

A return to the self

Akram Antaki

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I have never feared inspecting the boiling tears of the human pain. I have feared allowing myself to its selfish cocoon hiding from that hell. Rather, and with all modesty, those tears were my driving force my entire life.

My god, how bad it is that an abuse be entangled within the depths of the human self and its causes be overlooked within the surrounding world!

Preface*

By Nashwan Alatassi

It says in the moral law of the native Americans: search for your self by yourself. Don't let others walk your path. Its your path, your own. Others may journey with you, but no one may go through it on your behalf.

As such was Akram, spending his years searching for the truth, probing the depths of that path that is fraught with danger. While doing so, he was guided by a rare encyclopedic knowledge and his argumentative enlightened mind which is capable of overcoming axioms and self-evident ideas by submitting them into criticism and revision.

Akram once said in an article entitled "A Return to the Self" that was published in 2011 at Maaber's website **"... because I search for my self, I try, from my own perspective while starting from my modest experience of life and my relation with my self and the surrounding world, to touch upon - from a relational perspective - what has imprinted in my mind and soul and what I have come to understand of that inner self. This required a whole life to reach some**

* Nashwan Alatassi's Speech at the Eulogy of Akram Antaki. Damascus, The Cross Church. 21-4-2013

coherent understanding”.

His mind had never sufficed itself with ready-made and packed realities or truths. Rather, he had always excelled in his ability to override his self and transcend into wider knowledge and human horizons. He had embodied Ghandi's saying “**The path to the truth is always the hardest”**”.

To that end, his life was a series of thought battles, battling others and ,primarily, his self. That was while he was always eyeing the logo of his intellectual successor, Maaber: “**there is no doctrine higher than Truth”**”.

To Akram, Maaber was not a mere website. He jetted on its pages the essence of his thought, ideas, and rich experience of life. He was always racing the time to place that essence at the disposal of everyone. He had made Maaber a humanitarian and though oasis to those who write and those who read alike.

He embraced nonviolence as a path and as an approach that he incorporated into his experience and ultimately made a base for this approach. We can truly consider him the pioneer of nonviolence in our region and in Syria which is in a dire need for nonviolence nowadays.

His lifestyle was not any different as well. He has lived abstained from what others were running after. His life was an example to what a human can be; in harmony and compatible to one's self. His conscience was as pure as that of a child that has not been contaminated with the disadvantages of life.

Through the years that witnessed our knowledge of each other and our friendship, I have never witnessed that he, as any human might be, had his own dream. His dreams were rather larger and wider. He dreamt of a world other than the one we live at, a world more humanitarian and less painful and violent. To that dream, he dedicated his life and his pen which was his only means and with which he armed himself, in a world in which weapons, and not pens, has become the prevalent judge.

My friend, a bird in the night holding Diogenes' lamp; who is more entitled to mourn the other?

Do you up there in heavens mourn, and miss us as we mourn and miss you here?

Primary Revision as an Introduction

“Do it once again, but with infinite integrity”. Roman Rolland

1

Like a painful slap that brings one back to his sad reality, I've found myself, after the last meeting of Maaber (2010) and what followed of discussions with some friends, feeling the amount of our fragility as humans who are yet supposed to be more conscious from anything else. I also found myself feeling certain of the amount of the shallowness of the human relations. A reality soon sent me again to revise myself..

Once again,

I return to myself wondering, since the beginning, to which self shall I return to? I revise my life that I try to retrieve as a tape that seems unreal. I revise my relations starting with my inner circle to those that our lives once crossed paths. I revise my thoughts contemplating of everything that I have thought about or read especially those writings that have influenced me and had an impact on my life path. I contemplate what I have lived, and I contemplate myself ultimately.

I said I contemplate, and I mean what I say. But, I do confess that my thinking, once I return with integrity to my self, will

not be undeniably certain, but always and forever you will find beside that stance my heart that has always tortured me. If it wasn't my heart, then it may be that flowing emotion from deep within that has usually corrected my path, and/or implicated me.

I wonder why do I return to my self precisely this day and deeper than any time before? I can't find any other answer but that I feel the need to do so. But, besides this clear answer, and besides what explains this strong need, I do admit that there is another feeling and state of mind that has taken over me lately. It might be unpleasant to me but it's a feeling that seems to reflect some sort of boredom from everything surrounding me, from everybody around me, and especially from my self. It's a feeling that makes me feel despair sometimes and pushes me to put an end to my life at other times.

Yet...

Life proves to me each day and each moment that I cannot get away without those who are around me, friends and beloved ones, yet I find myself distant from them all. That is because despite all of our claims of mutual agreement on common values, we yet seem to have understood life only partially.

I wonder about my self and through it I wonder about the others. I wonder what connects me to them from one side and what parts us from the other. I discover each day, rather each hour, if not each minute and second -- I need to apologies here for my friends who love big words- that I am not only from this

world, but I come from it specifically and exclusively, and up until the end.

2

Who am I?

I am only man from this world. As all of you I am the son of a father and a mother who set from the beginning the path of my life and left thereafter many memories beautiful and, at times, miserable. I am the son of a specific family, known to some and unknown to others; it doesn't matter. Yet, it remains a family that left in my personality some influences.

I am of a certain class and certain religion with which I was born and raised through the family, school, and society. I was from a class and a religion that I later rejected before I come back to my senses and return, if late, to try to comprehend that class and religion as much as I try to understand everything that faces me in this life. I am a human who lived a natural course in life. Yet, it wasn't easy. I studied, excelled, and graduated from university as an engineer. A human being who lived practical life from the day he graduated up until his retiring. This practical life was what allowed me to know my country and other countries and many other people. Through this life, I made many relations that had profound influences on me. Those relations left the deepest impact on my self, as I have previously pointed out.

I have read a lot throughout my life. I have read the meager that I soon rejected and the precious that left deep impression

on me. I was influenced by whatever common beliefs and ideas around me. I adopted some of them and lived them as deep as I believed in them. Then, once these ideas or beliefs became less convincing to me, I calmly left them, with no fear, grudge, or regret. That is because I have learned from them. This also means that they left their deep impact on my self.

I have been through love stories, got married, and had sons and daughters that I have tried to provide them with the best that I have. I sometimes failed at doing that, but generally succeeded in helping them to become what they are now; good people who have grown up, got married, and had sons and daughters who became the pleasure of my eyes. That is because this is life, and because I, as I have taught them, have learned from them as well. They too left a great impact on my self.

I find my self today, at the final steps of my way, return to solitude. Without being disconnected from reality, from life with its sweet and sour, or from that I love or do not love, I go back and wonder again "who am I at the end?".

3

Know yourself..

That is because this is the magical formula that many of "the people of knowledge or gnostics" repeat today. It is the formula through which I shall, with the gods' will, solve all the problems that face me. That way, maybe, I will be able to solve all of the problems of this world which are my problems as well.

I wonder about what self do those people of knowledge or gnostic talk about?

I am not directly talking about yourselves; my friends. I also will not and shall not criticize you merely for the sake of marketing my ideas and beliefs, as some do most of the time. It is not my right to do so. But I'd rather dive deeper into my self that I am returning to now. This is my domain and I am here practicing my right because I am here in **(my) home relaxing on (my) rocking chair.**¹

I close my eyes and calmly reflect on what I have just been reading, that booklet that I have translated before. I had contemplated before I started writing these lines that that booklet will help me dive into that inner inferno which is my self.

However, they are just few sentences that remained stuck on my mind. These sentences are: "**when your self becomes scared in watching the hot tears of pain, and when it seeks refuge, being silenced with the cries of sorrow, as a shy turtle going into its selfish shell. You - the follower- should know that your self is not worth its silent god.**"²

I also contemplate that I never feared to focus on the hot tears of human pain, and that my self never sought refuge into its

¹ Martin Buber. I and Thou. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber publishing. Damascus. 2010.

