LOVE AS THE CENTER CONCEPT IN GLOBAL POWER CONFLICT: 
THE CASE OF TURKISH SUFISM AND RÜMİ

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Abstract

To be able to effectively deal with the dark side of mysticism, it has been proposed that mysticism should not lose connection with the analytical mode of thinking while it gives rise to intuitive mode of thinking or, simply, intuition. The exemplary form of perfect combination of these two modes comes out with respect to global power conflict. A mystical approach centering on the concept of love concerning the global power conflict can prove sound and effective in terms of this combination. More specifically, unlike other mystical traditions, Sufism as rooted and practiced in Asia Minor provides this exemplary form.

Thus, this expedition into Sufism in Turkey helps come to conclusions: 1) Love is the core concept of mysticism or the mystical side of religion. 2) To avoid the dark side of mysticism, the concept of love that is oriented toward God is ever again the first hand remedy to employ in global power conflicts. Through mysticism and its basic notion of love, what seems to be a ferocious power struggle in the globe can turn into the feeling of mercy and desire of service for people.

Key Words: Love, Mysticism, Global Power Conflict, Turkish Sufism, Rümi.

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Özet


Introduction

The relationship between religion and mysticism is an intriguing one to clarify. Although the best definitions of religion and mysticism go in the same line, these two are not the same. However, since there is a strong connection between mysticism and religion, one can contend that mysticism is as old as religion and the relationship between is one of the fundamental subject matters in the history of thought.

Since there is a strong connection between religion and mysticism (or spirituality), it might be rewarding to study the two in a similar way. When religion is the locus of attention, there is always mention about the dark side of religion and the bright side of it as well. Likewise, it is also possible to talk about the dark side and the bright side of mysticism. Religion, there is no doubt, is a powerful tool when utilized properly for social and international peace. Yet, when abused, it can also add up to social and international crises. Similarly, mysticism has many benefits for people. For instance, one of the benefits among many that religion provides is paving the way for a mutual understanding between different cultures. Like religion, however, mysticism too has a dark side. One of the reasons why there is a dark side to mysticism is that it might lead people to lose touch with reality and thus possibly with the sense of responsibility.
It is really hard to bring forth a perfect definition of religion. Likewise, it is really hard to come up with a definition of mysticism that is all inclusive of all forms of mysticism as practiced in all over the globe. Moreover, one can easily contend that it is even harder to describe the definite relationship between religion and mysticism. And considering the fact that spirituality is often defined in a way similar to mysticism, it is likewise harder to describe the definite relationship between religion and spirituality. In short, one of the major disadvantages of doing religious studies and even social scientific studies of religion is the hardship experienced in coming up with inclusive definitions of the terms of religion, mysticism and spirituality.

However, in an opposing state to this disadvantage, one major advantage of studying religion scholarly is to be able to stretch the findings and insights of a research to other realms of investigation such as philosophy, science, cultural studies, literary critique, etc. For example, the relation between religion and mysticism or the relation between religion and spirituality is very similar to the relation between Reason and Intuition as one of the most dealt-with subjects in the history of thought.

Both the necessity of reason and the necessity of intuition are generally recognized in both religion and philosophy. It is even so when it comes to scientific investigation. The necessity of reason and how it is utilized in science is evident. What is not widely recognized is the utilization of intuition in scientific investigation. However, just to mention one written work about this case, the French Mathematician Jacques Hadamard’s *The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field* (1945) is full of examples as to how intuition or, simply, unconscious mind is utilized in mathematics, which is the peak level of analytical thinking. The point in making here is that a scholar of religious studies can convey insights that come out through studying religion or simply religious texts to other realms of investigation such as the old problem of describing the relationship between Reason and Intelligence. In fact, this is an old problem that can be found as existing in every human culture, considering the fact that “human intelligence attained facts throughout history in two major ways: reason and intuition” (Meriç, 1998: 43).

Consequently, one can contend that insights derived from religious texts are not just abstract perceptions confined to religious realm. Religious insights can turn into general understanding, knowledge and truth that are applicable to other realms of investigation. And one commentary by Rûmî, the great Turkish mystic, concerning the Quranic verse that narrates the prayer of Solomon, provides a striking example as a peaceful account to be espoused in global power conflicts.

