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## **Defining *Ishq* By Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad (db)**

The literal definition of the word *ishq* is the attachment of the heart to something. It is derived from the word *ashkab*, a plant that dries and yellows after staying green for a certain amount of time. *Ishq Pichan* is the Hindi name of a parasitic plant that kills everything it encircles, rendering its prey dull and yellow. In Urdu, this same type of plant is called *akash bail*. In exactly the same way, *ishq* pales and weakens the body when it enters the heart.

Some believe the word *ishq* is not derived from any other word but is a root word itself. It has not been used anywhere in the Holy Quran, a possible reason being that the word *ishq* was slightly unpalatable to the original and pure Arabic. In the book *Qamoos*, *ishq* has been defined as a part of madness. *Shaykh* Muhiuddin ibn Arabi Quds رحمته الله said that the word *ishq* has been represented by the word *muhabbah* (love) in the Holy Quran. Allah ﷻ said:

*But those of faith are overflowing in their love for Allah. (2:165)*

When this love becomes engraved in the heart, the lover sees nothing but the beloved. This *muhabbah* flows like blood through the lover, who now sees the beloved in everything around him.

*By Allah, the sun does not rise nor set,  
But that You are in my heart and in my thoughts.  
I do not sit in the gathering of friends,  
But that You are my conversation among the people.  
I do not remember You in grief or joy,  
But that Your love is woven into my breath.  
I do not intend drinking water in thirst,  
But Your image I envision in the glass.  
If I had the strength to come  
I would, dragging my face or walking on my hands.*

This condition of the heart is called *ishq*. People have said *ishq* is intense love, but *Shaykh* Ibn Mansur رحمته الله said the following in his book “Laisan ul-Arab”:

*Ishq is the superlative form of muhabbah, extreme preoccupation with the beloved. This preoccupation can be both clean and unclean.*

*Shaykh* Ahmed bin Yahya رحمته الله was asked which of the two conditions of *ishq* and *muhabbah* is more praiseworthy, and he replied:

*Muhabbah, because ishq can become excessive.*

Hadrat Zoqi Shah Saheb ؒ said that man is the greatest of Allah's ﷻ creation. Therefore, *ishq* has also been connected to man's nature since it is the greatest form of *muhabbah*. There is no person who has not felt the emotion of *ishq*. The lover gains superior strength from the blessings of *ishq*, and he becomes lost in it.

*One leap of ishq widened my horizons,  
I used to think that the heavens and earth were limitless.*

*Ishq is the Sincerity of the Khalil,  
Ishq is the patience of Husain ؑ  
Ishq in the war of life is Badr and Hunain  
- Allama Iqbal*

*Ishq* has such power that it makes mere soil a part of history – for example, the mosque in Cordoba and Taj Mahal. Allama Iqbal has written in his famous poem “*Masjid-e-Qurtuba*”:

*Actions of the believer are enhanced through ishq,  
Ishq is true life and can never die.*

*Ishq is the breath of Jibril ؑ  
Ishq is the heart of Mustafa ﷺ  
Ishq is the Messenger of Allah ﷻ  
Ishq is the Word of Allah ﷻ  
-Allama Iqbal*

Intention and belief are strengthened by *ishq* to such an extent that the lover no longer fears anything, nor does any grief worry him.

*The believer is from ishq; ishq is from the believer.  
Ishq makes the impossible possible.*

Shaykh Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlvi ؒ wrote the following as his explanation of *ishq* in his book “Lam'aat”:

“A lover, a believer, believes that everything, all goodness, the believer's entire being, is only for the remembrance of Allah ﷻ, and he remains lost in the worship and remembrance of Allah ﷻ. This remembrance leads to restlessness within the lover, restlessness in getting close to the beloved, which gets stronger with each passing day. This increases to a point that it pains the lover to even take the beloved's name, and the lover feels as if his spirit will escape if he were to take the beloved's name.

*I tremble in the remembrance of my beloved.*

*Trembling which I feel in my bones.*

*Shaykh* Abul Qasim Junaid Baghdadi رحمته الله said:

*Ishq is a beautiful desire and gift that Allah ﷻ has made wajib on living creatures so that they can attain higher pleasures. This pleasure cannot be attained without love, an emotion that is present within the inner self. The possessors of this love are well aware of its tremendous worth. Every person is engulfed in the love of something through which he finds his path and reaches his destination. This is why such people enjoy a higher status than ordinary beings in this world. Hence, these lovers abandon whatever is tangible for the sake of something only heard of in stories (Tadhkirul Suluk).*

Imam al-Ghazali رحمته الله said that the lover should leap into the ocean of *ishq*, and he who is led ashore by the ocean's currents will be successful. If he drowns in his quest to get across, however, Allah ﷻ guarantees him the reward of his *ishq*. Imam al-Ghazali رحمته الله further states, "O friend, *ishq* turns the heart to blood, turns the eye into a river, tears clothes to rags, turns life to soil, and money into waste." *Ishq* is madness for Allah ﷻ.

*He who obeys Allah and His Messenger has already attained the highest achievement. (33: 71)*

*Shaykh* Zun Nun Misri رحمته الله was asked, "What is a true lover (*ashiq-sadiq*)?" The *shaykh* replied:

*"If you encounter someone with a heavy heart and troubled appearance, oft-crying and seeking death, and despite this, he is courteous and maintains his limits, know that he is a true lover. He is doing all this despite his troubles."*

Many have said that *ishq* is a fire. However, *Shaykh* Makhdun Sharfuddin Ahmed رحمته الله replied that if *ishq* were a fire, then a lover's face would not be drowned in tears. Some said that *ishq* is water, to which *Shaykh* Sharfuddin رحمته الله replied that hearts would not be burning if this were so. Still others said that *ishq* is a poison. If this is true, how is it that thousands of lovers are shouting and crying in desire and not dead?

It has also been said that *ishq* is hardship, but then, why is it that people are willing to give their lives to buy hardship? On the other hand, if *ishq* is luxury, then why do hearts burn because of it? In summation, everyone has tried to explain *ishq* in his or her own way, but no explanation has been able to come close.

To the author, *ishq* is a strong emotion that overwhelms the lover, and so, he yearns to unite with the beloved, losing himself in the process. If this is only the beginning of this journey, then what is its end? If anyone wants to search for *ishq*, let him search first for what aches the heart.

*Wherever in the world we could find heartache,  
We collected it and called it *ishq*.*

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