

This material is strictly for non-commercial purposes only. It may be used for such a purpose provided it is reproduced without alteration or omission, and that a link is provided to the website www.tasawwuf.org. All other uses require the explicit written permission of the publisher.

Defining *Muhabbah* By Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad (db)

Allah ﷻ created certain attractive forces amongst His creation. When this attraction exists between two inanimate objects, it is called magnetism, an example of which is gravity. When it exists between two living beings, it is called affection, as illustrated by a well-known Arabic proverb:

A being is attracted toward its own.

As this affection intensifies and grows, it becomes *muhabbah* (love). The root of the word *muhabbah* is *hubba*, which translates to seed. A seed takes root when planted in the ground and is nourished by sunshine and rain; then, fragrant flowers and fruits come forth. In the same way, when the seed of *muhabbah* is planted in the human heart, it starts to flourish and slowly encompasses the entire being.

Psychologists agree that the word *muhabbah* applies to the heart's inclination toward a desired object. Imam al-Ghazali ﷺ defined *muhabbah* as "a human being's natural inclination towards such an object that gives joy." *Shaykh* Mehmood Kashani ﷺ said that *muhabbah* is the inclination of the inner self for the appreciation of beauty. Along the same lines, *Shaykh* Syed Muhammad Zoki Shah ﷺ wrote in his book "Sar-e-Dilbaraan" that *muhabbah* is a magnetism that pulls one towards another.

This attraction turns to infatuation as desire increases in the heart, and the heart becomes restless and uneasy. This restlessness grows until thoughts of the beloved consume the lover's entire being. Separation from the object of one's *muhabbah* becomes unbearable, and the heart remains dissatisfied, constantly craving more. The lover's thoughts become one with the beloved; the beloved's happiness becomes the lover's happiness; and the beloved's wants become the lover's wants. These are all results of *muhabbah*.

When explaining the words of the Prophet ﷺ "Wal Hubba Assasi," *Shaykh* Janab Qazi Muhammad Sulaiman Salman Mansurpuri ﷺ wrote in his book "Rahmah lil-Alameen," that *muhabbah* is strength of heart; *muhabbah* is nourishment for the soul; *muhabbah* is coolness of the eyes. *Muhabbah* is everlasting life - the life of the heart, the success of life, and the extension of that success. Thus, *muhabbah* is everything.

Muhabbah forms the foundation of a community as hearts are drawn to one another. Intentions of the heart and mind strengthen *muhabbah*, and attraction grows so that the lover becomes absorbed in the beloved. A constant burning and want is ignited within the lover, and the heart becomes content with handling any anxiety for the sake of his beloved.

As one begins to see the effects of *muhabbah*, hardship and struggle become easy to handle. The heart becomes preoccupied with thoughts of getting closer to the beloved, and thoughts

other than those of the beloved melt away. Ibn Sina, the famous philosopher, explained that *muhabbah* is entrenched in every aspect of creation - be it elements, minerals, plants or animals.

Many analysts hold the opinion that *muhabbah* cannot be completely explained, because the explanation of *muhabbah* is *muhabbah* itself. *Muhabbah* is an emotion that can only be recognized by intense desire and enthusiasm and not by the mind. The *mashaikh*¹, however, have tried to render an explanation for the benefit of *salikeen*².

1) *Shaykh* Abu Bakr Shibli ؒ was asked, “What is *muhabbah*?” He replied:

Love is a fire that ignites when it is truly realized within the senses and captivates the entire being within itself.

2) *Hadrat* Bayazid Bustami ؒ has said:

Muhabbah is to know that one’s abundant qualities are actually minute, whereas the beloved’s insignificant qualities are actually abundant. For example, Allah ﷻ loves His creation; He showers them with countless blessings and mercies daily, yet Allah ﷻ Himself stated in His Book that these blessings are few.

Say: Short is the enjoyment of this world (4:77)

On the other hand, the believers perform an insufficient amount of *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah ﷻ), but Allah ﷻ refers to this as abundant.

Men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise (33:35)

A poet expressed his passion thus:

*However minute the reward it is still abundant
Whatever thanks I can give it is still minute.*

3) *Hadrat* Junaid Baghdadi ؒ said:

Muhabbah grows to the extent that the beloved’s characteristics transfer into the lover and the two become indistinguishable.