**Definitions: Religion, Mysticism, and Spirituality**

*Defining religion.* As we pointed out before, it is really difficult to come up with inclusive definitions concerning the terms of religion, mysticism and, as a relatively new one, spirituality.
The problem with any definition of religion is whether it is comprehensive of all perceptions of religion in the globe. Thus, any one definition of religion coming from one scholar of one certain religious tradition might be criticized severely and ruled out by another scholar of another religious tradition. Religion is also difficult to define considering the wide range approval of the fact that there are various "religious forms of atheism" (Taliaferro, 1996: 451). Philosophers of religion argue that believing in only one God is not necessary for a belief system to be defined as religion. As Philosopher Charles Taliaferro wisely stated: "The term 'religion' is not at all easy to define... with precision. A necessary condition for being a 'religion' cannot be the belief that there is a God (Theravada Buddhism is a religion which, in the main, is atheistic)" (Taliaferro, 1996: 447). As a matter of fact, whether any form of Buddhism is atheistic or not is debatable (Yaran, 2004). Yet, following the same logic, it can be argued that even 'non-religious' forms of atheism should be regarded as religion. Because, generally, the non-religious forms of atheism are dependent on the premise that there is no god, as opposed to various forms of theism dependent on the idea that there is God. In other words, whereas a theist tries to prove that there is God, an atheist tries to prove otherwise, namely, that there is no god. Furthermore, an extension of this 'similarity' would be that neither the claim that there is God nor the one that there is no god can be proved. Anyhow, it is not inconsistent to think that the various forms of atheism dependent on the idea that there is no god can be regarded as religion.

The issue can be more delicate than whether to consider atheism as religion or not. When going to relatively old-fashioned books written in the category of religious studies, one may find many definitions of religion that are not easily rendered to be acceptable even among scholars of monotheistic traditions of religion. For example, the following definition of religion seems to be perfectly inclusive of all religious traditions: "Religion is a felt practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings" (Thouless, 1923: 4). This definition is perfectly inclusive of both monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions. However, on a specific level, a scholar of Islam might not take it as a basic formulation for a definition of religion on the grounds that it has more Christian flavor to it than that of Islam. To make this point clear, it would be useful to mention a conversation between a Turkish intellectual, Burhan Toprak, and a scholar of Islam, Abdülhakim Arvasi, that took place sometime in the 1930s. A friend of Burhan Toprak, Necip Fazil, an eminent Turkish poet and writer who saw his friend at the time as leaning toward some type of Christian mysticism because of his education in France, took him to Abdülhakim Arvasi, seemingly out of religious zeal. The following conversation took place between the two:

-What would you say about Jesus Christ?

«-A true prophet without father...»

And silence...

-What is the difference there compared to our prophet [the prophet of Islam]?
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«–Huge...»

–Like how?..

«–Jesus Christ was the highest level in angelic quality; [but] there was something that lacked in him compared to the prophet of Islam.»

And silence...

–What was it that lacked in him sir?

«–His humanness!...» (Fazıl, 1999: 141).

Jesus Christ, according to Arvasi, was a superhuman being but this did not put him to a higher level than that of the prophet of Islam. Thus, this perception might be opposed to the definition mentioned above. In other words, the definition in question can actually be perceived as perfectly inclusive of both monotheistic and polytheistic religions. Yet the emphasis or the wording of the definition might still stir controversy.

It seems that finding proper and inclusive definitions of the terms is still one of the basic activities of scholars of religion. Definitions of terms change as though they are in flux almost directly in accordance with time. On the other hand, in general, scholars of religion tend to espouse definitions of religion that reflect their interests and expertise. For example, Kenneth Pargament, a psychologist of religion, espouses the definition that religion is "a process, a search for significance in ways related to the sacred", which reflects a perspective "tailored to the psychological venture" (1997: 32). This suggests that an inclusive definition of religion must also be inclusive in terms of scholarly interest and expertise.

Defining mysticism. There would appear three problems with trying to find an inclusive definition of mysticism: its relation with religion, the many forms of mysticism, and whether the term mysticism is identical to the term spirituality.

There definitely are religious and non-religious forms of mysticism. And the central aspect of mysticism in terms of defining it is mystical experience or the tendency or the search for it. In order for people to be defined as mystics or as inclined to have mystical experiences, they do not have to be following certain religious traditions (Kakar, 1991). However, when talking about mysticism, the most intriguing characteristic of it is its relationship with religious traditions, i.e., whether it goes in accord with them or not. Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar makes a distinction between Hinduism and Abrahamic religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (1991: 1-2). Considering that Buddhism too goes in the same line with Hinduism in terms of this distinction, one should clarify that in the Abrahamic religious traditions mysticism must not generally be interpreted against their theological sets of teachings. For example, in the Islamic religious traditions, it does not seem to be even partially true that most of the Sufis went against Islamic theology, though there were harsh debates and not-always-hidden animosity between them and non-Sufi scholars of Islam. Actually, the first systematic endeavor of reconciliation of these two came from Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and the second
but the greater endeavor came from Aḥmad Fārūqī Sirhindī (d. 1624), whose masterpiece is called Maktūbāt (The Letters).

Another issue with defining mysticism in terms of its content is defining religions with proportionality of mystical character. For instance, according to Ali Şeriatī (Ali Shariʿatī, d. 1977), a twentieth century Iranian sociologist, the strength of Christianity was extreme spirituality while that of Judaism was extremely materialistic in the sense that it was leaning toward physical reality (2003: 190).

The relationship between the concept of mysticism and the concept of spirituality in terms of their content borders must be considered as an important issue. One can contend that the two were being used interchangeably. When the word spirituality is mentioned especially with an adjective that ties it up with a certain religious tradition, the first concept that comes to mind is still mysticism. In other words, nowadays a distinction between them is made and considered but they were not widely perceived as separate concepts. To give an example, the conference book titled Islamic Spirituality does not actually make a firm distinction between Islamic mysticism and Islamic spirituality, though most of it tackles Islamic mysticism, i.e., Sufism (Nasr, 1989; Nasr, 1991).

All these matters considered, it becomes apparent that one should espouse a definition of mysticism that can be applicable to all forms of it. The following definition made by M. Cox seems to be so: Mysticism is “the ‘unitive acquisition of knowledge that is inaccessible to normal understanding’” (as cited in Fontana, 2003: 111). Of course, this definition might also bring up the issue of whether to call people of rational mysticism as mystics or not. Evidently, the endeavor to come up with inclusive definitions of terms is something that must be resumed when it is just thought to be over.

**Defining spirituality.** Like religion and mysticism, it is hard to find an inclusive definition of spirituality. One can contend that “defining spiritual and spirituality is even more difficult than defining religion. Compared with the word religion, psychologists made few attempts to define spirituality, and there is no denying that it is something of a nebulous concept” (Fontana, 2003: 11). We assume that the same holds true for mysticism. In other words, defining spirituality is again more difficult than defining mysticism. What makes it more difficult is that there is much more resemblance between spirituality and mysticism than that which is between spirituality and religion. In fact, “the term ‘religion’ is being used by scholars in an increasingly narrow sense; its meaning is restricted to institutionally based dogma, rituals, and traditions. In contrast, the term ‘spiritual’ is reserved for an inner, more personal process” (Pargament, 1997: 38). In short, the closeness of contents between spirituality and mysticism adds up to the difficulty of defining. Nevertheless, it seems that the term spirituality is a more lay term than mysticism.

The term spirituality also seems to have a larger content than that of religion. Because “the term spirituality is also sometimes taken to indicate an openness to the
spiritual teachings in all religions and schools of thought, rather than a dogmatic rejection of everything that does not come from one’s own favored tradition” (Fontana, 2003: 12).

Another important issue with defining spirituality inclusively is whether it stands against the notion of material world. Does a spiritual person deny the material world in favor of a spiritual one? To answer this question, to be exact, inclusive forms of the definitions of spirituality are not supposed to include denying material world. However, it should also be realized that, concerning the content and connotations of spirituality, “inviting the label ‘spiritual’ adds luster and legitimacy to any number of values and practices, but the label may ultimately lose meaning and power when it is separated from its sacred one” (Pargament, 1997: 465).

Ken Wilber, a renowned figure of spirituality, tried to describe an inclusive content of definition in his Integral Psychology (2000), which Psychologist Frances Vaughan summarized as follows: “a) Spirituality involves the highest levels of any of the developmental lines, for example, cognitive, moral, emotional, and interpersonal; b) spirituality is itself a separate developmental line; c) spirituality is an attitude (such as openness to love) at any stage; and d) spirituality involves peak experiences not stages. An integral perspective would presumably include all these different views, and others as well” (Vaughan, 2002: 16).

Trying to inclusively define the terms religion, mysticism and spirituality poses many problems. One can contend that each inclusive definition of these terms may also apply to each of them separately. It is not unwise to think that any inclusive definition of them would be subjected to reconsideration just when it is thought to be the final one.

In an effort to define these terms, one can take refuge in the Aristotelian theory concerning conceptual relations. According to this theory, there can be four types of relationships between concepts: 1) Equality: two concepts can be equal in terms of their contents (what is a member of A is also a member of B). 2) Opposition: two concepts can be opposed to each other in terms of their contents (what is a member of A is not a member of B and vice versa). 3) Full inclusion: the content of A fully includes the content of B (what is a member of B is also a member of A, but some members of A are not members of B). 4) Short inclusion: A and B partly includes one another (while some members of A are not members of B, some are also members of B and vice versa) (Taylan, 1988: 125).

Based on the four Aristotelian types of relations among concepts, the first two types of relations can easily be ruled out. The second two types of relations are the realm in which one can find or establish the relations between religion, mysticism and spirituality.

