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News and Notes

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Sufi Thought and Christian Teaching. (2)

THERE are not a few elements in the teaching of the Sufis which can be placed alongside similar ideas or practices traceable in the early church or even now current in the Church of Rome.

The respect which the *murid* (disciple) pays to the *murshid* (spiritual preceptor), while it may appear to be distinctly analogous to the similar respect deemed to be due to the *Guru* or to the Brahmin in Hinduism, is also suggestive of the system of authority which was in force in Christian monasteries. Evidence is not far to seek for the attraction the Christian ascetic or monk had for the Arabs before Islam and for the early Muslims. The monk was very definitely bound to poverty, chastity, humility and obedience and the abbot exercised an almost autocratic authority in enforcing the Rule. 'Direction' has also been a practice in the Christian church and in the absence of an organised priesthood in Islam, the *murshid* seems in many respects to take the place of the spiritual director who is consulted not only by the members of the inner circle of the Sufi 'college' but by those more loosely attached to him who come to ask advice and help in some perplexity.

In our first paper on this subject (*News and Notes*, November, 1934 and *Moslem World*, April, 1935) reference was made to the frequency with which the Breath of Jesus is spoken of or used in a figurative manner. The Urdu *ghazal* of Rasikh is an illustration.

Mushkil taharat-i-nafs, ihya-i-murda sahil

Antas pak hote to tu bhi Masih tha.

"Cleansing of the soul is difficult, resurrection of the dead easy; If thy desires had been holy then thou too wouldst have been a Christ." The word we have translated "desires" is of course the plural of *nafs*, with the significance of "the appetitive soul" but in addition there is a play on the word in its use with an allusion to Christ. So

the purity of the soul is the purity of the breath which raises the dead, *i.e.*, the Breath of Christ. It is the Breath of Jesus which brings the dead to life and it is the prayer-life of Jesus which gives efficacy to His Breath. What is the origin of this idea? Are we to see in it a common Semitism linked with the ideas contained in Gen. ii. 7, Job xxxiii. 4, Ezek. xxxvii. 9, etc., that the *Ruh* (spirit) is the vital principle and is associated with the breath? Or is the connection more immediately with our Lord's breathing on the disciples when he gave them their commission (John xx. 22.)? It is to be noted that the memory of that act was perpetuated in the practice of insufflation which was the act of breathing on the catechumen before baptism, a custom still practised in the Roman church and common in the Eastern church in early times. (Duchesne, *Christian Worship*). The early Muslims must have been familiar with this point of ritual. The breathing was an act of exorcism to banish the Evil One from the heart of the candidate for baptism. Muslim exorcists in India breathe on their patients and the breath of a pious person is supposed to have power to heal the sick.

Christian teaching emphasizes the importance of the heart in religion. The words of Jeremiah "I will give them a heart to know me" and "I will put my law in their inward parts and in their heart will I write it," are carried to their highest and purest interpretation by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Paul presents the teaching in other ways, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," and "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And again he writes to the Galatians, "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father." Augustine's words are familiar to all, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it find rest in Thee." Compare with the thought in these words the Sufi's insistence on the place of the heart in religion. Very frequently he appeals to the *Hadith Qudsi* which says "I could not be contained in my earth nor in my heaven but in the heart of my believing servant." Jalal-ud-din Rumi in the *Mathnavi* (Bk. i., lines 2,653-5 writes :

*Guft Paighambar ki Haqq farmuda ast
Man na ganj-am hech dar bala o past.
Dar zamin o asman o arash niz
Man naganj-am. In yaqin dan Ai 'Aziz
Dar dai-i-mu 'min biganj-am. Ai 'ajab
Gar mara jui, daran dilha talab.*

"I am not contained in High or Low, nor in Earth nor in Heaven, nor even in the Heaven of the Throne; know this for certain, Honourable One. I am treasured in the believer's heart. How wonder-

ful! If thou seekest for me, search in such hearts." And in Bk. ii., line 165, we find these words:

