

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

مؤسسة البیت الملكي للفکر الإسلامی



Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought

The 14th General Conference

4 - 7 September, 2007

**'Hubb' and the Human Endeavour:
Love as a Foundation for Community in the
Abrahamic Tradition**

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The concept of love for God and its ramifications for human society is common to all faiths in the Abrahamic tradition. Moreover, there is great common ground in the spiritual traditions of humanity about the philosophical underpinnings related to the concept of love for God. ‘Love’ as enunciated in Islamic thought and practice represents a refinement of the concept in harmony with the accomplishment of God’s final message to humanity. Here, the ‘love’ is seen not as an abstract concept confined to the relationship between the Creator and the Creation. Rather, it carries the weight of a comprehensive understanding of *Ad-deen*, thereby establishing and re-enforcing a community that is defined in a two-fold organic relationship, first, with the Creator and second, amongst His creatures. Accordingly, the paper attempts to explore this comprehensive understanding of *hubb* which includes an understanding of its role in the foundation of human society and communities.

The Pre-Islamic Abrahamic Tradition

The earlier perspectives on ‘love’ in the Abrahamic tradition, as a precursor to the Quranic vision, are primarily expressed in the sacred Judaic and Christian texts -the Old Testament and the New Testament. Before the revelation of the Qur’an, we find that even the pre-Islamic Abrahamic traditions drew a connection between love and the community. In Daniel 9:4, God’s covenant with the Children of Israel is

described as a “covenant of love.”⁽¹⁾ It should be noted that in the Judaic tradition, the covenant with God is ultimately with the Children of Israel as a whole; here, we see the central role that love plays in defining a community’s character.

While some understandings of the Old Testament emphasize man’s relationship with God as being one of obedience to God based purely on a legalistic covenant, the Old Testament texts actually view ‘love’ of the Almighty as one of the two central points of the covenant between Him and humankind, the other being obedience. As in the verse from Daniel cited above, in Exodus 20:6, God promises to give His “grace” and blessing to those “Who love him and obey His commandments.” Far from being a “jealous” or “vengeful” God, “[t]he Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, [is] slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” (Exodus 34:6-7). Thus the covenant with God as described in the Old Testament is based on both love and obedience.

While the ‘covenant’ with God is a central theme in the Judaic scriptures, the Christian tradition speaks of love as the “first and great commandment” upon which all other laws and requirements depend (Matt. 22:34-40). Accordingly, in the New Testament, the encouragement to love is often given in forms of speech that resemble commandments. Thus, God commands to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength” (Duet 6:4-5, Mark 12:29-30) and “[l]ove your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Again, in the tradition of the Abrahamic spiritual way, both love for God and love for one’s neighbor, i.e. fellow creation is emphasized. Thus love, in the Abrahamic

(1) “God, who keeps His covenant of love with all who love him and obey His commands.”
Daniel 9:4

tradition extends from one's relationship with the Creator and actually becomes the foundation of the community as the commandment on which all other laws depend.

The Qur'anic Tradition

Love is 'a human being's natural inclination ⁽¹⁾ towards such an object that gives joy', 'a magnetism⁽²⁾ that pulls one towards another.' Love of Almighty Allah is an attribute of the believers; it is the ultimate magnet for the human heart. The love carried by believers is distinct in terms of its intensity⁽³⁾ and therefore makes them identifiable in their posture and actions. It is a sign of complete and perfect faith (*Iman*) and therefore seen as omnipresent and unaffected by ever-changing conditions of life.

The Qur'anic word '*Hubb*,' the root of '*muhabbah*' (love), is derived from the Arabic word for 'seed'⁽⁴⁾ and therefore explains its origin and connection with human birth and evolution. Love is implanted in us with nature; it is part of our *fitra* and in time, grows up within us, encompassing all aspects of the human behavioral patterns. Likewise, love for the Creator is ordained in human creation and therefore very much central to '*fitrah*' (the original state/nature) and consistent with his status as 'the best of forms' ⁽⁵⁾ amongst the creatures. This love is the

⁽¹⁾ Imam al-Ghazali

⁽²⁾ Shaykh Syed Muhammad Zoki Shah, Sar-e-Dilbaraan

⁽³⁾ 'And those who believe have intense love for Allah' (Al-Baqarah : 165).

