Afterword: The Face of the Praised

I have fashioned thee as a work of art for Myself.

QUR’AN, 20:41

I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee.

DEUTERONOMY, 18:18

Verily of an immense magnitude is thy nature.

QUR’AN, 68:4

Almost as a rule, one finds the following calligraphic inscription in the mihrabs of Bosnian mosques: “Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the mihrab.” One finds similar inscriptions in the mosques of other areas, but little detailed research has been done on them. The Zachariah in the inscription is the prophet of God and priest at the Mosque or Temple in Sion, the father of the prophet John, the Baptist, and the person upon whom he enters is the Virgin Mary, the mother of the Messiah Jesus. The inscription is one part of a Qur’anic verse that refers to Mary in the mihrab of the Mosque.

For Muslim tradition, the mihrab is the symbolic centre or focus of the mosque and so of all human life. What does the inscription mean and why is it found at this central place?

Those who first wrote this unfinished sentence in their mihrabs must have had clear answers to these questions. Their descendants today do not. They have either lost or forgotten them. What has been forgotten can be recalled, however, as there is no true forgetting, at least in the core of the self or for the real. Forgetting is simply a condition of the self where its indomitable core is obscured by false representations and false knowledge.

1 The full verse runs as follows (Qur’an, 3:37): “Her Lord received the child with gracious favour, and by His goodness she grew up comely, Zachariah taking charge of her. Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the miḥrāb, he found her provisioned. ‘Mary,’ he said, ‘how comes this to thee?’ ‘From God,’ she said. Truly God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning.’"
The core is cut off from the periphery, which comprises the body, analytic reason, the passions, and so forth. The periphery then appears to be the entire self, but what is lost can be found, so long as it is true. The truth cannot be lost. Only human beings can be lost. When we find ourselves, we also find the truth hidden from us. The inscription at the heart of the mihrab offers us signifiers with ontological, cosmological, anthropological, and psychological references. To understand them, we must have recourse to the framework of traditional intellectuality and perennial wisdom.

The disclosure of these signifiers is of crucial importance for the process of liberation from forgetting or oblivion. Liberating ourselves, we disclose or discover our hearts as treasuries of immediate knowledge – knowledge which does not depend on anything external, but on which human self-realization itself depends. In this way, we may realize ourselves in line with our authentic nature. Memory or recollection is therefore our highest possibility. In it, we find both our beginning and our end.

Finding our beginning and end entails the discovery of both arcs of our existence – the first marking universal descent from the One, the other ascent to the same One. This descent begins in the Light of the Praised, the universal "seed," the maternal prophecy, and the principle of reception in absolute purity, quietude, and service. The end of ascent is the Praised as the universal "fruit."

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2 The heart is one of the key concepts for this discourse. The immediate reference is the physical heart, the central organ of the individual through which the blood, as bearer of life, must pass. In the modern period, this meaning has become practically the only one, while for traditional intellectuality it has always been peripheral. In traditional teachings, the heart is considered the core of the self and the principle of the unity of human existence. As such, it is both source and end. All existence comes from it and returns to it, less in a temporal sequence than in absolute unity. The entire self is a manifestation of the heart. The human self entirely depends on the heart, but the reverse is not true. When a condition of the self is taken as independent of the heart and sufficient in itself, it may present an apparent obstacle to the harmony of the One in the many. In such a case, a departure takes place within the self, as it travels down within itself towards its lower and darker parts. Consciousness and power lack guidance and are applied as violence and ignorance: a boundary develops between the heart and the self in the form of hardening, rusting, and corruption. That the heart is the principle of the self does not mean it gives birth to phenomena or they to it. It is in and with all things and beyond them. The Holy Spirit descends upon and in it, so that it reveals the Living, through all His names scattered across the horizons and focused in the self. The heart is thus flow, the coincidence of coming into being and going out of being, of giving and receiving, waning and waxing, of inhalation and exhalation. It is Intellect as the recipient of knowledge and the maximum of closeness to the One.