On the one hand, it can be contended that the relationship between religion, mysticism and spirituality as specific terms, given that they might mean reference to organized communities, is like the following: Religion includes mysticism, which
includes spirituality. On the other hand, the forth type of relationship can apply to any pair of these concepts separately. That is, some members of the scope of the concept of religion (i.e., some religions) may not be spiritual. Moreover, some forms of spirituality may not be included in the category of religion since they may not have the basic components of religion such as creed and belief system.

The Structure of Islam and the Substance of Islamic Spirituality

Power struggle in every branch of life, to be realistic, is an occurrence that individuals, groups of people and larger communities and societies might get exposed to in the course of their lives. In a sense, it is a part of life. It is apparent that Islam, going along with the notion of justice since its birth, announced and provided its adherents with accounts concerning power struggle. However, before going further to investigate these accounts, it is appropriate and somewhat necessary to present a general picture of Islam, i.e., the basic structure or the most fundamental components of Islam, which can also be seen as providing insight concerning the definitions of religion, mysticism, and spirituality. This seems necessary because we are mostly inclined to explore the mystical or spiritual flavor in the Islamic approach toward power struggle.

The Hadith of Gabriel. When talking about the most fundamental picture of Islam, the first thing that comes to mind is the hadith of Gabriel, as one of the most crucial pieces of basic Islamic texts, because it most clearly presents the fundamental structure of Islam. In other words, in terms of presenting a precise picture of Islam, the hadith of Gabriel is probably the most crucial piece of text among the corpus of the hadiths, the collection of the sayings, conducts and approvals-through-silence of the prophet of Islam. The hadith of Gabriel as mentioned in the hadith book of Bukhari is the following:

Musaddad told us and said: Ismā'il Ibn Ibrāhīm told us: Abū Ḥayyān At-Taymī from Abū Zur'a and from Abū Hurayra, and he [Abū Hurayra] said: The Prophet —peace be upon him— was one day out with people and the angel Gabriel [one of the archangels, Jibrīl] came to him and said: What is ʾiḥšān [bestowal]? The Prophet said: «ʾIḥšān is that you worship God as if you see Him [at the same time]. Though you do not see Him, He sees you.» Gabriel said: What is ʾiḥšān [bestowal]? The Prophet said: «Iḥšān is that you worship God as if you see Him [at the same time]. Though you do not see Him, He sees you.» Gabriel said: When is the doomsday? The Prophet said: «The one who is being asked about it does not know any better than the one who is asking. But I will tell you about its situation: It is when the concubine gives birth to her master and when the vulgar shepherds of camels brag about having built constructions. There are five things that nobody knows except God. » Then the Prophet read the verse "Only God has the knowledge of doomsday" [Loqmān, 31: 34]. After Gabriel had left, the Prophet turned back and said: «Get him back.» They [went after him but] did not see anything. And the Prophet said: «That was
Gabriel; he came so that he would teach people their religion» (Bukhārī, w.date: 25-26 [Kitābu’l-Īmān: 2; bāb: 37; hadith no.: 57, 58]).

As can be seen, there are three fundamental questions and one extra question in the hadith of Gabriel. The first three questions actually clarify and deal with the three fundamental components of Islam, which can also be applied to any religion. The fourth question, on the other hand, clarifies and deals with the necessary psychology of being a Muslim. According to this notion raised up in the fourth question, one can contend that Muslims are not supposed to live in the past nor in the future; on the contrary, they are required to live in ‘here’ and ‘now’.

The first three questions that mark the components of Islam bring to our attention two crucial distinctions, one being between theory (doctrine, mentality, īmān) and practice (doing good deeds, ʾislām) and the other being between analytic mode of thinking (īmān + ʾislām) and intuitive mode of thinking (iḥsān). Somebody who has the two components is considered as the person who has a sound mentality and practice. Besides, somebody who has all three (īmān + ʾislām + iḥsān) is that who gets immersed in the first two components. In other words, the notion of worshipping God as if the one who prays sees Him is more related to intuitive mode of thinking than analytic mode of thinking: it does address heart more than mind. Interestingly, the two most profound Islamic sciences, Kalām, as the science of Islamic creed which is the extension of the notion of īmān, and Fiqh as the science of Islamic Law which is the extension of the notion of ʾislām, are actually rational-analytic sciences in terms of their dealing with the basic Islamic texts. On the other hand, the third most basic Islamic science, Sufism or Islamic mysticism, often times does not employ a rational-analytic way of thinking. Moreover, it is widely accepted that the true nature of mystical experience is not comprehensible through intellect.