² Helena Blavatsky. The Voice of Silence. Akram Antaki Translation. Damascus. 2011

selfish shell fleeing from that inferno. Rather and with all modesty, these tears were my motivations through my entire life. So I feel some hopefulness. Especially that I am fully convinced that this **“earth.. isn't but the only entrance that connects into the dawn that proceeds that true valley of light. That light that nobody can access and that is always glowing without wicks or fuel”**.

And I, who is of this land, specifically and exclusively, do not aspire to become a god. Especially that I cannot -and do not even want to- abandon that sensual world that I do not see as detached from the world of the self and the world of the human relationships.

Therefore, you find me trying, yes (only) trying, to understand and I feel what passes by me and calls me to let my self **listen to each cry of pain, as the lotus flower exposing its heart to absorb the morning sun**. That always calls me so as not to **let the burning sun dries the tear of pain before I attempt to wipe it off the distressed eyes**.

You find me..

At the same time, I cry of anguish because when I called out for friends at a moment of pain I did not find anybody to my side - maybe because they didn't need my friendship anymore. Or- maybe- they have achieved their completion and self sufficiency on this transient world. I don't know. I contemplate the importance of overriding my *"ideal"* concepts and the

importance of playing the human game in the same fashion that everybody does.

I find my self unable to do that. But..

Maybe, that is because I am still searching for my self. I find myself in a constant need to such constant revisions -- as hard as they may be. This revision is full of memories and emotions. What this precisely means is that I cannot answer to that call that calls for me to eradicate what is in my self of *previous memories and emotions*.

You find me revising my memories that are more than mere images in mind. By the way..

I record here that I have not yet become convinced with the compelling argument that some bring forth with not enough reflection which states that *nothing exists but now*. I consider such sayings, and their presentation, merely word play. That is because I am a sensual human whose sense cannot stop or fragment time that, as I perceive it, in a constant never-ending movement. It is a movement that starts from a past that can't be denied and continues to reach a present that cannot be defined and would soon vanish heading towards a future which is held within time.

However, it remains that this subject is very complicated and needs more reflection and contemplation. I do admit that *now* that is the present is not obviously defined by ... **that spot that defines that mental movement from one time into another -**

in the sense that it is a seal to the vanished time- or as a form of an end that is tied and held. Its rather (the meaning that is) the real current and full present which exists up to now as an actual presence, as a meeting or a relation. The present appears only through the reality that the "Thou" has become present.³

It remains that this is a different subject that I will try to discuss later.

It remains as well that I am fully convinced with the importance of knowing my self, that self that I believe to be my real self that contains my personality with its all its problems. It is that self that they say it comes from the depths and which connects to the universe which I myself is a part of as much as it's a part of me.

I now contemplate that this was, and still is, my conviction which stems from the depths of my soul and my self to which I return to try to know and connect with a note "I have to know my self at first and be always vigilant secondly and finely.

4

On The White and The Black and What's Between

I know my self everyday and every moment through silent meditation and through "relation" as well. That is because I am

³ Martin Buber. I and Thou. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber publishing. Damascus. 2010.

fully convinced with what my last teacher⁴ that I came across pointed to me that meditation and relationship are opposites but rather integrated.

I live my life in the heart of the relation which maybe private and/or public. Either ways, it's a defined and exclusive relation. So I do; I influence; I become influenced; I make mistakes and be right. I revise myself in wonder each time once I am in solitude with my self.

I did a good deed here; a deed that I soon found its traces of happiness and satisfaction within my heart. I also found that on the faces and eyes of those I did with or for. Thus I feel happy and satisfied because I have done a good deed. It is exactly and simply like the feeling of the creator with happiness and satisfaction at the seventh day once he finished creation.

And...

But I had been angry here and/or had offended there because I am human. It would be an act that soon makes me feel deep sorrow in my self, much like the others I offended. I return to my self and to my mind and heart to touch upon the roots of this wrongfulness that lead to the offence I had made and ignited that anger.

On one hand, I wonder on the causes for such offences and on the roots of such anger that we find within ourselves, which is

⁴ Ibid.

surely a reality we cannot deny. Still, we find such causes and roots out of our selves and in the world we interact and deal with. This world is not a figment of imagination my friend.

On the other side, we live in a world which is still violent and in which offence is as much wide spread as anger. This reality is the other side of a reality level that we cannot hide or deny. We live in a constant and continuous relationship with that world that is surrounding us and we live, as well, with ourselves.

Oh God! How bad this manipulation with words, emotions, and words is! Oh God! How much offensive to the mind it is when wrongfulness is restricted at one side for example and other sides are neglected! Oh God! how bad it is for offence to be restricted deep within the human self and its causes in the surrounding world be neglected!

One human is angry, for example, because he cannot provide enough food for his family. He cannot provide because of general causes that relate to society and politics and to the sum of circumstances around him. How, I beg you, could we advise him to look for the roots of his pain and anger in within his self before we help him as humans - who are supposed to feel what he feels - to solve that primary problem which is feeding his young children and wipe off the tears of pain off their faces?

Talking about returning to the self, especially here, and in such circumstances- which are plenty, soon becomes mere non sense and void of meaning. That is because, in the best chances, we

don't see what we are talking about and seek from ourselves for ourselves. Rather, it reflects a different level of reality and of facts.

Then..

Let's suppose that an offence which results from anger has occurred between two people of the same level and it affected their exclusive and direct relation. Here, I acknowledge that revising the self, individually and mutually, becomes important and a duty on the two parts of the relation. That is because if revision isn't made then there is a fault that needs to be attended to. That is because it would be a fault in understanding the self and in understanding the relation. It would be a supposed fault in the world of the "Thou" which has become in reality the world of "it".

But still...

The question arises cruelly: is knowing the self the only way (even if knowing the self is undoubtedly indispensable) to solve our human problems? Is it the secret magical formula stemming from the depths?

On this subject, if I am not wrong, Martin Buber says: **“adding what shows of experiences to what is hidden does not change the reality. We only follow the divisions that are stemming from the desire of the human race to explore the secret of death. The things that surface and the things that are in within are nothing but things and things”**.

In this, I completely agree with Martin Buber because, in fact, we face it here, in reality.

5

A Problem of Another Type...

It is a problem that might seem simple, but in reality is very complicated. I personally do not like to complicate matters.

But, matters in life are complicated. Also, my experience in life taught me to be reserved when I face a simplification in presenting matters and problems that relate to this complicated life.

I want to know my self. I fear many things. Especially, I fear death much like all humans have done throughout the human history. But still..

Death, if we examine it, remains a fact and a reality in our world. It is a fact and a reality that faces humans since the beginning and will continue to do so until the end. This means that death and the fear of it are nothing but a reality that does not belong to the world of *abstract ideas*. Yet, the world of abstract ideas does intersect with the world of human reality.

I fear the world of *abstract ideas*. Precisely, I fear the world of *simplified ideas*. I exactly fear those who take things lightly, those who manipulate ideas and words and, either consciously or unconsciously, the minds and hearts of humans.

Especially, I fear from and worry about that human who is contended about his self and his experience and he who **created by or expressed himself by a construction of ideas that in which he finds solitude and that allowed him to rest from the consequences of the nothingness.**

Yes, I fear that teacher that asks us to reject any other teacher than him. I fear that who, quite impertinently, looks down on all the values and beliefs and thus directs us into the path of nothingness by guiding us to reject all other directions.

Knowing the self, is like talking about complete self verification in an ill world. It is like talking about the problems of this life that cannot be solved without returning to the self. Knowing the self has become a part of the abstract and simplified ideas. I fear in such cases abstraction as well as simplification.

More than anything else, I fear deception and fear the deceivers because I was deceived a lot in my life.

That is why you find me dealing with caution with anything I read, see, or hear about such matters. I do so especially when it is about the real human experience throughout the ages. That experience has made its diverse perspective on gratitude, divinity, life and death, and on the nature of the relations of the human world.

