

Mysticism (Sufism): Agreement and Affinity¹

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Today, the effects of the consequences of certain events taking place throughout the world- no matter inside the countries or internationally, on people's beliefs and their spiritual aspect of life, have caused people to be interested in mysticism; not necessarily in the truth of mysticism, but most often in its public estimation or reputation and what they see as mysticism in their own imagination. Therefore, many people presumably have raised subjects in the name of mysticism trying to represent true mysticism by using the related expressions and terms and it has led to developing many different mystical movements, both in Islam and out of Islam, that have become popular nowadays. However, some of these outer-Islamic methods such as Zen Buddhism and Yoga have relatively more ancient history and originality, but this paper will not discuss them.

The reason of why this mixture has formed can be clarified by a simple example: when it rains over a dry land, both fruitful vegetation and noxious weed grow. Now, the events that have occurred for humans are similar to that rain which results in creating a variety of mysticism methods in the land of human beings' spirits. But the important point is: considering all these schools of mysticism, how can an agreement be reached and how can affinity and coalition be formed among them? In order to accomplish such purpose, the best solution, as always, is to follow the Prophet's manners and accept the divine invitation persuading the monotheistic religions to be united: "(O' People of the Book), let us come to a word in common between us and you, that we shall worship none except Allah, that we shall associate none with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords and partners other than Allah."² But a few significant hints need to be given about this invitation.

The Prophet (PBUH) could not compromise his prophetic mission in order to share it with other people; for example, he could not tell anybody: "You are the prophet from now on." This duty comes from the deepest part of its owner's essence. It is a divine mission and cannot be compromised on with others. Due to this, the Prophet never entered into negotiations with idolaters to reconcile and, besides, the addressees of the above-mentioned verse are not the idolaters but the Jews and Christians. Perhaps it could be somehow considered a good word for Uthman (ibn Affan) when he came across a request by some to accept his resignation from the caliphate, he stated: "This divine position bestowed upon me cannot be resigned". His word was true, but according to the meaning of "the word is correct but its inference is wrong"³, his reasoning (inference) was not, and he was wrong because his caliphate had not been divine, although his dogma was true anyway.

¹ The speech made on April 19, 2003.

² Quran: Surah of Ale-Imran, 64:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ.

³ Ali (A): كلمة حق يُراد بها الباطل

Therefore, this divine mission and also every other divine missions cannot be compromised and agreed upon. As it was mentioned, it originates from the spiritual essence of the owner of this position. Throughout history, there have been objections emanated from disagreement and disobedience by some ignorant enemies against the divine successors, for instance, in the Arbitration (between Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiyah I), in response to the Kharijites⁴ when they wanted to appoint someone as an arbitrator, His Excellency Ali (A) asserted that no arbitration was needed. This means that people's agreement or disagreement over the prophecy or the guardianship is ineffective, because it is an inseparable truth that is intrinsic with the prophetic or guardian entity. In the Arbitration, when His Excellency (A) was forced by the Kharijites to endure the Arbitration, at first he assigned Ibn Abbass but then under pressure from the others, he accepted Abu Musa as the arbitrator conditioned that he must verdict in compliance with the Quran and the rules of the divine book. This paper will not talk about the other events taken place later on and what happened afterthen since it has been mentioned in history books.

At the time of Imam Hasan's (A) imamate (pontificate), such objections were also made as some of his followers revolted against him so violently that his leg was injured, objecting why he had resigned. In response to them, His Excellency Hassan proclaimed that: The position (the divine caliphate) that I hold cannot be resigned. This agreement was one of the first steps taken to separate the government from the divine reign. One of the reasons of why the Imams and the divine successors have stayed away from political activities during history has been to avoid bloodshed. Ali (A) behaved the same. He became a stay-at-home, although he remained vigilant of the caliphs' (Abu Bakr and Umar I) activities and took the role of a counselor. But it does not mean that he left his guardianship position with them or that they confiscated it. This subject matter; uncompromisability of the prophetic position, the imamate or the guardianship, is a point which has hardly been taken into serious consideration.

Now, giving this introduction, let us go back to scrutinize the above verse. In this verse, the Prophet only addresses the Jews and Christians and invites them to **“the word in common between”** the Prophet and them. This petition calling for a coalition and alliance is the first necessary step. The reasons of why only the Jews and Christians were addressed in this verse are, on the one hand, the only **“People of the Book”** living in Arabia at the time were them and on the other hand, they belong to monotheistic religions, because they had prophets sent by God. In the following sentence of the verse, the addressees (Jews and Christians) are requested to worship none but Allah and the important point is that it is accentuated by **“associate no partner with Him”**; the attention is drawn to worshiping nothing but Allah and as a matter of fact, it emphasizes on affinity and coalition. It needs to be mentioned that worshiping nothing but Allah necessitates knowing and respecting His representatives and guides who are assigned and missioned by God. In other words, the Prophet declares that although they (the addressees) did not embrace him as a prophet, they praised the principle of worshiping nothing but God, attributing no partners, neither inanimate nor living idols, to Him. However, later on, at the Islamic reign of the Prophet; **“People of the Book”** had the right of maintaining their own religion and the corresponding rituals but they had to pay jizyah (poll tax) in order to be involved in the government

