

Love of God

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Introduction

Love of God is the most important concern of a religion. Ironically however, it is the most neglected one too. Here I would like to refer to an article that was published in the Times of India today (dated October 4, 2009). This article entitled, “*The Truth is, we all lie*” was written by an Indian residing in UK. The writer quoted several illustrations to prove the veracity of the title. One of the examples takes into consideration the situation when for instance people meet each other. They often say “*I thought of calling you, but could not (for whatever reason)*” etc. This is a blatant lie in today’s age of advanced cellular communication. Lying therefore can be categorised into two - **indirect** and **direct**. While indirect lie is actually ‘half truth’, in reality it is as good as a direct lie. Such lies exist not only in the secular but the religious fields as well. My topic of discussion would pertain to the lies propagated in the religious sphere – particularly in the name of ‘Love of God’.

Love of God

In my experience, I have realised that the feeling of true love for God eludes mankind. For instance, I spoke to a mother who loved her son immensely. I told her that your son is a mere *taker*, he doesn’t give you anything and God, on the other hand, is the ultimate *Giver*. Comparing the blessings which God endows on us (including our children), we must love God billion times more than our children. I asked that lady, “*Do you love God as much as you love your son?*” Our conscience for sure will give us the answer. I drew such a comparison in the light of an Arab proverb that says:

“It is in comparison that we understand.”

Whereas he keeps showering love upon his son and daughter, man has just lip-service to offer to God. This ingratitude on the part of man is when even the very act of a speaker conveying and a listener responding is possible due to a very well-synchronised and rather overwhelming interplay of events. In fact, a scientist wrote that once while he was busy working, his young daughter came up to him and started talking. During the conversation, his mind began visualising the miracle that speech and hearing were. He started thinking about the process by which voice reaches the ear and then the brain. But he suddenly jolted his thoughts out of that framework because he realised that his thoughts were drawing him closer to realising the existence of the Creator. This is a typical example of how man proves his ungratefulness before his Creator. Despite being showered by immense bounties by his Creator, man’s centre of love remains his kith and kin.

Sufi practice

Sufi practice introduced a reduced form of expressing the love for God. They projected love of God (*Muhabbat-e-elahi*) as romantic love (*Ishq-e-elahi*). This was further reduced to *Qawwali* that cast ecstasy. I once visited the *khānqāh* of an Alim Sufi which was famous for chanting the name of God 24X7. I observed that the chants were merely a matter of numbers. Disciples were available on a shift-basis and they kept repeating a pre-defined set of words. It is a grave underestimation to think that God can be found through such practice.

What is love of God?

Love of God can be described as **deep attachment to God**. Such a person remembers God alone and as he speaks of God, his soul enlivens. God is a part of his thought process at all times. I have not found anyone who has such an attachment to God. Man is attached to every other object much more than God. Be it his children, spouse or lover - except God man professes deep love for every other being.

Deep attachment is no simple thing. It transforms your entire being. A most recent example of this is the 20- year old Rukhsana, the frail girl from Jammu and Kashmir. Upon seeing that her parents were being hit by the militants she transformed into a different person. Her mind did magnificent planning within seconds – first she hit the militant with an axe so as to over power him and then snatched his gun and killed him. A girl, who had never before seen a gun, became a super girl due to her love for her parents. This is because our mind is an unlimited reserve of potential which unleashes itself in situations.

One who develops such attachment with God, his soul would begin to get nourishment by the remembrance of God. He would start living in God – that is true love for God!

Effect of love of God

True love for God makes you see the world as abounding in blessings of God. Where ever you see, it is a manifestation of His blessings. The sun, the moon, the birds and the trees – even his own being would remind him of the blessings of God. For instance, a person visited the house of one of his village acquaintances who had become a Member of Parliament. He resided in a palatial city house that was equipped with all facilities. He was so grateful to the political personality because of which he was partaking of all the luxuries that before even referring to any object possessed by him, he used to express his gratitude towards his benefactor. This was a unique experience because I have never come across anybody who expresses gratitude so fervently towards the blessings that God has bestowed upon him.

God has laid down the following criterion in the Quran to judge between believers and non-believers:

Those who believe love God most. (2:165)

This verse describes the yardstick that has been set up by God to define the love that believers must have towards God. This great love for God may also be referred to as *hubb-e-shadid*.

But unfortunately, man prefers setting up equals to God. These equals may be his business, children, spouse or lover – any object, animate or inanimate that he starts loving the most. **This is an act of shirk as it is equivalent to giving the place of God to somebody else.** Many for instance try to justify the excessive love for their children by calling it a natural instinct. What these parents fail to realise is that this feeling of love for their children is actually their test. This natural instinct is to help the parents to discharge their duty towards their child, not to shower him with unlimited love and adoration. This therefore serves as a litmus test to find out how attached is such a man to God despite having children and a natural instinct to look after them.