Knowing the *self*, which they simply talk about today, has turned, quite unfortunately, into a mere tool - if not simply a

formula or a sensual experience. They claim that it is the magical solution which can change the path of the human and solve his problems. That makes us take “knowing the self” lightly, as a thing among things, if not an experience of the experiences in this life.

I want to know his self, and wonder on what I know about the selves of those people of “knowledge or gnostics”.

But above all, I continue to dive into the depths because...

I want to know my self.

On Love and Affection

“Love exists.. and I believe in it” (Aragon)

1

I recall a beautiful poem by a French poet from the 16th century:

Life is beautiful; I kill myself to understand you

this what the rose said, before it died.⁵

And because life is really beautiful, despite its occasional harshness, you find us cling to it as hard as we can trying our best to defer the end. That is because, despite all of the illusions that we try to convince ourselves with that promise us of an immortal life or a return to this life again, you find us convinced deep within with that bitter truth that there is no other life other than this one that we live in this transient world.

That is why you find us, consciously or unconsciously, attempt to take from it as much as we can for ourselves and our beloved ones.

But, slow down my friend! Slow down!

⁵ Pierre de Ronsard

La vie est belle, je me tue a vous le dire.... Dit la fleur, et elle meurt..

Before you elaborate on your problems and the problems of this life, why don't we pause a little and reflect on the last word you said? Why don't we question the reality of the love you mentioned which might truly be the thing that gives life its true meaning? Surely why not? Definitely why not? Why don't we reflect together on that relation which is the most beautiful connection between humans and which is probably the most superior in existence? I find myself dreaming, happy and sad altogether, while recalling some of the most beautiful verses of love poetry:

You are my lord, and my soul is in your hand.

You have wasted it. Yet, may your hand be safe.⁶

I reflect with a sigh.. maybe because I have passed sixty five years and/or because I've missed the train of life. I reflect on the beauty of that relation which is for most of the time and is essentially is very sensual - which is a side of it, from one perspective, that is the most enjoyable side of love that everybody sings to. Especially it is the case when a human is united with his spouse (with his beloved), and **the longing hills of eternity storming around them.⁷**

I also wonder: What is love?

⁶ Jafahu Marqadahu, Unknown Poet, sung by Mohammad Abdelwahab.

⁷ Martin Buber, I and Thou, 3rd part. Akram Antaki translation Maaber Publishing. Damascus. 2010.

I contemplate before everything that love is a relation. That is if we didn't say that it is, for us as humans, that expression that is the most sincere of the relation between our "I" and the "Thou" of those we love. But, before we dive into the content of this relation I think it is important to clarify certain things.

I start with what the great Indian thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti has said about this subject. Although He didn't know how to explain to his interlocutors the essence of love, he tried, with all simplicity, objectivity and rigidity, to show, from his mental perspective, that is often a negative one, what love cannot be.

Love, from the perspective of Krishnamurti, cannot - before anything- be possession because **when we claim that we love someone, what we do we mean by that? We mean that we own that person. And from possession emerge, jealousy. That is because if I lost him or her, what shall happen? I shall feel empty and lost. So, I keep on possessing and seizing onto him or her. From possession and seizing jealousy emerges. It is so because that ignites a fear and all other endless conflicts that stem from that possession. Definitely, that cannot be considered love, can it?**⁸

That is very correct. But what needs further clarification is the distinction between the concept of possession and the inevitability that each relation be **a real and exclusive relation**

⁸ Jiddu Krishnamurti, The First and Last Freedom, On love.

with any being or life-form on this world. Then, its Thou becomes freed from the relation and surpasses it alone to face you. That is because the relation fills the horizon but this doesn't mean that nothing else exists but relation. This rather means that everything else lives within its light. And as long as the relation continues, its universal boundaries is invincible. But once the “Thou” becomes an “it”, the universal boundary to the relation becomes a humiliation to the world and its privacy an exclusion from the world.⁹

That means, based on my humble understanding, that if love is not supposed to be possessive, which is essential, but also and at the same time, love should be exclusive which is also essential.

Also, Krishnamurti was right to a great extent when he supposed that **love doesn't mean feeling. If you bear feelings, or you were romantic, this doesn't mean that you love. Feelings and emotions are merely senses. A believer who is following Jesus or Krishna through his personal guru (that is his personal teacher) or any other person is merely an emotional emotive person who is submerged in his senses which are the product of thought. And thought is not love. That is because thought is the product of senses. This**

⁹ Martin Buber, I and Thou, 3rd part. Akram Antaki translation Maaber Publishing. Damascus. 2010.

means that an emotional emotive person cannot know what the meaning of love is.¹⁰

Although I agree that love doesn't mean feeling and that thought doesn't mean love, I find myself ultimately and finally reserved on such talk. My reservation here is related to the decisive judgement, with its severity, that our friend here, Krishnamurti, has reached. That is because even the divinity, that encompasses us all, cannot deny the possibility of love to anybody on the bases of his reality or the level of his perception. This means that with this sever and hasty judgement Krishnamurti made a mistake. With his mental approach, he fell in the sin arrogance. A true lover, and I mean one who knows the essence of love as an exclusive relation that can be lived, isn't supposed to be arrogant. However, Krishnamurti emphasized this arrogance again, unfortunately, in the second paragraph in the same conversation when he said quite confidently and from the same decisive and sever bases: **An emotional person, who sheds tears for his religion, cannot definitely love.¹¹**

What Krishnamurti needed to clarify in this subject, quite humbly and more confidently, is that **emotions reside within a**

¹⁰ Jiddu Krishnamurti, The First and Last Freedom, On love.

¹¹ Ibid.

human but a human resides within his love. This is not a metaphor but a solid fact.¹²

But above all, Krishnamurti was truly right in his approach. That is especially correct when he emphasized that **when there is no respect, love cannot be; And when there is no compassion, mercy, or forgiveness, love cannot be.**¹³

He was also completely right with the result which he came to at the end of his conversation. He said: **you truly love when you don't possess, when you don't be envious, when you respect the other, when you are merciful and compassionate, and when you respect your wife, children, neighbors and your poor servants.**

So that, don't say "I love the world" because when you learn how to love one person you will learn how to love the world. That is because when we don't know how to love one person our love to humanity is false.¹⁴

Indeed, Krishnamurti was right in general in his conversation and approaches in which he tried to clarify his concept of love and affection. His lovely understanding intersects with what Paul said to the Corinthians in his first letter when he said: **Love is patient and is kind; love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, love doesn't behave itself**

¹² Martin Buber, I and Thou, 3rd part. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber Publishing, Damascus. 2010.

¹³ Jiddu Krishnamurti, The First and Last Freedom, On love.

¹⁴ Ibid.

inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; love doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with.¹⁵

I think that all these principles are very correct.

But..

But still, what Paul the messenger couldn't do two millennia before, what Krishanmurti couldn't do in the near past, and what anyone wouldn't be able to do in the future is to offer an adequate definition for love. That is because of a very simple reason :

-Love can't be defined .

That is because love is a relation.. because love is an exclusive relation.. and because a relation is lived. And because ... **whoever takes a stand in a relation participates in a reality, that is with a being that is not his own only and doesn't exist outside. That is because each reality is an action that I participate in without being able to own it to myself. That is because when there is no participation there is no reality.**

¹⁵ Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. 13:4-8.

And once there is personal possession there is no reality. As much there is a direct connection to the Thou, there the participation shall be more complete.¹⁶

3

Because love is that way, I think it is not possible to approach it from the perspective of logic, thought, analysis and science. Therefore, love finds the best way to express itself in poetry that describes the circumstances of love and/or in verse that discusses the circumstances of lovers. This way, love resembles “gnosis” that found legend to be the best way through which it is expressed by humans language.