⁴ Those who disobeyed Ali (A).

financing expenditure.⁵

Another important point is that this matter of calling out for alliance has always been applied in politics, society and Islamic rules, but unfortunately majority of these petitions have served “give me *YOUR* hands to achieve alliance”, in other words, “everyone has to be with *ME*” and it is not “everyone all together”. In fact, some opportunists and instrumentalists have abused this principle to satisfy their own dictatorial greed.

There is another problem with this invitation to mysticism and that is; mysticism is all based on intuition and cannot be worded according to its nature, but some are insisting on learning this intangible plasma just like the way other theoretical sciences are studied. Instead of paying careful attention to the true nature and the authenticity of mysticism and looking for it deep in their pure hearts, they expect to find it through papers and pages of books, making judgments via experimental or historical researches. Meanwhile, it is reasonably natural to be stuck in playing with mysticism terminology since they possibly imagine that knowing the literal meaning of these complicated words are exactly the very plasma of genuine mysticism; fancying they understand mysticism. But the unpleasant fact is that they have no slightest idea of what mysticism could possibly be. They might have heard about mysticism that “the proof of pudding is in the eating” and because of that, they say one should eat this mystical pudding, and again they confuse the eating of this pudding with reading and studying mysticism books and then they talk about it based on their fantasies.

History verifies that deviations from mysticism have taken place since it has been on the papers. This is true for the mysticism of all religions. Basically, at the rise of religions and according to an oriental attitude, true adherents of religions normally tried to acquire the in-depth knowledge and mysticism of the religion via “taking the knowledge from the mouths of the chosen”.⁶ By the time of the Prophet (PBUH) and then his direct descending Imams (A), the adherents (the Shiites) never made personal judgments and actually considered it as blameworthy; hence they had affinity and affection. But since the unwrittenable knowledge that could not be worded has been on paper divergence began, as it has not been acquired by taking from the mouths of the divine successors and instead, it has been looked for in the books and personal fantasies.

Going back to history, in the period of one of the Abbasid caliphs, there were hundreds of mujtahids (jurisprudents) in Baghdad and each made his own judgment, issued his own Fatwa (opinion) and then conducted it. The caliph found out that how divisive these mujtahids were becoming. He selected six of them who had the most followers and ordered people to abide by them. These six mujtahids were Abu Hanifah, Shafei, Malik, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawood and Tabari. Gradually, the first four were much more in the center of attention and the last two were ignored, and yet considerable divergent views exist among them.

The same is true for mysticism as well. All mystical truths have been expressed deeply through the scripts and sayings by senior mystics but they never officially raised these facts

⁵ Muslims paid Khums (one-fifth of their income) and Zakat (alms tax; literally means that which purifies) to satisfy God's will. But, Jews and Christians did not believe Muhammad as prophet, they normally could not feel happy to pay tax. Therefore, to be under the Islamic governmental, they had to pay tax to take some parts of government expenditures.

⁶ أخذ العلم من أفواه الرجال

as scientific controversies; take these sayings by the Prophet for instance: “**There is no god but Allah**”⁷ or “**There is no power and there is no might unless it is from Allah Almighty**”⁸, such sayings refer to the phenomenon called “The Pantheism” (unity of existence) that first was implied by some pioneering mystics (Sufis) in the former times like Bayazid Bastami and Mansur Hallaj, but for the first time, it was debuted in written form by a Sufi from the west of the Islamic lands named Ibn Arabi and then it was explained by some thinkers who explained his works. Thus, it was slowly developed as a mysticism subject. This conversion from perceptivity to utterance triggered the divergence and disagreement. For example, Ala ud-Daula Simnani; although he was a Sufi and he deeply believed in pantheism with all his heart and in deed, had a disagreement with how the pantheism was defined by Ibn Arabi.

Therefore, as long as we are trying to find mysticism and Islam via studying mysticism terminology through papers, books and history, these disagreements will remain. Needless to say that this does not mean to prevent one from conducting researches and studies on the field of mysticism, but, along with studying, one must compare what s/he studies through books with what s/he finds deep in their pure hearts to see which one is the true mysticism. The true mysticism has to be found in the heart to reach a conclusion that mysticism and intuitive facts cannot be assessed by judicious and scientific touchstones, and this way, one can distinguish between the true mysticism and the fake ones. Real agreement and affinity will also be found in mysticism when the result of such alliance is an “*all-together*” alliance not an “*all-with-me*” one, as the latter is an exhibition of the invisible side of human being’s egocentrism.

⁷ لا اله الا الله.

⁸ لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم.