'l-balaghah, Saying no.42

7. Biharu 'l-anwar, vo1.40, pp.281 – 2 (new ed.); and Fakhru'd Din ar-Razi, at-Tafsiru 'l-kabir, under verse 9, surah al-Kahf ("Or dost thou think. . .").

8. In the Persian-Language dictionary "Burhan-a qati" the following is written about "elixir" (iksir): "It is a substance which melts down, combines and perfects; that is to say it makes gold from copper and useful drugs beneficial. It seems that "perfection" is also called "the elixir" metaphorically."

It so happens that in love the same three properties are present – it "melts down", it "combines" and it "perfects" – but the well-known and famous metaphorical aspect of it is third one, its perfecting transformative power. Thus poets have sometimes called love by the name of "the doctor", "the drug (dawa)", "Plato" or "Galen". In the prologue to the Mathnavi Rumi writes:

Hail, O Love that bringest us good again –Thou that art the physician of all our ills,

The remedy of our pride and vainglory,

Our Plato and our Galen! (Transl. Nicholson, bk. 1, 1.23)

9. From Vahshi Kirmani, Iranian poet (991/1583)

10. Hafiz

11. 'Al'amah Tabataba'i

12. Rumi, Mathnavi

13. Adapted from Nicholson's translation of Rumi, Mathnavi, bk. 1

14. Rumi, Mathnavi, bk. I

15. see 30:21

16. And of His signs is that He created for you, of yourselves, spouses, that you might repose in them, and He has set between you love and compassion. (ar-Rum, 30:21)

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ مَتَاعُكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَابْتِغَاؤُكُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُسْمَعُونَ

17. B. Russell: Marriage and Morals, London, 1976, p.86

18. ibid. Translated from the Persian, original untraced.

19. Adapted from Nicholson's translation of Rumi, Mathnavi, bk. 1

20. Ibrahim, 14:37

21. ash-Shura, 42:23

22. Safinatu 'l-bihar, vol.I, p. 102 (under Hubb).

23. ibid, p.662 (under Sama)

24. Rumi, bk.I

25. Nahju 'l-balaghah, Letter no. 53

26. Sharh Kitab al-isharat wa 't-tanbihat, Tehran, 1379 A.H., vol.3, p.383.

27. As for love, there are blemishes also. Among these is the fact that the lover, as a result of his preoccupation with the goodness of his beloved, is heedless of the beloved's defects:

28. Biharu 'l-anwar, vol. 15, bk. 10, p.51 (old edition).

- [29.](#) Rumi, Mathnawi, bk.I
- [30.](#) Ibid.
- [31.](#) `Allamah Taba'taba' i.
- [32.](#) Adapted from Nicholson's translation of Rumi, Mathnavi, bk. 1
- [33.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah.
- [34.](#) Biharul-anwar, vo 1.21, pp. 215 –216 (new ed.).
- [35.](#) Adapted from Nicholson's translation of Rumi, Mathnavi, bk. 1
- [36.](#) At a place called ar-Raji'. (tr.)
- [37.](#) Ibn Ishaq's The Life of Muhammad, translation of A. Guillaume, London, 1955, pp.426 – 428.
- [38.](#) Sharh of Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Beirut, vol.3, p.574; and ibid. (note 33) p.387.
- [39.](#) ibid. vol.2, p.220
- [40.](#) Rumi, Mathnavi, bk.I
- [41.](#) The love of the Prophet towards them had no personal aspect, that is, it was not only because, for example, they were his children and grandchildren and if someone else had been in their place he would have loved them. The Prophet loved them because they were exemplary persons and God loved them, for the Prophet had other children whom he did not love to this extent and to whom his community had no such obligation.
- [42.](#) at- Tafsiru 'l-kabir, vo 1.27, p. 166 (Egyptian ed.).
- [43.](#) Usdu 'l-ghabah, vo 1.4, p.23
- [44.](#) Kanzu 'l-`ummal. In as-Suyuti, Jam`u 'l-jawami ` , vol.6, p. 156.
- [45.](#) Hilyatu 'l-awliya', vol. 1, p.63. There are many traditions on this subject, and we have come across more than ninety in authoritative Sunni texts, all of which concerns love for Amir al-Mu'minin.
- There also exist many traditions in Shi'ah texts, and the respected scholar al-Majlisi has gathered them together in vol.39 (of the new edition) of Biharul-anwar in the chapter on love and hatred for Amir al-Mu'minin; he related 123 traditions in this chapter.
- [46.](#) ar-Riyadu'n-nadira, vo 1.2, p.219; and about another twenty traditions, as far as we are aware, have been related in Sunni texts on this subject.
- [47.](#) as-Sawa'iqu 'l-muhriqah, p.74; and five more traditions have been related in Sunni texts on this subject.
- [48.](#) al-Mustadrak `ala as-Sahihayn, vo 1.3, p. 131. This story is related in various ways in more than eighty narrations in authoritative Sunni texts.
- [49.](#) Rumi, Mathnavi, bk.I (translated by Nicholson).
- [50.](#) Biharul-anwar, vo 1.42, pp.295 –296 (new ed.)

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