From this perspective, we can consider the Song of Solomon to be an integral part in the Bible, if not the holiest part. From this perspective as well, we are still thrilled when we hear the song:

**His left hand is under my head,
and his right hand embraces me!**

**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,(...),
that you not stir up or awaken love
until it pleases.¹⁷**

¹⁶ Martin Buber, I and Thou, 2nd part. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber Publishing. Damascus. 2010.

¹⁷ Song of Solomon 2:6-7.

Love, especially between a man and a woman, is first and foremost is an exclusive relation.. and a sensual one, two.

Precisely because it is that way, mutual love between a man and a woman, and as between a human and another, is a responsibility. It is actually a grand responsibility. Love between a man and a woman cannot be limited to the sensual relation between the two, though this sensuality is essential at some point if possible. Rather, in general, this relation would yield a family and children and, supposedly in normal cases, would yield a friendship.

All these matters, in their lively reflections, are relations of love and/or exclusive love relations. That is to say they are relations that are lived seriously in reality.

The scale of love expands from an exclusive relation between a man a woman to become a larger exclusive relation in a family.

The scale of love expands further beyond the boundaries of family to become exclusive love relations that are lived with other families and other people.. and as such.

This relation persists and expands, if really truthful and exclusive, between the “*I*” of each of us and the “*Thou*” of those we love. It might as well break and vanish if it loses its relational intimate character. In such cases, the “*Thou*” in each of us becomes a thing, and the relation with the other becomes merely a relation with the other - with the “*it*”.

That is because if we didn't deal with those who we love with the essential word I-Thou, we don't really know the meaning of love.

I return to contemplate more deeply in that conclusion to which Krishnamurti has reached when he said **"when we don't know how to love someone, our love to humanity is false"**.

I conclude from this quotation, which was the most beautiful and honest thing he expressed in his interview, that whoever reached such a conclusion must have, one day in his life, lived and knew real love through an exclusive relation with a particular human. But, alas, did he lose everything afterwards when he abandoned his natural life as a human and became merely a universal thinker?

That is because this is the bitter truth. He who disconnects from love as an exclusive relation loses the love of the other party and that great ecstasy that united them together, and might even lose the friendship. Also, because of the lack of this exclusive relation with a particular person, a particular family and particular people with whom he becomes happy or sad to their happiness or sadness, he actually loses everything and becomes captive to his illusions and the world of his thoughts, a captive of what he was (and is) still calling - quite righteously- to refuse.

But...

Could Love on this transient world last?

To answer this question, I have nothing else to add on Aragon's famous song and poem 18 :

Man never truly possesses anything

Neither his strength, nor his weakness, nor his heart

And when he opens his arms

His shadow is that of a cross

And when he tries to embrace happiness

He crushes it

His life is a strange and painful divorce

There is no happy love

His life resembles those soulless soldiers

Who have been groomed for a different fate

Why should they rise in the morning

When nighttime finds them disarmed, uncertain

Say these words and hold back your tears

There is no happy love

My beautiful love, my dear love, my torn heart

I carry you in me like a wounded bird

Those who unknowingly watch us walk by

Repeat after me my words and sigh

They have already died in your bright eyes

There is no happy love

By the time we learn to live

It's already too late

Our hearts cry in unison at night

It takes many a misfortune for the simplest song

Many regrets to pay for a thrill

Many a tear for a guitar's melody

There is no happy love

There is no love which is not pain

There is no love which does not bruise

There is no love which does not fade

And none that is greater than your love for your country

There is no love which does not live from tears¹⁸

That is because, and this is one of the bitter truths in life, nothing is guaranteed for humans... because there is no happy love and there is no endless love.

That is because, even in the best of cases, love must end -if- at least with the death of one of the lovers before the other or, as legend has it, they die together. Therefore, there is no happy love and there is no eternal love on this transient world.

That is because we are human, and because eternal, universal, and comprehensive love is of the attributes of the divine.

¹⁸ Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux

And because it is as such, and because this is life, there is no love on this earth that is not vowed to pain.

But,

This doesn't deny that love remains the most beautiful and most sacred of existence.

5

But, you find me, within this discourse on love and on pain, still feeling uncomfortable because I couldn't express myself completely on what I have and wanted to say. Therefore, I find myself in need to dive deeper into the inferno and to contemplate more.

That is because when I talk about love, **I had spoken about it as the sole relation between humans. But, if its true, could I talk about it only as an example, (I mean) as an example facing something else that is called hate?**¹⁹

Answering this grand and legitimate question can be explored in our return to our selves and/or maybe if we read Martin Buber who once said "**Since lover is blind, this means it can't see the being completely. Meaning, it is not affected by the**

¹⁹ Martin Buber, I and Thou, 2nd part. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber Publishing. Damascus. 2010.

essential word in a relation. Whereas hate is naturally blind.²⁰

I contemplate on the idea that love is, unfortunately, mostly blind. That is because, in this life, when we love someone, we are usually unable to see him completely but see that beautiful side that we love. We don't see that appalling side that might lead us to hate. For this reason, *blind love* might become another face for hate that is naturally blind. This is what frequently happens in life especially when the people and the relations become related unconsciously, one way of another, to the world of "it".

Consequently, that is because only some of the being can be hated, and because he who can see the being as a whole - and might find himself having to reject it- does no longer belong to the kingdom of malice but rather, become part of the kingdom of what is humanly prohibited that disallows him to utter the Thou. He finds himself unable to utter the Thou to the other human being facing him. That is because this word always presupposes an assurance to the other that we are facing. This means he would find himself in need to reject the other or reject himself.²¹

This is what really happens in reality when a human being faces the dark side in those he loves. That side that was hidden before. The person might be compelled to reject it if he doesn't

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

want to confront it in the same manner, I mean via his own dark side.

We notice that this rejection doesn't belong truly to the world of hate or malice, but rather belongs to the kingdom of what is humanly prohibited. This rejection might be more dangerous from malice and worse and harder than hate. It is because it is prohibited that we are unable to direct the Thou to the person facing us. That is because this sacred word always presupposes an assurance on the entirety of this person.

But again as we have previously said:

There is a side of him/her that we reject, and thereafter we are unable to assure on the said entirety. This thing might lead us, in reality and because we are humans, to be compelled to reject the appalling part that faces us or compelled to reject ourselves. Also .. **"You see us in front of this barrier deciding to enter a relative relation and along this reality a wall emerges"**.²²

This wall that cannot, once we deeply comprehend it, belongs to the world of hatred. This wall, that might be- from the perspective of the relation between the I and that that we can no longer address as Thou-worse from malice and harder than hate, is usually forgetfulness.

²² Ibid.

While saying what I say here, I truly talk about myself and reflect, as a human from this world, on those that I once loved and later became estranged from during my life.

That is because I am still unable to resemble him at whose feet I kneel crying, that who is able to love everybody.

I contemplate that because of this reason I find myself throughout my life forgetting those who offended me. I so notice that the depth and scale of this forgetting was always proportional to the depth of the offence and the depth of the heartbreak. Also, It was always proportional to the depth of the love relation that connected me to that person with whom my relation was disconnected.

Forgetting, as they say, doesn't mean hate. It is, if we honestly contemplate, a state closer to un-love and un-hate; because it is a total disconnection in the relation.

Therefore, you find me in need for further meditation through deeper diving into the depths of my self. Especially, as Martin Buber correctly pointed out: **"a human who outwardly hates, (remains) closer to the relation from that who doesn't hate nor love".**²³

And I.. I still want to know my “self”...

²³ Ibid.

On knowledge or Gnosis

“There is something rotten in the state of Denmark” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet)

1

Throughout history, and since the start of time until now, gnosis has been the sincerest form of expression on the true relation between man and that great secret that embraces him and is in his heart- I mean his private inner self or divinity.

Throughout human history, there were people who interacted with life deeper than anyone else. They made between their “selves” and the surrounding world a relation which nears perfection. Those natural and supernatural humans have reached, with their hearts and minds, a deeper understanding of their selves and of the grand secret of this world. Their understanding soon was reflected on those around them in the form of knowledge, or gnosis, that we still variously live by until today.