Three kinds of people in the hereafter

The traditions point out to there being three broad categories in which men would be segregated in the hereafter. One kind would be those who would have earned eternal hell fire for themselves. Further, there would be two categories of the paradise dwellers. One would be those who discharged their duties towards fellow men and God in a regular way and did good deeds by following their conscience within the realms of their capacity. The second category would be of those who would go out of their way to follow the commandments of God and accomplish the work He wants man to do.

A verse in the Quran describes the prayer of Asiya, the wife of Pharoah. Praying to God, she said:

My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise. (66:11)

This verse clearly alludes to the fact that one category of paradise dwellers would find place in God's immediate neighbourhood. The others would stay away from neighbourhood of God but would be saved from the hell-fire. Now it's up to man to decide, which category he would wish to stay in.

According to traditions, pre-Islamic Arabia was home to some seekers of truth called *hanīfs*. Imbued with the spirit of finding the truth, they used to pray saying, "O! God, we don't the right way of worshipping You. Had we known this we would have worshipped You in that manner." As I see my companions distribute the Quran at conferences, I pray to God saying, "O God! We might not be doing what is required by You for we do not know that which You desire of us. Had we known it, we would have done just that. But we are spreading the Quran to people from our understanding; accept our intention, though we might be falling short of what we must!"

Companions were an excellent example of men consumed by love of God. Their spirits were so awakened that they devoted themselves fully to the cause of God. During the *hajj-at-ul-widah*, the Prophet of Islam implored that they spread the message of God far and wide. Traditions (*Ibn Hisham*) recollect that upon listening to this message of the Prophet, the companions embarked on journeys far and wide from Asia to Africa. This is why very few graves of the companions can be seen in Mecca and Medina. Despite foraying into lands of unknown cultures and languages, the companions did not let themselves be deterred. It was this courage and conviction that helped them change the very culture of the Middle Eastern nations. This was the effect of being immersed in the love of God.

According to a tradition, a companion *Uqbah bin Nafe* undertook a strenuous journey (in 63 Hijri) to spread the Word of God. He was so passionate about doing dawah work that after having traversed entire Africa when he reached the shore of the Atlantic Ocean and could see nothing but an endless spread of ocean ahead of him, he let out a heart wrenching cry saying, "O! God had I known that people reside even beyond the ocean, I would have jumped into the ocean with my horse, to spread the message to these people." It was their conviction and fervour that made them achieve their seemingly impossible feat.

Conclusion

Love for God is symbolic of man's acknowledgement of his beneficent Creator. Man in effect, expresses his thankfulness to his ultimate benefactor. From a drop of water to the mechanism by which a man can drink water are all manifestations of the greatness of our Creator. It is this gratitude towards God leads to the arousal of a feeling of love for man – which enables us to make efforts for doing dawah work. In fact, the angst in a believer to save others from hell-fire is actually the litmus test for knowing his love for mankind.

According to a tradition, once while Prophet Muhammad was seated, a funeral procession passed by. Seeing this, the Prophet stood up in respect. One of the companions' asked him the reason for standing up as it was the funeral procession of a Jew. To this Prophet replied:

“Was he not a human being?” (Al-Bukhari)

Thus, Prophet established a commonality – a link between himself and the Jew. This is the starting point for doing effective dawah work.

The two -point formula

According to the Quran, there is only a two-point formula that the believers must adhere to in order that they may be granted entry into eternal paradise. The first one is to strive to attain *marefat* or God-realization. The second one is to perform Dawah work. For which, Christians present a very good example. According to a verse in the Quran:

Believers, be Good's helpers, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, 'Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?' The disciples said, 'We shall be God's helpers.' (61:14)

A book entitled, 'Adventurers for God' recounts how a missionary group planned that they would spread Christianity in the jungles of South America. A team was sent to conduct a recce. As the contingent returned, a person from it began telling how there is no clean water, road, only forests etc. in those jungles. The commander asked angrily, tell me are there men there? He said 'yes'. The commander replied, 'Alright then, if there are men, we shall go there.'

The Christian missionaries faced language barriers too. These missionaries stayed there – learnt the language, structured the grammar and translated Bible in the language of the tribe. This is real missionary spirit. Christians took dawah on a different plane all together. They institutionalized and made dawah work very organized. Muslims have never been able to do so. The Christians have not been very successful however, because of certain ambiguous concepts in their religion like atonement, trinity etc.

We have to do dawah as per today's standards. Any work done on a substandard level will not gain acceptance in today's world. The etiquettes of dawah play an equally crucial role – from style of delivery to content – all should be par excellence.

May God guide us!