

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

LOVE ALLAH

It was the Haj season in Makkah. An assembly of sufi *shuyookh* was discussing the definition of love. (In the sufi context, love refers only to love for Allah.) The youngest person among them was Junaid Al-Baghdadi *rahimahullah*. He was eventually asked, "Tell us what you think, O 'Iraqi." With a lowered head and tears rolling down his cheeks, Junaid *rahimahullah* replied: "The lover is one who has lost himself. Constantly engaged in the *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah and discharging His *huqooq* (rights), he sees Him with his heart which is burnt by the radiances of Allah's awe. His drink from the goblet of divine affection is unpolluted. Thus Allah manifests Himself to him through the veils of the unseen. If he speaks, it is to Allah. If he utters anything, it is about Allah. If he moves, it is due to the command of Allah. If he remains still, it is because he is with Allah. In short, he is *lillah*, *billah* and *ma'allah* (to Allah, for Allah and with Allah)." Hearing Junaid's eloquent explanation, the *shuyookh* began weeping and said: "There is nothing to add. *Jazaakallah Yaa Taaj-al-'Aarifeen* (May Allah reward you, O Crown of those who recognize Allah!)." ¹

The truth, however, is that there is no comprehensive definition of love. In fact, definitions merely complicate its understanding. It is best defined by its existence. There is

¹ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Madaarij-us-Saaliheen* Pg. 737 (Darul-Kitab-il-'Arabi, 2004\1995)

therefore no clearer definition of love than: love itself. (What we are saying is that words cannot define love. It has to be experienced to be understood.) ... All the suggested definitions (Ibn-ul-Qayyim mentioned thirty of them, including the above definition of Junaid Al-Baghdadi) do not actually define love. Instead, they focus on its causes, signs, demands, benefits and other related issues. For example: Shibli defined love as *'obliteration of everything besides the beloved from one's heart'*. Abu 'Abdullah Al-Qushari defined it as *'surrendering oneself to the beloved to such an extent that he no longer bothers of himself.'* Abu Yazeed defined it as *'regarding one's many actions as too little and the few favours of the beloved as too many.'* None of these quotations actually define love. Instead, they highlight the demand of love.²

The Arabic Word for Love

There are ten levels of love and the Arabs have a separate word for each one of them. However, the most common word is *al-mahabbah*. The root of this word is حَبَّ (hub) which has five possible meanings viz.

1. Whiteness and purity. حَبُّ الْأَسْنَانِ means whiteness of the teeth.
2. To be apparent and above. Thus the ripples that appear above the water are called حَبَبُ الْمَاءِ and حَبَابُ الْمَاءِ
3. Firmness. The Arabs say حَبَّ الْبَعِيرِ when the camel kneels firmly and refuses to stand up.

² Adapted from Ibn-ul-Qayyim's *Madaarij-us-Saalikeen* Pg. 732

4. The essence and core of anything. Thus حبة القلب refers to the interior of the heart.
5. To Retain and protect. Hence the utensil in which water is stored is called حُبُّ الْمَاءِ

There is no doubt that all five of these meanings are found in love. It entails purity, appearance of one's feelings for the beloved, firmness of such feelings, surrendering of one's heart (which is the core of one's existence and his most valuable possession) to the beloved, and confinement of intentions and desires to him.³

Inculcating Love for Allah

Ibn-ul-Qayyim mentioned ten ways through which love for Allah could be inculcated. They are:

1. Recitation of the Qur'aan.
2. Engagement in *nawaafil* (optional acts of 'ibaadah) after performance of the *faraa'id* (compulsory acts of 'ibaadah).
3. Constant *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah.
4. Giving preference to His likes and desires over one's own.
5. Pondering over His names and attributes.
6. Pondering over His benevolence and favours.
7. Crying to Him with total humility.
8. Sitting in solitude in order to *speak* to Him, read His speech (the Qur'aan) and express one's servitude to Him. This should be done at night when Allah descends to the skies and it should be terminated with *taubah* (repentance) and *istighfaar* (seeking of forgiveness).
9. Sitting in the company of true lovers of Allah.

³ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Madaarij-us-Saalikeen* Pg. 732

10. Abstention from anything that could be a barrier between one's heart and Allah.⁴

Al-Ghazzaali and Inculcation of Love for Allah: A Summary

Whoever loves anybody besides Allah for a reason other than his relationship to Allah is ignorant and does not recognize Allah. Loving the Rasool *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* is praiseworthy because it is the result of one's love for Allah. The same applies to love for the '*Ulamaa* and the *atqiyaa* (pious). The reason for this is that the beloved of the beloved, his messenger and his lover are all beloved. Therefore, in reality, there is no beloved besides Allah. In order to appreciate this, we have to ponder over five *asbaab* (causes) of love. Firstly, nobody besides Allah possesses all of them. Secondly, their existence in anybody besides Allah is not a *haqeeqah* (reality). Once you are convinced that nobody besides Allah possesses all of them and while their existence in Allah is real, the existence of some of them in anybody else is not so, you will understand why there can be only one beloved, and that is Allah.

The First *Sabab* (Cause): Man's Love for himself and his existence.

This demands maximum love for Allah because whoever knows himself and Allah would certainly know that he does not exist of his own accord. Instead, his existence, its continuity and perfection are all from Allah. Allah is man's creator. Having created man, he ensures man's continued existence (for as long

⁴ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Madaarij-us-Saalikeen* Pg. 732

as He desires) and creates all the *asbaab* (means) for perfection in this existence. He also endows man with the ability to utilise these means in a manner that leads to such perfection. In short, man's existence, its continuity and perfection are impossible without the favour of Allah. That being the case, it is imperative for man to love Allah. It is impossible that man loves himself but not his creator and sustainer. A person who cannot bear the heat of the sun would cherish the shade. Is it possible that such a person would dislike the trees that provide him with shade? In comparison to the *qudrah* (greatness) of Allah, everything in the universe is comparable to the shade in relation to the tree and light in relation to the sun. Everything is the result of Allah's *qudrah*. Thus Hasan Basri *rahimahullah* said:

من عرف ربه أحبه

"The person who recognises his Rabb will (definitely) love Him."

The Second Cause: Man Loves Anybody Who Is Kind to Him

Man has a tendency to love anybody who is kind to him. This also demands that he should not love anybody besides Allah because, if he has a sound understanding he would realise that in reality his only benefactor is Allah. Firstly, Allah's favours on man are innumerable.

و ان تعدوا نعمة الله لا تحصوها

"If you count the bounty of Allah you will not encompass it."⁵

⁵ Surah Ibrahim (Aayah 34)

Secondly, all acts of kindness shown to man by fellow people are in fact the kindness of Allah. Ask yourself: Who created your benefactor? Who blessed him with the wealth by which he is assisting you? Who granted him the strength to help you? Who guided him to help you? Who initiated the urge in his heart to help you? Who guided him to you? The answer to all these questions is undoubtedly Allah. Hence, your human benefactor is merely a worldly means for Allah's kindness to reach you. Therefore your only benefactor is Allah.

The Third Cause: Man Loves All Kindhearted People

Another common tendency is to love all kindhearted people even though one may not be a beneficiary of their kindness. If there are two kings, one is kind and just and the other is a merciless tyrant and the kingdoms of both are far from where you live. You would feel a natural inclination to the former even if there may be no hope of you benefitting from his kindness. Similarly, you would feel a natural disinclination from the latter even if there may be no fear of you suffering from his brutality. Accordingly, there is no reason why we should not love Allah. Remember that Allah is *Al-'Adl* and *Al-Muqsit* (both mean that Allah is most just). He is also *Al-Bar* (The Kind), *Al-Kareem* (The Benevolent), *An-Naafi'* (The Benefactor) and *Al-Wahhaab* (The Giver). If we love all kindhearted people, should we not love Allah whose kindness encompasses everybody including the unbelievers and ourselves? In fact, all the above prove once again that we should love nobody but Allah.

The Fourth Cause: Man Loves Beauty

There are two types of beauty:

In the Gardens of Knowledge

1. Outer beauty which is physical in nature and recognizable by everybody including little children.
2. Inner beauty which is spiritual in nature and hence only recognized by people whose knowledge extends beyond '*the surface of the worldly life*'. Such beauty is identified by the noble actions and conduct of people instead of their physical appearances. Hence, an '*aalim* may be admired for his actions and conduct even though he may not be the most handsome of people. The same could be said about any other pious Muslim. However, this type of beauty is only loved by those who are able to appreciate it. Anyway, our discussion in regarding the causes of love and why Muslims love Allah alone focuses on this type of beauty.

The inner (spiritual) beauty of man is based on three factors:

1. Knowledge of Allah, His *Rasool*, *Kitaab* (Al-Qur'aan) and *sharee'ah*.
2. *Qudrah* (Ability) to reform himself and others.
3. Abstention from sin and indecency.

Each one of these factors demands undivided love for Allah alone. Can the knowledge of the entire creation put together compare to the knowledge of Allah?

و ما أوتيتم من العلم الا قليلا

*"You have not received in knowledge but a little."*⁶

Hence, if the beauty of knowledge is lovable, should we not love Allah? If man's knowledge is incomparable to Allah's knowledge and confined to what Allah *taught* him, should we love anybody besides Allah?

⁶ Surah Al-Israa (Aayah 85)

Qudrah (strength and ability) is the second factor which endears man to others. I am sure you would testify to the enthusiasm with which we listen to narrations depicting the *shujaa'ah* (bravery) of Ali bin Abi Taalib, Khaalid bin Waleed and many other famous warriors in our history. Even if we have not seen these personalities, merely reading about them boosts our love for them. However, can the *qudrah* (strength and ability) of the entire creation compare to that of Allah? If man realizes the extent of Allah's *qudrah* (strength and ability), it is impossible that he would love fellow men for their *qudrah* (strength and ability) yet not love Allah. Remember that Allah is:

على كل شيء قدير

"Able to do everything"

The skies, the earth and everything within them exist only with His *qudrah*. He controls and sustains all of them but does not get tired.