One should also bear in mind that the concept of ʾislām as mentioned in the hadith of Gabriel is not the same as the religion of Islam. The term ʾislām as mentioned in the hadith of Gabriel only refers to the practical side of Islam. In other words, the religion of Islam consists of not only ʾislām meaning the practical side of the religion of Islam but of all the three, īmān, ʾislām, and iḥsān (Sirhindī, w.date: 1/50). As a matter of fact, this is actually pointed out in the last sentence of the hadith.

The hadith of Gabriel is crucial in that it presents a perfect depiction of Islam. Throughout the history of Islamic sciences, many scholars of Islam pointed out the importance of this hadith. For instance, concerning the case, Ibn Daqīq Al-Ḥidī (d. 1302) says the following: “This is a hadith of great importance that contains all of the outward and inward duties of religious activity and that all knowledge of shari‘a [Islamic Law or the religion of Islam] turns to and is branched out from, because it includes all knowledge of Sunnah [the prophetic tradition of the religion of Islam]. It is to Sunnah like mother in the same way the first chapter of the Quran, Al-ʾĀtiḥā, is called ‘the mother of the Quran’ since it has a unique quality of containing the meanings of the Quran” (Al-Buğā & Mistū, w.date: 16).
Moreover, given that there is a strong connection between the Quran as the first source of the religion of Islam and the corpus of hadiths, which is in essence the extension of the Quran itself, one can put forth the idea that there is actually a basis of the hadith in the Quran itself. In fact, the Quranic basis of the hadith of Gabriel seems to be the Quranic chapter called Al-'Aşr (meaning time or declining day) that consists of only three verses:

1. By the declining day,
2. Lo! Man is in a state of loss,
3. Save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance (Quran, w.date: 449 [Al-'Aşr: 1-3]).

It seems that the third verse of this chapter includes the first three notions raised in the hadith of Gabriel. The part of the verse “those who believe” addresses the concept of īmān. The part “(those who) do good works” addresses the concept of islām. And the part of the verse “(those who) exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance” addresses the concept of iḥsān. On the other hand, considering the fact that the original name of this chapter, Al-'Aşr, can mean both time and declining day as the translator preferred, one can contend that the chapter has also reference to the psychology of Muslim adherents, which the hadith clearly encouraged them to espouse as to living 'here' and 'now'. With respect to the importance of the chapter Al-'Aşr being the basis of the hadith of Gabriel, it should also be taken into account that the chapter Al-'Aşr is actually referred to as the salvation theory of Islam (Yaran, 2004).

The first two concepts (īmān + islām) address the belief system and the practical side of the religion of Islam. The third concept addresses Islamic mysticism (Sufism) or the spiritual side of the religion of Islam. These three concepts can also be expressed in many other ways. For instance, it can be said that whereas the first concept is related to knowledge, the second concept is related to action or conduct. On the other hand, the third concept is related to religious sincerity (Sirhindi, w.date: 1/71; 1: 86; 1: 218; 3: 18, 25; 3: 108). This amounts to say that whereas the first two concepts exalt the good mentality and conduct that Islam wants Muslims to have, the third concept exalts the concept of love that Islam wants them to have. Hence, whereas īmān and islām are related to mentality and practice, iḥsān is related to love.

The center concept of Islamic mysticism is love, since it is a way to God through love. In fact, the Quranic verses encouraging the prophet of Islam to be patient with Aşhāb-i Şuffa, the poorest companions of the prophet that were the root community of Sufis, emphasizes their main attribute as love. These two verses are the following:

1 For further insight on the importance of this Quranic chapter and how it included Islamic creed, deed, and spirituality, see: (Ibn 'Āshūr, w.date: 15/528-534). I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Sarıoğlu of İstanbul University, who first gave me the idea about the Quranic chapter of Al-'Aşr being the basis or the ‘source’ of the hadith of Gabriel.
Repel not those who call upon their Lord at morn [morning] and evening, seeking His countenance. Thou art not accountable for them in aught, nor are they accountable for thee in aught, that thou shouldst repel them and be of the wrong-doers (Quran, w.date: 112 [Al-An‘ām: 52]).

And keep thy soul content
With those who call
On their Lord morning
And evening, seeking
His Face; and let not
Thine eyes pass beyond them,
Seeking the pomp and glitter
Of this Life; nor obey
Any whose heart We
Have permitted to neglect
The remembrance of Us,
One who follows his own
Desires, whose case has
Gone beyond all bounds (Quran, 1968: 737-8 [Kahf: 28]).