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ ﴾

⁽⁴⁾ Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad, Love for the Prophet (Chicago: Faqir Publications)

⁽⁵⁾ 'We indeed created humanity in the best of forms.' (At-Tin:4)

﴿ لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴾

hall mark of honor ⁽¹⁾ and distinction that the humankind carries in comparison with other creatures.

Justice as a Means of Attracting God's Love

In the Islamic vision of '*hubb*,' there are several methods of attracting God's love on the community. One of these methods is the establishment of justice. '*Hubb*' is intrinsically linked with the establishment of justice ⁽²⁾ and fair play in the community. A society where '*hubb*' provides the engine for growth is built on the edifice of justice. This is central to Islam as *ad-deen* and to the Islamic vision of human progress. The Qur'an states that the outcome of the establishment of justice is God's love for the establishers of justice. Such justice must be established in one's relationship with the Creator, but also the establishment of justice within the family, in the economic and legal spheres, the political sphere and society at large. Once again, we see the central role that love plays in the development and establishment of the community.

Purity as a Means of Attracting God's Love

Another method of attracting the love of God towards the community is attaining purity in every form, physical as well as spiritual. ⁽³⁾ 'God

(1) ' We have indeed honored mankind' (Al-Isra':70)

﴿ وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ ﴾

(2) '.. God loves the doers of justice (Al-Mumtahanah:8)

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴾

'.. God loves the doers of justice (Al-Hujurat:9)

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴾

(3) God loves those who make themselves pure' (At-Taubah:108).

﴿ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ

الْمُطَهَّرِينَ ﴾

loves those who make themselves pure' (At-Taubah:108) It is stated in the Qur'an that God loves those who make themselves pure. Such purity permeates all aspects of society beginning with the individual level and permeating all aspects of the community's interaction within itself. Again, this shows the role that community life can play in attracting the love of God towards the development and establishment of the community.

Righteous Deeds as a Means of Attracting God's Love

Righteous deeds are another means by which the community may attract God's love. God states that on "those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow love." (Maryam:96)⁽¹⁾ Obviously, such righteous deeds will not only be individual acts of righteousness but also righteous deeds at the level of the family and community. Thus, inculcating righteous deeds at the communal level is another means of attracting God's love.

God's Love and Fulfilling Obligations towards God as a Community

It should be noted that God's love for the community is also linked to the community struggling in His path (in the comprehensive understanding of that struggle) and fulfilling the community's obligations towards God. As God warns in the Qur'an, if the community of believers turns away from the *deen*, God will replace the community with a nation that 'Allah will love them and they will love Him.'⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ "Those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow love."(Maryam:96).

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ

⁽²⁾ (Al-Ma'idah:54)

Loving Creation as a Completion of Love for God

When the community attracts God's love, '*muhabbah*' can form the foundation of the community as hearts are drawn to one another. The Prophet (May peace be upon him) commanded the believers to love for their brethren what they love for themselves. This brotherhood is not confined only to that of the Muslims but as Imam Nawawi pointed out, this is the community of humanity which includes people of all religions. Therefore, to love the creation that Allah has commanded to love is in truth a completion of love for Allah. Thus, in the Islamic thought, one's relationship with and love for Allah and love for and relationship with His creation are intertwined. For example, God states: And hold fast, all together, unto the bond with God, and do not draw apart from one another. And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren; and [how, when] you were on the brink of a fiery abyss. He saved you from it. (Al-Imran:103) Thus, one's collective bond with God and '*hubb*' turns enemies into brethren⁽¹⁾. It also holds the promise of a community that qualifies for the love of the Almighty.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ سَخِيمٍ

وَسُجُوتٍ ۖ

⁽¹⁾ And hold fast, all together, unto the bond with God, and do not draw apart from one another. And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren; and [how, when] you were on the brink of a fiery abyss. He saved you from it. (Al-Imran:103)

﴿ وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۗ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ

قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا ۗ

Love for the Creator must be reflected in love amongst His creation. Here '*hubb*' finds support from other potent concepts such as '*Rahma*' and '*Ihsan*'. '*Hubb*' when coming into full play, is interwoven with these attributes and holds the promise of a harmonious, caring and tolerant society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the concept of love for God is interwoven with the concept of loving the creation of God. This is a common theme not only in the Qur'an but in the Abrahamic traditions as embodied in the Old and New Testament. As illustrated above, love, in this comprehensive understanding of it, has the potential to be the foundation of the establishment and development of community life.