و لا يؤوده حفظهما

*"Protection of the skies and earth does not tire Him."*⁷

Besides, every possessor of *qudrah* among the creation gains his *qudrah* from nobody but Allah. Hence, there is no real possessor of *qudrah* besides Allah. Does this not prove that if possession of *qudrah* is a reason for love, we should not love anybody besides Allah?

The third factor that results in inner beauty and love is abstention from evil and indecency. Thus we love the *Ambiyaa*, *Sahaabah* and other pious servants of Allah. However, the

⁷ Surah Al-Baqarah (Aayah)

Ambiyaa are *ma'soom* (infallible) due to Allah's protection. Similarly, the *Sahaabah* and other pious servants of Allah are only able to abstain from sin due to Allah's guidance. Furthermore, Allah is *Subbooh* and *Quddoos*. Both of these attributes mean that Allah is by nature *The Most Pure*. Unlike the *Ambiyaa* and other pious people, His purity is not dependent on the protection and guidance of anybody else. Consequently, there is a vast difference between their abstention from evil and Allah's freedom from it. The demand of this vast difference is that, if people are loved due to their *qudrah* (strength), we should love Allah even more. Actually, this difference demands that we should have only one *mahboob* (beloved) - Allah.

The Fifth Cause: An Attachment between the Lover and the Beloved

The attachment between the lover and the beloved is sometimes quite apparent. However, it is often unclear. This is the type of attachment that exists between two people even though the beloved possesses neither beauty nor wealth. Development of a similar attachment between oneself and Allah is required in order to be initiated into the fraternity of His sincere lovers. This is achieved by adopting all the qualities exhorted by the *sharee'ah*, especially those of Allah like: generosity, kindness, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, encouragement of good, dissuasion of evil etc.

تخلقوا بأخلاق الله

“Adopt the character of Allah.”⁸

The Benefit of Love

Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said that there are three qualities whoever possesses them will taste the sweetness of *imaan*. These three qualities are:

1. That you do not love anybody more than Allah and His *Rasool*.
2. That you love a person solely for the pleasure of Allah.
3. That you detest reverting to *kufr* (disbelief) just as you detest being thrown into the fire.⁹

A deeper look at numbers two and three reveals that in actual fact both of them are subordinates of the first. Thus the crux of the *Hadith* is that the person who loves Allah and His Rasool *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* more than everybody else will be blessed with the sweetness of *imaan*.

Describing *imaan* as a tree, Allah says in the Qur’aan:

و مثل كلمة طيبة كشجرة طيبة أصلها ثابت و فرعها في السماء

تؤتي أكلها كل حين باذن ربها

“The example of a pleasant kalimah is like that of a pleasant tree. Its roots are firm and its branches are in the sky. It yields its fruits all the time with the command of its Rabb.”¹⁰

⁸ This entire discussion has been abridged from Imaam Ghazzaali’s *Ihya’ Uloom-id-Deen* V. Pg. (Ed.) and Sa’eed Hawwa’s *Al-Mustakhlash Fi Tazkiyatil-Anfus* Pg.281-286

⁹ Al-Bukhaari, *Al-Jaami’-us-Saheeh Ma’al-Fath* V.1 Pg. (Dar-ul-Hajar, Cairo)

¹⁰ Surah Ibrahim (Aayah 25)

The *Kalimah* of *Ikhlaas* (i.e. *Laa Ilaaha illallah ...*) is the root of the tree of *imaan*. Its branches are adherence to Allah's commands and abstention from everything that He prohibited. Its flowers are the Muslim's intentions to do good deeds, its fruits and fragrance are the good actions which the Muslim eventually does and the sweetness of its fruit is perfection of *imaan*. Enjoyment of *'ibaadah* is a sign of such perfection.¹¹

Another benefit of loving Allah is that the lover of Allah eventually becomes His beloved and is thus forgiven and blessed with entry into Jannah.

قل ان كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحببكم الله و يغفر لكم ذنوبكم

*"Say (O Muhammed): If you love Allah, follow me – Allah will love you and forgive your sins for you."*¹²

However, love is not lip-service. It has to be proven. In the case of love for Allah, it has to be proven by following the teachings of Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam*. Nevertheless, if you love Allah, He will love you. Do you need anything after that?

و صلى الله على نبيه الكريم و على آله و أصحابه أجمعين
برحمتك يارحم الراحمين

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¹¹ Ibn Abi Jamrah, *Bahjat-un-Nufoos* V.1 Pg.26-27 (Dar-ul-Kutub-il-'Ilmiyyah, 2007)

¹² Surah Aal 'Imraan (Aayah 31)