Aşḥāb-i Şuffa, believed to be the first ‘Sufi’ community, was a group of people who were extremely poor. Yet they were extremely enthusiastic about their spiritual journey to God. In fact, the two above-mentioned verses consider their love towards God as their primary concern. Because, as recorded in the verses, they do call upon their God both in the morning and evening, but they do this in a situation in which they seek to see God. Hence, their main characteristic is their love towards God. They seek God’s countenance or face. The original Arabic word in both of the verses translated as countenance or face is ṭawḥī, which, according to Abdullah Yusuf, “is used for God’s Grace or Presence, the highest aim of spiritual aspiration” (in Quran, 1968: 302 [footnote: 870]). In other words, God wants his prophet not to repent and not to be impatient with “the true servants of” Himself who “are those whose hearts turned to Him morning, noon, and night, and who seek not worldly gain, but God’s Grace, God’s own Self, His Presence and nearness. ‘Face’ is the symbol of Personality on Self. Even if they are poor in this world’s goods, their society gives far more inward and spiritual satisfaction than worldly attractions” (in Quran, 1968: 737 [footnote: 2369]).

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2 It should be noted here that Pickthall’s numbering of the Quranic verses does not at times go along with that of the mainstream translations of the Quran. This is because Pickthall, though he is accurate in his translations, sometimes picks up a complete verse as two verses. For instance, what appears to be the19th verse of this chapter in Pickthall’s translation, is actually only the last part of the 18th verse in the mainstream translations. For this reason, we also would like to use translations other than that of Pickthall. Besides, henceforward, when there is not an exact quote of verses, we will only cite chapter (sura) name, chapter number, and verse number without referring to any translation.
It would be rewarding to go into the specific reasons why these two verses were revealed. In Islamic sciences, especially in the science of *tafsir*, the science of commentary on the Quran, specific reasons why a single Quranic verse or a module of the Quranic verses that descended on the prophet provides insights and information about the context of the verses. To that purpose, the specific reason related to the above-mentioned second verse, which is similar but more dramatic than the first one, aptly helps clarify the dimension of love associated with those in search of spiritual enlightenment. Concerning the reason why the 28th verse of the Quranic chapter called *Kahf* descended, Commentator (Mufassir) Al-Baghawi (d. 1122) says the following: “This verse descended about ‘Uyayna Ibn Hisn Al-Fazārī, who came [possibly with some people of his kind] to the prophet and found around him a group of poor people. Amongst them was Salmān [of the Persian origin, one of the closest companions of the prophet]. He wore a velvet garment. And he was sweaty in that garment. In his hands, there was a little branch of date palm. He was peeling the branch and weaving the garment. ‘Uyayna said to the prophet (peace be upon him): ‘It does not disturb you, the smell of these? Yet we are the leaders and most prosperous people of the tribe of MuQar. If we become Muslims, all people of our tribe would become Muslims. What is averting us from following you is nobody but these people. Dispel them so that we follow you or assign us a time of gathering and them another one.’ That’s when God revealed the verse (be patient); that is, suppress yourself, O Muhammad! (with those who pray their Lord in the morning and evening)…” (2004: 3/132). And again, according to Qatādah (d. 735), one of the early scholars of Islam, “this verse was about Aṣlāb-i Şuffa. They were seven hundred poor people [usually living] in the mosque of the prophet. They were not dealing with trade, agriculture or livestock. They were simply performing a prayer [ṣalāh: namāz] and waiting for the next one” (2004: 3/132).

Although there is a greater purpose involved, the Quran does not want the prophet to be negligent of Aṣlāb-i Şuffa, the historical core community of modern-say Sufis. In other words, the prophet could have removed or dispelled Aṣlāb-i Şuffa in order to set aside special time for some noble people yet to become Muslims, because their becoming Muslims might have led the entire people of their tribes to become Muslims. But the Quran does not want the prophet to treat Aṣlāb-i Şuffa as companions of secondary importance even though there possibly was a greater benefit in laying them off. The argument of ‘Uyayna Ibn Hisn, the non-Muslim leader of the tribe of MuQar at the time, was of rational substance. However, the spiritual concern of the Quran associated with Aṣlāb-i Şuffa prevailed. Hence, love prevailed over rationality. In short, as Muhammad Tāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr (d. 1973), an eminent twentieth century commentator of the Quran, pointed out, both of the above-mentioned verses (An‘ām, 6: 52; Kahf, 18: 28) descended as refutation of the argument of the arrogant people who looked down on Aṣlāb-i Şuffa (Ibn ‘Āshūr, w.date: 7/304). Moreover, it would also be worthy of mention that, according to Ibn ‘Āshūr, the part that reads “‘seeking the pomp and glitter

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3 For the other similar reason of descent related to the Quranic chapter Al-An‘ām, 6: 52, see: (Al-Baghawi, 2004: 2/81).
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of this life’’ in the 28th verse of the 18th Quranic chapter4 “is an allusion on the foolishness of those non-Muslims who, rendering their concern focused on outward matters and ignoring to consider the spiritual realities and values, looked down on the company of the people of virtue, good reason and luminous heart. And they just made their concern focused on outward appearances” (Āshûr, w.date: 7/305).