2

From the aforementioned stance, we can say that knowledge, or let's figuratively call it gnosis - which means that graceful sublime knowledge, is an expression of a spiritual experience which generally never manifested it self through theology or philosophical reason, but rather expressed itself via legend. Legend isn't viewed here as an imaginary unbelievable story.

Legend is viewed as a way created by humans so as to express a different level of truth that common theological or philosophical approaches couldn't deal with or even access.

From this stance, I shall attempt in what follows to touch upon the meaning of gnosis and its real experience throughout the ages.

I shall start with the view of the universe and the world in which we live. This universe was dealt with by the spiritual histories of all human societies in all parts of the world. It was viewed as a world distant from perfection. Buddhism, similar to the three monotheistic religions that emerged in our region, as well as other ancient mystical books, viewed this mundane world as a world of pain, anguish, and death.

From this point, and as an expression of the supposed vileness of this world, let's contemplate together, as did ancient Gnostics, the circle of life itself. There, creatures feed on each other. Everyone survives on the other starting with the earthworms and ending with humans. Even domesticated animals that don't consume meat survive on plants for their food. Also, humans have always been plagued with diseases or natural catastrophes like earthquakes, floods, fires, drought, or volcanic eruptions, add to that those man-made catastrophes as a result of his greed such as injustice, slavery, wars, and premeditated murder.

it is a reality that generated, and still does, death, destruction, and pain in our world. This led that elite which felt and

comprehended their and the world's pain and torment, amidst the common and surrounding ignorance, to view themselves as foreign to the world in which they lived. From their feeling, most likely, the beautiful gnostic wisdom emerged that entails that they, people of gnosis, are at the heart of this world and not from this world. It is a feeling and a point of view that is justified for any human who reaches that sublime level of understanding and sensitivity. But...

This is the most important part related to our topic. Most people of gnosis, understood, some way or another, in the many quarters of earth, that the one responsible for imperfection in this world is not the human, contrary to what most mundane religions and philosophies postulate, but rather what is far beyond humans, if not what's beyond divinity itself.

This is an exaggeration that nears, from the common religious perspective, the boundaries of blasphemy and disbelieve. It is a state that one day Al-Hallaj expressed, quite eloquently:

I disbelieved in God's religion. And for me, disbelief is a must while repulsive amongst Muslims.

You find us facing a phenomenon that is infinitely deep on which the views and explanations of the people of knowledge—of gnosis, in different times and manners, were divergent, on its form of course. Yet, those concepts and explanations were very similar in their contents.

It was the people of knowledge, or gnosis, who have tried, since the beginning, and throughout the ages, to surpass that bitter truth that is *the reality which seems vile* for a world that is incomplete and imperfect on the one hand, and who have tried to construe the relation of this world to a divinity that is supposed to embody perfection and idealism on the other hand. They attempted to surpass these forms through wisdom and/or philosophy, like Plato for example, by contemplating the harmony of the universe and the greatness of creation. Yet, what is vile remains vile and there was no way for harmony nor the greatness to hide it.

They have tried as well through the concept of karma in oriental religions and philosophies to construe the causes of vileness and anguish which humans suffer. They couldn't of course construe a lot. That is because if the concept of karma was able, at best, to show how the chains of anguish, deficiencies, mistakes, and pains interact and interlink in our world, the concept couldn't at any day explain why such deficiencies, mistakes, and vileness exist in the first place.

That is a reality that didn't pass unnoticed by the people of knowledge, gnosis, who found themselves from the beginning facing a chronic problem to which they sought to find a solution.

There were different approaches to the problem, and the one solution grew to become solutions-- that is if we were not to

say that the only solution to this grand problem has become solutions that are divergent and different in form and content.

Also..

Because the solution cannot be dealt with in the more simple tangible aspect of a world governed by harsh laws, this knowledge has become deeply rooted than any other; a knowledge stemming from a human experience that is more honest from any other; mystical. **But, adding the mystical of the experiences to its form does not change anything in reality.**²⁴

Reality remains reality. Human experience, no matter how grand and deep it becomes, shall remain a human experience.

From this, gnosis has become carrying from within the seeds of what it had tried to avoid. Gnosis has turned through time into mere knowledge and/or mere wisdom. My god! How confident that wisdom was imagined, in the essence, a shut room designated to the knowledgeable, a room that needs a key. Oh secrecy that bears no secrecy! Oh the accumulated knowledge! It is always the “it”, always the “it”!²⁵

That is because the deepest knowledge soon turn into the world of things that Martin Buber calls the world of the “it”. Regardless of the established greatness of all the explanations and knowledge - and specifically when such knowledge

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

attempted (or even tried to attempt) to comprehend what cannot be comprehended and understood, all of the explanations and knowledge will soon become things and matters. That is to say that all the explanations and knowledge will turn into the world of the “it”.

What cannot be comprehended and understood - for us- is that eternal "Thou" that contains us. That “Thou” shall remain until the end that great secret that surpasses us. That is because **the relational experience for early history humans was not happy or common. Rather, it was a force that affected and was lived by that being. It was not shadowy interest in unknown numbers!**²⁶

We find that that experience was bitter on the one side, and pessimistic, when related to life on this transient world, on the other side...

Despite all of that, gnosis remains, as a human experience, an experience that is thoroughly beautiful and deep; and an experience that is worth being known and understood if we really wanted to know our world and ourselves through our deep relation with this world.

Knowing this experience dictates, on face-value, that the answer of the people of knowledge to that problem that faced them; the problem related to the vileness and deficiencies of the universe, has taken two seemingly contrasting turns.

²⁶ Ibid.

The first turn was the one embraced by ancient oriental religions and philosophies. It rejected, or let's say avoided, dealing with the issue of the oneness of complete transcendent divinity. It emphasized that humans must return to their "selves" in order to be fulfilled and override by that fulfillment the pains and anguishes of this world.

The second turn, even if it doesn't contradict the first on its goal and resembles it in many details, attempted to explain the contradictions and evils of this world by a more complex explanation of divinity that included some sort of graded nature in its world. This is what happened in our region where gnosis, stemming from the three monotheistic religions- headed by Judaism, entwined with the gnosis of the Greek, Egyptian, and ancient Zoroastrianism philosophies, resulting in Christianity. That deep experience gave way to a complex conception of a divinity that is supposed to be characterized with wholeness and perfection.

4

It is because the people of knowledge, or gnosis, ultimately believe in an ultimate divinity that is impersonal, transcendent, and surpasses all the universes and creatures. This divinity, which is the origin of everything, did not create anything - in the sense that we now attribute to creation, but rather...

From this absolute transcendent impersonal divinity emerged the elements that created the seen and unseen universes. From this perspective, the mystical approach that dictates that god

exists in everything might be held to be relevant. Also, from this perspective, the people of gnosis suppose that some of those elements drifted away from that fountain thus resulting in some harmful changes in the process of creation. This might mean, in return, that ascribing divinity to the universe or nature and whatever creatures exist there within, is worshipping corrupt incongruous molecules, even if such molecules were in essence emerging originally from that absolute and transcendent divinity.

The Gnostic legend diverge on this matter. Those divergences take us to the worlds of what we call “aeons” as apparent in some ancient Gnostic manuscripts like the gospels of Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and Judah. There, “aeons” assumed their position as divine manifestations between us and the absolute and transcendent divinity. Also, from this absolute and transcendent divinity, and by its will, the universes of “aeons” give rise to where the divine action is complete; to what has later been called the “Pleroma” which means overall fulfillment and fullness.

Also...