*An dile ko malla'-i-mahtabha-st
Bahri 'arif fathat-i-abwabha-st.*

"That heart which is the rising place of moonbeams (*i.e.*, pale reflections of the great Sun of Truth), is for the mystic the opening of the gates (or chapters) of revelation." On this same theme we quoted in our first paper a few lines of Hafiz and here is another poem from the same author:

*Salha dil talab-i-jam-i-Jam azma mi kard
Anchi khud dasht zi-begana tamanna mi kard
Gauhari k'az sidf-i-kaun o makan berun bud,
Talab-i-gumshudagan-i-lab-i-darya mi kard.*

"For years the heart made enquiry of the Crystal of Jam. What it had itself, it desired of the alien. The Pearl not contained in the shell of the phenomenal world, it sought from benighted people on the sea-shore." Here the picture is of mankind lost on the shore of the boundless ocean of divine knowledge (*ma'rifat*). Being unaware even of his own identity, how can he possibly apprehend transcendent reality? Even though he should spend long years, making diligent enquiry of the sages (here symbolized by the *Jam-i-Jam*, a fabulous mirror, cup or crystal variously supposed to have belonged to or been the invention of Solomon or Jam, and to have the property of mirroring the whole world), he cannot achieve the knowledge of God. Adam, says the Sufi, left Paradise to live in the world and it was as though he had left that boundless ocean to live on the barren shore. There he lost the knowledge of his real self which was bound up with his mystic apprehension of God. Nevertheless, in the heart of man, which is the vehicle of the Supreme Glory (*Jalil-i-akbar*) and the place of the manifestation of Divine Light, there lingers still some traces of the effulgence of divine knowledge and therefrom some faint moonbeam gleams of mystic apprehension of the Lord Most High. Hafiz says that the heart longs to be comforted and blessed with the love of the Beloved but it vainly disquiets itself and us, turning hither and thither with its questioning in the urgency of its longing, for it has itself all the secret which is left to us. The treasury of reality and mystic apprehension is in the heart; we seek in vain from others. We may turn to them very wistfully but "Not by these, by these was healed my aching smart." The pearl which is not to be found within the shell which is formed of the overarching heaven and the outspread earth beneath, nor in the great ocean of created existence, we request from the lost on its wide shore when we really have it ourselves. The rays of the eternal beauty are not without but within. Again we are reminded of the words of Augustine, "I was seeking Thee without and lo, Thou wast within." Great is the mystery of the human heart restless till it find rest in God our Father and there is much truth in these other

words of his "Our whole work in this life is to heal the eye of the heart by which we see God." All who have had to try to break down the crass legalism and formalism in which Muslims harden themselves, must welcome the hungry heart-cry of the Sufi unsatisfied by the stone which is offered him for bread. For when the heart cries out in longing for God have we not the joyous news of the Guest who waits our hearts' hospitality, who will come in and sup with us that we may sup with Him.

But what of the response to the Sufi's longing? Hundreds of instances could be given of the unsupportable loneliness of the human spirit, hands imploringly held out to the silent heaven for one word of love and one crumb of comfort, but with all the language of love found in the pages of Sufi poets and writers, how much is there of the love of God for man? The Beloved remains in cold impassivity. He is the stately and 'free' cypress which has not the trouble of bearing fruit, whose leaves are not subject to the chilling blast of winter and is too dignified to bow from its proud height. It is the human lover who is distracted with passion and longs for the proud Beloved to raise the face-veil which conceals the ineffable Beauty. Hardly ever does the Beloved become the Lover. There is nothing of the Love which loved us while we were sinners, the love which stoops, the love which says "In all their affliction He was afflicted." The only passages which occur to us wherein some little approach is made to the conception of love as an attribute of God are in the *Mathnawi* Book v. 2, 735-40 and 2, 185-7.

Ba Muhammad bud 'ishq-i-pak juf.
Bahr-'ishq u-ra Khuda 'Laulak' gutt.
Gar na-budi bahri-'ishq-i-pak ra,
Kai wujudi dadami atlak ra.