The Idea of Power Struggle in Islam

The religion of Islam provides great accounts concerning power struggle among human beings. The prosperity, welfare and happiness of the adherents of Islam are of its primary concern. The religion of Islam does promise people with prosperity and happiness both in the world and hereafter. It should be noted that the majority of Muslims in the wake of Islam were people of lower ranks or simply needy people who were oppressed by the affluent and powerful tyrants of their society. In exalting the spirit of those oppressed people and giving them hope, the most primary text of Islam, the Quran, draws upon the historic struggle of the Jewish people living in Egypt at the time of Pharaoh:

Truly Pharaoh elated himself
In the land and broke up
Its people into sections,
Depressing a small group
Among them: their sons he slew,
But he kept alive their females:
For he was indeed
A maker of mischief.

And We wished to be
Gracious to those who were
Being depressed in the land,
To make them leaders (in faith)
And make them heirs (Quran, 1968: 1002 [Qaṣāṣ: 4, 5]).5

4 Another translation of the verse is the following: “Keep yourself content with those who call on their Rabb [Lord] morning and evening seeking His good pleasure; and let not your eyes turn away from them desiring the attraction of Worldly Life; nor obey the one whose heart We have permitted to neglect Our remembrance, who follows his own desires and goes to extremes in the conduct of his affairs” (Quran, 1997: 349).

5 It should be noted here that the two words in parentheses [(in faith)] in the translation of the verse is just the comment of the translator. The crucially important words in the last part of the verse literally mean leaders (imāms) and heirs or inheritors (wārithīn). Pickthall’s version concerning the translation of the verse is this: “And We desired to show favor unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors” (Quran, w.date: 278).
Another Quranic account of most salient nature concerning oppressed people is the following verse:

And We made a people,  
Considered weak (and of no account),  
Inheritors of lands  
In both East and West,—  
Lands whereon We sent  
Down Our blessings.  
The fair promise of thy Lord  
Was fulfilled for the Children  
Of Israel, because they had  
Patience and constancy,  
And We levelled to the ground  
The great Works and fine  
Buildings  
Which Pharaoh and his people  
Erected (with such pride) (Quran, 1968: 379-80 [A‘raf: 137]).

Now, three points should be made before going further. First, studying the reason why any verse, any module of verses or even any Quranic chapter descended, in an effort to develop an understanding of the Quran, is helpful. But it should be kept in mind that studying the reason of descent of any Quranic part does not mean to confine the meaning into a specific situation. In other words, the reason of descent, on the one hand, is illuminating the meaning. On the other hand, studying the reason of descent does not signify limitation on the meaning. This is actually a fundamental rule in the science of Quranic commentary that is strictly valid in terms of the verses related to religious verdicts or Islamic Law (Ferînûz, 1890: 11179). 6 However, it can also apply to a general understanding of the Quran.

The Quranic chapters that include the above-mentioned verses are Meccan, i.e., they were revealed in Mecca at a time Muslims were weak and even somewhat desperate. Thus, it can be contended that the above-mentioned verses were aimed not only to give the early Muslims hope but also to equip them with a consciousness about global power struggle.

6 It should be noted that this book seems to be ageless in the area of the Methodology of Islamic Law. And its writer, Mawлина Al-Qaṣī Muhammad Ferānūz (Mollā Khusrev), a fifteenth century Ottoman scholar of French origin, actually wrote it as an explanatory book on his own pamphlet called Mirqātū l-Vuṣūl.
Second, in a sense of historical continuity, the Quran keeps telling the story of Moses. Both of the Quranic chapters, that the above-mentioned verses are in, keep referring to the story of the prophet Moses, which is the most-told story in the Quran (Naseef, 2007: 115). The story of Moses is shattered throughout the Quran with its various aspects and is full of insights for the benefit of the early Muslim community. There is no doubt that the Quran, in telling the story of Moses in various contexts, was observant of the educational purposes of the Muslim community. It can be contended that, considering the insights one should derive from the story of Moses, the Quran wants Muslims to have a hermeneutic rigor of intelligence so that they can get closer to the notion of ‘what happened before can happen again’.

Third, considering the second distinction which stems from the hadith of Gabriel between analytic and intuitive understanding of the fundamental Islamic texts, there would be a difference of orientation between scholarly (Kalâmī or/and Fiqhī) understanding and Sufi understanding of the Quran. Whereas the scholarly understanding of the above-mentioned verses would be intelligence-based, the Sufi understanding would be intuition-based, i.e., an understanding of love-oriented approach.