One of the worlds of “aeons” was very important to Gnostics. They have called that “aeond” “Sophia” (*Greek* for Knowledge) which generated through its process to an incomplete consciousness that became embodied in an entity that turned to be the creator of our material and psychological world. This creator made everything in its form. This entity,

which they postulated to be unaware of its origins, imagined itself to be the only supreme creator. This creator is referred to as the Demiurge by the Gnostics. It is a dual-nature divinity and this duality affected its creatures that, from and because of it, bear a side that belongs to true divinity. This side seems to be unrecognized by the creator of the material universe who controls our world and who has become dualistic.

Therefore, we see that humans reflect the dual nature of the world that was created by that incomplete divinity and that humans bear in themselves, at the same time, the seeds of true divinity. Or, let's say from another gnostic perspective, which seems to me deeper, simpler, and more human, that **the world of human is dual, and this corresponds with its dual stance (...)** **The human stance is dual (because) this corresponds with the dual nature of the basic words he utters.**²⁷

This is a perspective that I shall deal with later.

We continue with the prevailing human-gnostic perspective trying to understand that duality. We contemplate what the people of gnosis suppose that the human race is made of two elements. The first element is that evanescent materialistic one. The other element, the most essential and important, is the eternal and spiritual which is that fragment originating from the essence of eternal absolute divinity which the gnostics call the (divine spark). But..

²⁷ Ibid.

It seems that humans weren't generally able to properly pursue that inner divine spark that is hidden deep inside of them. This inability, from a human perspective of gnosis, is stimulated by the negative effect of the false god who created this human and wants to prevent him from knowing his true self and keep him attached to the earthly world with its concepts that make him a slave to the universal earthly laws. Also..

Its a reality that humans differ on their levels of comprehension and awareness. Some are "Pneumatic", thus they are more capable to receive gnosis. Others are "Hyletic" and can only recognize the material world. Others as well live through their mental mirror that they perceive as the soul and therefore mistake the false god of the mind, the Demiurge, with the true Divinity. Everybody remains, either ways, captive to this world from which one cannot be liberated but with death that ends the cycle of life on this earthly world and set the divine spark free from its captivity. That spark, unless otherwise supported by whatever a human receives of "gnosis" throughout his mundanely earthly life, shall soon return to be embodied which we prefer to call reincarnation.

As such, throughout the ages and eras, there has been, according to the gnostic legend, cycles of gnosis and fulfillment from a generation to another. Such cycles have set free some chosen people from their captivity in this material

world and allowed them to comprehend the truth of their “selves”.

We record that the concept of conscious, that is largely used now, has been reached by the people of gnosis long time ago.

Also..

6

In relation to salvation, gnosis presented a more beautiful and deeper concept than that presented through the simplified concepts of our earthly religions. Here, we shall not elaborate on those who have carried, from ancient times, that grand message of helping humans override their misery such as Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth, Mani, Ahmad, among others. Instead, here we shall contemplate that clever, complex, and deep Gnostic approach that attempted to help humanity which is ignorant of its origins and soaked too deep in its earthly matters to seek fulfillment and liberation from the shackles of this world.

From this perspective, the gnostic concept of salvation is truly more beautiful and cleverer than the other concept purported by the mundane religions. Sin which gnosis seeks us to abandon is nothing but the human's ignorance of him self and of his inner spiritual dimension that is inherently deep within. The messengers of gnosis throughout the ages sought others to know this dimension. Such an understanding emphasizes that

salvation is direct and personal on one hand, while simultaneously general on the other hand.

It is a salvation that stimulates that divine spark found deep within the conscious of every individual and within humanity at large.

This understanding leads us again and directly to the necessity of knowing that deep and personal self. We are obstructed to acquire this knowledge by our mundanely conditions and ties. This thing makes true divinity unknown in our world.

Knowing the self cannot be obtained without gnosis that can, as we have already pointed out, “save” us from the evilness of this world. Gnosis can as well stimulate the divine spark that is in our depths. That is because.. **when you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty, and you are poverty.**²⁸

That shall be enough for this brief and contracted presentation of the phenomenon of gnosis. I return to myself to contemplate more wondering, again, what's gnosis?

7

Is gnosis, as most literature on it points out, that clever and complex concept of divinity? I find myself simply wondering on the extent of that conception that might not be, in the end,

²⁸ Gospel of Thomas - 3 (BLATZ Translation).

more than a state of mind? It might be a state of mind because it might be an attempt to comprehend what cannot be comprehended, which has turned, quite unintentionally, divinity into the universe of “it”!

Or has gnosis, when urging us to return to the self, emerged from a similar mental conception that supposes that everything in this world that is materialistic and tangible is polluted? This might require ultimately total abstraction from matter and transcendence from this life. I wonder about this, again. Was that wisdom dictating that a person of gnosis is in this world and not part of it a result and an outcome of the experience of the life of a sage? Or was it merely a sad contemplation of the reality of a sad situation?

You find me as well, in relation to answering these questions, returning to my self contemplating that I still, after spending most of my life investigating and searching in this field and its literature, find myself alone, sad and full of questions and doubts.

But I...

Above all, despite everything that has been said on this field, and despite all the disappointments, pains, and sadness, I still feel, or still convinced, that I am not only in this world, but also from it exclusively and specifically.

At the same time, I find myself, in contrast, kneeling at the feet of those great gnostics who left with their biographies and

traditions the deepest impact on me. I feel some comfort and simultaneously deep sadness.

That is because when I contemplate that I have come to know throughout my life many of those gnostics, I find that very few of them have left that deep impact on my self. Oh, that one of Nazareth, my first teacher, **how many people had I encountered who claim to be belonging to this path, how much had I listened to their words to find myself ultimately remaining in the same spot, alone and heartbroken.**²⁹

I wonder about the reason, specially that who I mean here are very knowledgeable people, many times than I am, on the literature of gnosis. Despite this, what they called for or spoke of on that knowledge, that is ascribed to ancient knowledge and/or calls for knowing the self, didn't have that deep impact on my self. I wonder why?

My answer, with all honesty and clarity of mind, is that I didn't feel what they spoke of was truly honest enough. This is the reason that caused what they uttered of quoted words, though most was truly beautiful, to leave no deep impact on my heart or the hearts of others.

This is the reason that made them, with all that they had to offer, unable to go through that self to which they urged to know. Therefore, this is the reason that stopped them from

²⁹ Yassu' my Massaiah, an article in Maaber Magazine by Akram Antaki.

reflecting their knowledge on people around them and dealt with them sometimes loftily.

That is if I didn't say that they still deal with themselves and with humans as disconnected things and not as humans who should be viewed as real mirrors of themselves that they are not courageous enough to truly reveal. **That is because they play with gnosis.. like those of the materialistic perspective which has become very common today.**³⁰

Also, because the humanity that they spoke of.. **is the "it's" abstracted humanity which is imagined, supposed, and called for by (them). It is a humanity that has nothing to do with the living humanity that can be truly spoken of regarding the "Thou". There, an idol is the noblest imagination, and the elevated imaginary feelings expire. There, thoughts no longer crown our heads or live in there. Instead, thought dwell among us and present themselves to us. A human who cannot utter the essential word deserves pity, and he who uses these abstracted thoughts as a password, as if he was their speaker, (shall soon turn into) a despicable person.**³¹

From my perspective, this is what turned those (friends) into mere spectators standing before a river and watching the flow of the current with whatever wickedness floats on the surface.

³⁰ Ibid..

³¹ Martin Buber, I and Thou. Akram Antaki translation. Maaber Publishing. Damascus. 2010.

That is because he who dares to truly dive into the depth of his self and this world and he who holds overall responsibility in it remains despite all of his knowledge claims unable to comprehend gnosis. Therefore, he remains unable to present to others what he claims of experience.

It is because diving into the depths of self, and what gnosis results from that, is a state that is lived truly as a deep and exclusive relation with the self and with the surrounding world. From what is previous, I discovered that there is a path that leads to god and from what follows I discovered that there is only one path to oblivion.³²

That is because real gnosis, which was presented to us by the greatest gnostics throughout the ages and had its deep impact on the lives of humans, was true experience that was lived by them as a truthful relation with their inner "Thou" and with humanity in the heart of this world. It was an experience that they lived as sons of humans and as people from this world. Also..