When a light bulb is lit, only the main light source can be seen from afar, and not the surrounding glass. In the same way, the lover loses and forgets himself in the beloved. In the translation of a *hadith*, we are told that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah said, “If there would be a Prophet after me, it would be Umar (ؓ).” It is evident from Islamic teachings and history that *Hadrat* Abu Bakr ؓ was in fact much closer to the Prophet ﷺ. However, our scholars have written that *Hadrat* Abu Bakr ؓ lost himself in the Prophet ﷺ to such a degree that the two

¹ *Mashaikh* is the plural form of *shaykh*, a spiritual guide on the path of self purification (*tasawwuf*).

² A *salik* is a seeker on the path of *tasawwuf*.

became indistinguishable, and so, if a Companion (*Sahabi*) were to attain the status of a prophet after the Messenger ﷺ of Allah, it would have been *Hadrat Umar* ﷺ.

Majnun's love for Layla³ reached a peak, and in this state, someone said to him, "Layla is coming!" Majnun jumped up and said, "I myself am Layla!" This is the lover completely losing himself in his beloved.

Love and lover are erased and only the beloved remains.

4) *Shaykh* Abdul Qadir Jilani ﷺ said:

Muhabbah is a veil between lover and beloved, and the lover becomes successful in his *muhabbah* when he loses himself in the beloved (*fana*). When a lover starts on this road of *muhabbah*, he must sacrifice both body and soul in order to achieve his goal. He must sacrifice both character and attributes for his beloved.

5) *Hadrat* Husain bin Mansur Hallaj ﷺ stated:

The reality of *muhabbah* is to abandon one's qualities to become one with the beloved.

6) Imam Siri Shakti ﷺ said that true *muhabbah* does not exist between two people until they say, "I am yours and you are mine." Allah ﷻ will become ours if we surrender our wills to Him, leaving everything, including our futures and hopes, to Him.

7) *Hadrat* Abu Abdullah Qarshi ﷺ said:

The reality of *muhabbah* is to surrender all of oneself to the beloved, leaving nothing for oneself.

8) *Hadrat* Abu 'Ali Rudbari ﷺ said:

Muhabbah is to acquire submission and to leave one's wants.

9) *Hadrat* Rohim ﷺ explained:

Muhabbah is drawing closer to the beloved in every state and situation, whether the beloved is attentive to the lover or not.

10) *Shaykh* Abu Bakr Kasani ﷺ said:

Muhabbah is to leave everything for the sake of achieving the goal, which is the beloved.

11) Imam Khwaja Yahya Ma'az ﷺ said:

³ *Layla and Majnun* is a classical love story originally from Arab folklore. The myth has been influential for Middle Eastern poets, especially *sufi* writers in whose literature the name Layla suggests a reference to their concept of the Beloved.

The reality of *muhabbah* is that it does not decrease with the non-responsiveness of the beloved. Likewise, it does not increase any more with the close attention of the beloved.

12) *Shaykh* Shibli ؒ was imprisoned because people considered him insane. Once some people came to visit him, and he asked “Who are you?” They replied, “Your friends.” At this he started throwing stones at them, so they ran. *Shaykh* Shibli ؒ said to them:

If you were really my friends and well wishers, you would not run from my punishment.

A true friend wants only good fortune, and to run from good fortune is stupidity.

13) A pious elder is known to have said:

Only he whose cup of love is filled can see the Beloved.

Imam Wisal Shirazi ؒ is quoted as saying, “My friend, do whatever you will with me, but I will not leave you.”

14) *Hadrat* Shibli ؒ further commented that *muhabbah* means to love everything that the beloved likes, even if the lover himself dislikes it, and to dislike whatever the beloved dislikes, even if the lover himself likes it.

The lover loves only for the sake of the beloved and hates for the same. The lover should negate everything, even himself, and acknowledge only the beloved. *Muhabbah* is restlessness that does not end until the lover is connected with the beloved; it is a fire that does not cool until the lover realizes his objective.

15) According to this *Faqir*⁴, *muhabbah* is an extreme anxiety that does not diminish even after the object of love is attained. *Muhabbah* is a fire that does not cool even after witnessing the beloved. A lover cried out “Fire!” and all the townspeople gathered around but saw no fire. They asked where the fire was, and this lover replied:

(It is) the Fire of Allah kindled (to a blaze), that which does mount to the heart (104: 6-7)

*I drank and drank from the wine of love
Neither is the wine finished nor my thirst quenched.*

⁴ *Faqir* literally means “a needy and dependant person.” Here the word is used by the author, Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad (db), to depict his own need and helplessness in front of the Creator.