"The pure love was joined with Muhammad. For Love's sake, God said to him, 'Except for thee.' If it had not been for pure love how should I have given existence to the heavens?" Here is a sort of *Logos* doctrine associated with the person of Muhammad. It is the second stanza which is of interest to us, for there a ground for creation is sought not in blind will, but in love. The second passage is not worth quoting *in extenso* but two phrases are of interest. *'Ishq wasf-i-izad ast.* "Love is a Divine attribute." *Pas mahabbat wasf-i-Haqq dan 'ishq niz.* "Know that love and even excessive love is an attribute of Creative Truth." Here we find Rumi bursting the bonds of orthodox Islam.

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties one has to face in the work of evangelism is to bring home the Christian idea of a Moral Law which is authenticated in the moral consciousness, the law written in our hearts. Here we have united the transcendent Law-giver and the imminent Revealer of His own holiness within man's breast. Thus is a true sense of sin born and sin is condemned within and without. No foreign law is arbitrarily imposed but one which, by the

indwelling of God's spirit and the conviction he has wrought within, is confessed as holy, just and good. Islam preponderantly accepts the transcendent Law-giver but fears of the doctrine of man made in the image of God which alone can guarantee a moral and ontological concentricity in human and divine, often lead to the rejection of it though it be guaranteed by such a great name as Al Ghazali. It is to the votary of *Kashf* (inward illumination) to whom one may look for support for such a Biblical doctrine and Al Ghazali's conception of man as spiritual substance, (*jawhar-i-ruhani*) comes into the same category. The classical reference in this connection is to the famous tercet of Mansur al Hallaj: "Praise be to him who manifested His humanity, the secret of the splendour of His glorious Divinity, and then visibly appeared to His creation in the form of one who eats and drinks, so that His creation could perceive Him as in the flicker of an eyelid." In the Urdu *ghazal* of Shah Hatim we have:

*Kahin wuh surat-i-insan hokar kalam kare ;
Kahin wuh ghaḥ men gharibon ke a salam kare.*

"Here He speaks having the form of Man; There in the guise of the poor He comes and salutes us." We may doubt whether these will bear the interpretation that God is incarnate in humanity, but they certainly are interpreted by Indian Sufis to mean that an inward revelation of God within man is possible because God made man in His image and after His likeness.

The subject of Fana (annihilation) and Baqa (subsistence) and its relation with Christian conceptions is too vast to deal with in our limited space. We shall return to it another time. But, in passing, note the following commentary of the Urdu poet Rasikh on the saying of our Lord, "Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

*Hai 'azam-i-tark-i-hasti wajh-i-dawam-i-hasti
Jite hi ji fana ho gar ho baqa ki khwahish.*

"The purpose to forsake existence is the cause of the perpetuation of existence. Die while you live if you wish to subsist."

There is the echo of moral conflict in the words of Bedar:

*Dil se wahshi ke tain shikar kiya ;
Said-i-sheer o palang kya hai ab ?*

"I have made a prey of such a savage as the heart ;
What is the hunting of tiger or panther to this?"

J. W. S.

Notes from the Moslem Press.

THE June number of the *Review of Religions* which is the organ of the Qadianis is practically filled with propaganda against Christianity. The Editorial turns somewhat aside from the general theme to castigate Sir Muhammad Iqbal for his recent letters

in the *Statesman* attacking Ahmadiya. The learned doctor is represented as the champion of a unity in Islam which is non-existent. This of course is not explicitly stated but is implied and illustrated by dissension between Shia and Sunni Islam. The words of the writer are as follows:—

“It is not true as stated by Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal that ‘the mutual theological bickerings of Muslim sects do not affect vital principles on which *all* these sects agree with all their differences in spite of their mutual accusation of heresy.’ He knows it that the differences between the Sunnis and the Shias are vital and fundamental.”

During the course of this article the editor has occasion to express ‘pious’ horror that the Doctor has “not spared a great Prophet of God—Jesus Christ.” We cannot regard this as anything else but moral obliquity and hypocrisy when we remember the terrible things which have issued from the Qadianis with respect to our Lord. Compare this with every other article in the magazine and see how these attack Christianity.