That is because what this gnosis later give way to was mostly aberrance. I wonder with the last teacher I encountered on .. **what benefits my self if it could withdraw from this world again to loneliness when this world, specifically and necessarily, isn't part of that loneliness -- What good does that divine pleasure give to a life that was shattered into two lives? If this rich and heavenly moment had no relation**

³² Ibid.

to my poor mundane moment, then what does it have to do with me then - I who should live quite seriously on this earth?³³

I wonder, yes I do seriously wonder, if this world that we live upon is truly vile despite all the vileness that we witness and live by?

Is love vile? Is sexual intercourse vile? Is nature vile? Is matter vile? And, should we truly become liberated from whatever is related to such things?

Is life really vile? and therefore we should transcend from it.

I still find my self seeking my self through a relation that I want to be honest with my self and this world.

That is because I want to know my self.

³³ Ibid.

In the beginning was the relation

“..and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. (John Gospel 1:1)

1

When the loveable disciple uttered his phrase "**In the beginning was the Word..**", did he realize the nonfinite dimension that he gave to the human relation to their inner thou? That is if we weren't to say that nonfinite dimension to the relation of a human to that grand secret that is divinity? For me, there is no doubt that he knew exactly what he was saying because he was the son of the word at first, and what he uttered was the essential word, I-Thou that expresses the real connection between him and him self. Also..

With that deep connection, he expressed a state that surpassed many times the primal and instinctual human fear from that unknown that we call death. That fear derives from that possibility of complete disconnection from life in general and with the inner self in particular. The disciple was speaking in the name of true comprehensive love to that who has become an integral part of his self through love, mind, and .. relation.

It's the relation! Always the relation!

I contemplate that grand secret from the relational perspective. That is not because no one can in reality show with precision and/or with direct concrete scientific evidence its nature and existence. Some believe that they can do so, and I respect the beliefs of those. But..

Because I search for my self, I shall try from my own perspective, from my own humble life experience, and from my relation with my self and the surrounding world to search for, from a relational perspective, what has been imprinted my mind and soul and what I comprehended of that inner self. That required me a whole life to reach a somehow solid understanding.

I've said a whole life, and now I am at the outset of the end. I revisit my memory on how my experience was with this issue. The reason is , in truth, and despite I've spent my childhood and youth years at Christian schools 34, divinity was not a subject that worried me a lot during my early years. The reason behind this may in fact be , luckily I suppose, a liberated atmosphere that prevailed around my family which was not renowned for being strictly religious. At school, they used to teach us, quite intensely, the principles of Christianity and ethics related to that divinity. The general atmosphere at home, which didn't care much for such issues, always balanced the situation.

34 Schools of Franciscan Sisters, Marist Brothers, and Azarian Fathers

I recall a related anecdote. One day, a missionary priest visited my school when I was in my third grade. He spent with us two long hours in which he preached us on things related to divine missionary. He eloquently and effectively elaborated about our need to the divinity, especially of our lord Jesus Christ.

I can no longer remember exactly what he said that day, but I remember quite vividly what I heard that day affected me deeply. That made believe that the call of divinity has pierced through my heart which became convinced that it was called for service. I became so convinced that I came back home later that day and headed directly to my father who was sitting at the lunch table with my mom, grandfather and my uncle. I enthusiastically told him: “Dad, I want to be a priest”.

Everybody laughed, especially my father who directly answered me: Just eat your lunch now!

That laughing brought a complete end to that call in which I was submerged moments before. Also..

I recall the boredom and sleepiness that engulfed me during mass or during the long hours in which they attempted to preach us, when we were kids and teenagers, the principles of religion, prayers and contemplation.

This means that divinity, or what they attempted to preach us back then- and probably this was the cause: had no direct impact on my life. Impact was from direct influence and relation with some people in the course of my life during that time, like that with Sister Carla in the first years of my childhood. I still remember her kindness and dedication, and her bright beautiful face. My father was one of those people. I remember watching him every night when he prayed before the icon of the Virgin Mary before he went to bed. I always admired his true interaction during that. Of those people were Brother Bernardos, with his kindness and dedication, at the Marist Brothers school, and my grandfather whose death deeply affected me when I was only 14 years of age. I remember I cried a lot then because I lost a person that I was deeply attached to. Also, of those people was Father Yousef Ma'louli from the Azarian Fathers School. He, with his dedications and kindness, nurtured my youth and adolescence. I still recall how Father Yousef once stopped me on the road when I was in high school and I was about to become a communist. He told me then "Akram, oh Akram; Marx was right when he revolted against the face of oppressors!".

I recall as well the young Father Jurniak who was a deserter from the military in Algeria. It was him who first started passing to me books and leaflets that dealt with new ideas. Some addressed issues of justice and others addressed atheism. I remember Father Michel Attallah, the principle and our philosophy teacher, for his tolerance. I remember how I while

seventeen years of age and being influenced of what I had read of new ideas that weren't taught to us directly in school, rejected the divinity and religion as presented to us and how I decided, with the mind and enthusiasm of a teenage student, that I was unbeliever.

Since those days, and in this context, I remember two specific people. Mr. Nadra Alyaziji was then a young teacher who taught ethics in our school and he tried to discuss the principles of Idealist Philosophy. He charmed me with his kindness and love despite that I fiercely rejected him because I believed that the principles he invited me for contradicted my principles. The other person is Father Michel Attallah. I remember that, while I was in the eleventh grade, I requested to meet him and discuss an important matter.

"Come in Akram, what is it that you want to tell me?" That is how he invitingly talked to me after letting me in to his office and sit before him. I remember how I then felt confused for a little while. Yet, I soon gathered up my courage and told him "I came to ask a personal request from you, Father, .. I want to be relieved from attending the weekly mass and religion lessons".

He looked at me in wonder and asked: "Akram, why do you want not to attend the mass and religion lessons?" I answered, quite arrogantly, "Because I am no longer a believer father, because I am now an atheist and I no longer believe God exists!".

He sadly smiled and simply said "as you wish..".

I remember how I rushed out from his office wishing at that moment, being overwhelmed with shame, that I'd vanish from earth. I kept thinking of that questions for a long time "why! why did I do what I did? Why did I hurt his feelings? I was thinking that if I was in his position I would have immediately expelled that arrogant student from my school. Yet he didn't do that, he remained, with all kindness, supporting me as the best student in his school. Even more, when I joined the engineering school, he asked me to teach Mathematics to the seventh grade students in his school which was the same school I went to. I contemplate that those memories, which might seem simple, taught me via relation another deeper side for my human self. It is the side of love and tolerance, if I weren't to say that it was the real side of what we presume to be divinity.

It's the relation, always the relation!

3

That relation is what makes us when we are alone with our selves and amidst the surrounding universe fly with happiness and/or at times makes cry for our nonfinite misery. It is so because..

It is what makes us feel deeply when are happy that the I that is our selves is in harmony and homogeny with its self. The latter is the total "Thou" that is in our depth.

My God!

Relation makes us, when we are miserable and have enough courage and direness to face ourselves, cry when feeling shame and disgrace from ourselves that are also our "selves". They are the "I" that was disconnected from its "self". This self is nothing but that total "Thou" that is in our depths.

Oh my God!

And as such, by relation, thought, life, and deeds, experience deepens and connections with the self strengthen as well. That is to say that it's relation of my "I" and the "Thou" of my self. Maybe, this relation might become disconnected because the relation wasn't deep or honest enough. This relation, or un-relation, is always between the "I" and the total "Thou" that is deep in my self...

Oh God!.

I contemplate on my self and my life. I remember how I deepened my readings and understanding with work and throughout life. I was still reading the classics and Marxism books. Soon, I found myself enjoying reading scientific books and especially philosophy books. I found myself reading again the old testament, especially the books of Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah. I also read again the new testament especially "The Sermon on the Mount" in the Gospel of Matthew. I also started enjoying reading The Gospel of John.

I started, with or because of the said deepening, to feel another dimension that I hadn't felt before. It was a dimension that had

been being rooted in myself in combination with the more life experience I had and my responsibilities towards who I love.

There I started for the first time to read the Holy Quran. I failed the first time because of my poor Arabic at the time. I was able to read it later in a second time.

Also, in light of this experience, dimensions and questions deepened in my heart and soul. They were the ones that were furnished by the books that I grew fond of reading, especially those related to divinity. It is the divinity that you find me today trying to, while revising myself and through relation, show what I feel of its truth.

4

That is because in this respect I was and still deal with that subject on two levels:

The first is the one who I connect directly to my self and with the surrounding world through the mind, science, and direct and indirect human sensory experience of the world in which we live with our bodies and minds and which we experience with our senses and thoughts.

The other is a level that cannot be separated from the first because they both interlock. The second contains the first; it possesses it and/or is subjects itself to it by the self and by the relation.

You find me on the first level trying, experimenting, and thinking with a mind that is trying to be distant. While on the second level, I live an intimate relation with my self. Between those two levels, there is always that connection that never breaks but rather reacts in the depths of the self with the thoughts and feelings through the mind and soul simultaneously.

At the first level, you find me, when contemplating Cosmogony for example, still pause in front of one of the most popular and probable theories that is the Big Bang Theory. I contemplate from a scientific perspective that this great and scientifically based theory has shown many important things such as:

-The materialistic universe that we live in has a moment of beginning- which means that it is, as known today, wasn't there since eternity. Also..

-This universe, according to the theory presented by the astrophysicist Edwin Hubble (1889-1953) in 1929 and who documented the phenomenon, is expanding at a speed that correlates to the speed at which its elements are going away from each other which means that the universe is not static.

- That this universe is cooling while, as supposed in the Bing Bang Theory itself, it was very hot in the beginning. Scientists Arno Allan Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson 35 recorded in 1965 the remains of that explosion. They did so by documenting and measuring high-thermal cosmic microwave

radiation 36 that remained from the first universal instances. This means that the universe develops and from what seems to be solid matter, life evolved. Finally..

35 Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were granted the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1978 because of this discovery.

36 2.725 degree Kelvin (-454.765 degree Fahrenheit, -270.425 degree Celsius

There has been discoveries of light elements such as hydrogen and helium. These discoveries support the Big Bang Theory which remains one of the most probable theories on the beginning of the universe.

You find me on this matter, in my heart and soul, stand before many questions that those great scientific discoveries presented. Those are questions in which science, theology, and philosophy intertwine. Such questions lead us to very logical philosophical questions on the possibility of the beginning of the universe as a reaction to a supernatural force. With this, the questions deepen and intertwine.

The common belief in science is that nothing exists outside of the things universal and materialistic nature that is composed entirely of matter and energy. Until now, this notion is supported with the deepest and greatest theories that examined the basic properties of matter. The deepest and most important of these theories up to now is Quantum Theory that attempts to provide a deeper explanation for the relation between

materialistic molecules and radiations. Important as well are the other hypotheses stemming from the Quantum Theory of which Werner Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" was the most important. This principle, relatively and comparatively—and when contrasted to the Quantum Theory from which it originated, showed the limit to our earthly sciences. That is because man, who still **dwells experimentally on the surface of things and draws from them the knowledge of their composition, acquires experience from there and experiences what such things have.**

But, the world isn't presented to man through experience only. Experience only presents to man a world composed entirely of a he and a she.³⁴

Naturally, you find me here facing new questions in which our mundanely sciences intertwine too with our spirituals, especially the spirituals that originate from the ancient oriental religions and philosophies. This was clearly shown by the physicist Fritjof Capra in his book "Tao of Physics". Capra's book shows the deep philosophical questions of the ancient oriental religions and philosophies and shows the extent to which such questions match those presented by modern Physics.

That is because, naturally, a spark emerges from the depth of the world of things which was, still is, and shall remain to be subject to human experimentation by the human who is

³⁴ Ibid.

interacting with this world and trying to explore it. That spark is what brings all of the questions back into the depths of the human self or probably the depths of the living and eternal relation between the self and its depths which Martin Buber calls the I and the Thou.

On this matter, you find me contemplating divinity from the perspective of my relation with my self. Here, I honestly say that this relation, which was never stemming from a personal fear of a god that judges and/or condemns, has become with time deeper and more sensitive.

I find myself calmly becoming rationally, philosophically, and in the depths of my heart, that is spiritually, a believer who believes in a grand mystery that surpasses and contains me but I cannot define it.

Therefore, you find me at this age reading again and with a new perspective the holy books of our religions like the Book of Genesis which has been attracting me often:

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..
And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.**

and he separated the light from the darkness.. And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.”..And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so... And God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees.. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years.. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”.. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.”..”So God created mankind in his own image, male and female he created them... And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

I have grown to touch upon the spiritual aspect for symbols that stem from those distant human attempts to understand the secret of creation. I find it very deep and honest and expressive of the true honest relationship between ancient people and their world.

From this stance, you find me today, with Fritjof Capra and trying to find the path for a mind that has grown to become more interactive with its own depths, attempting to touch upon the dimensions of those religions and ancient eastern philosophies that intersect with what our modern sciences has reached. Here, I recall a special Buddhist text that is purported to be very ancient. The text was the one Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the great mystic, used in prefacing her timeless work "The Secret Doctrine" when addressing what is prior to creations:

The Eternal Parent (Space), wrapped in her ever invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven eternities.

Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of duration.

Universal mind was not, for there were no Ah-hi (celestial beings) to contain it.

The seven ways to bliss (Moksha or Nirvana) were not. The great causes of misery (Nidana† and Maya) were not, for there was no one to produce and get ensnared by them.

Darkness alone filled the boundless all.³⁵

I find myself again before another human attempt to explain the beginning of the universe and the start of life and humans.

³⁵ The Secret Doctrine by H. P. Blavatsky Vol. 1, Pages 35-40 STANZA I. (Referenced by the Translator).

That has all become through my live relation with this universe that I am part of and live in as a human in that relation. But..

5

Between me and myself, with my mind and soul, I still wonder on the reality and essence of the tangible existence of that great mystery that surpasses me and which they refer to as divinity. My answer to this contemplation is "yes, definitely, there is a grand mystery that is alive and that surpasses and contains us all"..

That is because, if we are merely matter that is composed of atoms and energy, that is to say mere dust which is incomparable to the vastness and grandeur of the universe, then we are – and here lies the great miracle, dust that thinks, dreams, loves, and suffers. That is if we weren't to say that we are the dust of divinity.

This is what i truly feel, this is what I have become completely convinced with. It is that there is an entity that surpasses us. There is a self, if not a real dimension that surpasses the human who feels it. Therefore, I have become completely convinced that it is imperative to seek to comprehend that self if we wanted to truly understand ourselves.

This dimension is..

the universe, that absolute and nonentity. and from it ...

it is that quiescence, if you will, and that movement, matter, and energy. Also...

It is that pain in our hearts, that happiness, and that love..

(In short)..

It is all that we know and will know and especially, all that which we aren't unaware of and will remain unaware of..

For me, it is the only and essential proof on the reality of that which surpasses us and that we cannot identify but call divinity.

This is what I have become to believe with all of my heart and soul. That is the divinity that I, honestly and naively, summon when I am alone saying "**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven**".

While I am certain that those deep questions related to the nature of that entity and its dimension shall remain with me and with humanity until the end.

Those questions are related to true gnosis that I have already addressed in the previous chapter.

I, as many of you, still try, from my humble perspective, to comprehend that dimensions of that gnosis. That is because..

I want to know myself.

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