In an article on Islam in West Africa we read of one of missionaries of the Ahmadiya preaching in Balogun and Campos Squares in Lagos against the Gospel record of Christ. In an article about the Resurrection of Islam occurs these words:

“In short, he (Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) ushered in an era of Islamic renaissance by knocking on the head of (sic) its arch-enemy Christianity.”

The regular feature of this and other similar journals is to be found in the lauding of Islam’s love of learning and its contributions to civilisation. Islam is the patron of learning because there was a University at Cordova (*and in spite of the terrible illiteracy which characterises the masses of Islam to-day and down through history*) and Christianity is the enemy of learning because of the persecution of Galileo and others (*and in spite of the fact that the standard of literacy of the peoples who have been influenced by Christianity is higher than that of any other group of nations*). If Islam is the great advocate of learning let her prove it by lifting the masses of illiterates who profess Islam.

Further, Islam is the champion of the slave in spite of the admission that “Islam no doubt recognized the legitimacy of the institution,” and Christianity is the oppressor of the slaves because of their ill-treatment in the United States, (*and in spite of the fact that Christians have been the initiators of the abolition of the slave traffic and even now spend money to suppress it.*)

Such arguments are being repeated parrot-fashion without regard to the truth. In a recent article in another journal we are told that there is a new missionary undertaking among the Negroes of North America to offer them the brotherhood and fellowship which is denied to them by the white Christians, for “in Islam there is no colour bar.”

In the May number of *ma'arif* there is a most interesting article entitled Japan and Islam. There has been a good deal of talk in India lately about a movement towards Islam in Japan. The writer of this article, who is a Professor in Tokio and hails from Delhi, pours scorn on such statements. He says there is not one mosque in Japan. There are perhaps five or six Japanese Muslims and not more than a dozen Japanese women who are married to Muslims. There are some Muslims from Central Asia and Russia and some from India. These are mainly settled at Tokio and Kobe where they have raised by subscription from India and the local Muslims 75,000 yen for a mosque of which the foundation has been laid. The Japanese Government however refuses to recognise this as a place of worship and the Government consent is required. Dr. Khalid Sheldrake tried to help them in this respect but was unsuccessful. The Tartari Muslims as he calls them are not particularly well off and altogether there may be between four and five hundred in Japan. They have established a school in Tokio about which a lawsuit is going on between two parties.

What is said in this article about Christian Missions is specially interesting. The Professor says that with centuries of experience behind them they work on patiently and soberly. Those who go to Japan to do missionary work read Japanese history and acquaint themselves with Japanese customs and religion and spend three years in language study. He says "The Muslims ought to learn from the missionaries."

The writer declares that the Quran has been translated into Japanese but this translation is from a Christian translation into English. He has seen a book on Islam which he could not read but which he judged to have been produced under European influence for it contained pictures and among them some of the prophet himself.

Some advice is offered to those who would preach Islam in Japan. Regard must be had to the customs and habits of the Japanese. It will be no use presenting a Friday bath as a part of the Islamic Faith. It is of course correct that in a land like Arabia, where there is always a famine of water, it should be a proof that Islam is a religion of cleanliness to insist on a weekly bath but Japanese bathe every day and so they would regard Islam as a "dirty religion." The publications of the Woking Mission and the Islamic Review of Lahore are now to be found in the public libraries of Japan and the professor urges that more books in English should be thus distributed.

Praise and Prayer.

WE give thanks to God that once again at the invitation of those in authority, Christian medical workers have visited the heart of Arabia on their errand of mercy.

PRAY for God's blessing on the Saharanpur Summer School.

PRAY for those who are preparing literature for Muslims that they may be rightly guided.

PRAY for two educated Muslim girls who are very interested in the Christian message if not almost persuaded.

LET us pray for all the members of the League and seek to realise our oneness with them in a task which is a glorious venture for our Saviour.

"**YOU** have nothing to do but to save souls, so you will need all the grace you have and to have all your wits about you."

Notice.

Please note the Editor's change of address.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.)

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hony. Secretary:—

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