However, at this point comes forth the problem with mysticism: whether it promotes an extremely passive response to changes in the real world and only functions as a shield to cover the psychology of naïveté or it is aimed to make people realize the core concept of spirituality with all its essence and make them be equipped with it without losing touch with reality.

The beauties mysticism brought forth and the admiration of people toward great mystics of any culture is well known. But the word mysticism and thus spirituality has also some pejorative connotations. Mysticism is defined “in its pure form” as “the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else” (Underhill, 1960: 72). Yet some negative definitions such as ‘vague speculation’ and ‘belief without foundation’ were also riveted to the term. The apparent polarity associated with definitions of mysticism signifies its intriguing character. One nicely striking example of the adjective form of the term mysticism being employed in a negative context is the usage of ‘Alī Sharī‘atī. When talking about a non-realistic aspect of Chinese communism, Sharī‘atī puts forth the term “mystical communism (Şûfî Shuyû‘iyya)” in an effort to signify that non-realistic aspect (2006: 320).

Regarding the second distinction inferred from the hadith of Gabriel, one thing is clear: In the religion of Islam, the integrality of the two sides of this distinction is required and it constitutes the integrality of belief, practice and spirituality. The depiction of the lack of this integrality stemming from either side can be construed as identical with the integrality of Fiqh (Islamic practice) and Tasawwuf (Islamic
spirituality or Sufism), which was nicely introduced by the eminent scholar of Islam, Mawdūdí (d. 1979). According to him:

An 'Ibadah [Islamic practice] devoid of spirit, though correct in procedure, is like a man handsome in appearance but lacking in character and an 'Ibadah full of spirit but defective in execution is like a man noble in character but deformed in appearance (1995: 142).

Consequently, the integrality of belief, practice and spirituality is required and it is the best form of all variations; moreover, it constitutes the integrality of mentality, deed and heart-related aspects of the religion of Islam.

People of Righteous Deeds and Promise of God

The Quran as the most primary text of Islam encourages its adherents to do good or righteous deeds. It lays out three basic conditions as the components of salvation: believing in God, believing that there is another life to come after death (Baqara, 2: 63; Māida, 4: 69) and doing righteous deeds (Naḥl, 16: 97; Maryam, 19: 60; Baqara, 2: 82; Zuhruf, 43: 72). The perfection of Muslims comes through righteous deeds (Bayyina, 98: 9). Through righteous deeds, they can turn out to be righteous people (Furqān, 25: 70; ‘Ankabūt, 29: 7; Taghābun, 64: 9).

Righteous deed as opposed to wicked deed simply denotes good and peaceful activity. “In the light of the Quranic data, one can define righteous deed as any idea and activity aimed at service for people and peace” (Öztürk, 1999: 40).

The Quran encourages Muslims and in a sense all people to do righteous deeds resulting in having powerful initiative for the process of peace. In other words, provided that people do righteous deeds, the Quran promises them to have the power to implement the peace process for people of both national and international spheres. The two striking verses of this promise are in the following:

We wrote this in The Zaboor (Psalms xxxvii, 29) after the reminder (Torah given to Musa [Moses]: that as for the land, My righteous servants shall inherit it (Quran, 1997: 380 [Al-Anbiya: 105]).

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7 It should be noted that Mawdūdí seems to use the term Fiqh as inclusive of Kalām. Or he just considers the Islamic creed (Kalam-related subjects) as the absolute condition for being a ‘muslim’, which is the adjective form of the term islām denoting the five pillars of the religion of Islam being mentioned in the hadith of Gabriel.

8 It should be called into account that Öztürk’s book actually represents a general and a fairly liberal interpretation. A more conservative approach would construe righteous deeds –at least at core level– as the five pillars of Islam as denoted by the term islām in the hadith of Gabriel. However, considering the fact that basic religious texts of Islamic tradition are actually beneficial not only to Muslims but to everybody regardless of their religious traditions, we think that both interpretations are appropriate and favorable.
Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will most surely make them vicegerent in the earth as He made their ancestors before them, and that He will establish for them their religion, the one which He has chosen for them, and that He will change their present state of fear into peace and security. Let them worship Me Alone and not to commit shirk with Me; and if anyone rejects faith after this, it is they who are the transgressors (Quran, 1997: 406 [An-Nur: 55]).

The Quranic emphasis on righteous deeds is clear. So is the promise of God. The powerful initiative to implement peace as implied in the above-mentioned verses is in fact inclusive of both local and international levels. Because, given that the Quran never goes to details and demands a hermeneutic attention from its readers, one should also notice that the Arabic word ARZ mentioned in both of the verses literally mean earth or land but it also implies statehood. For instance, in the Quranic verse that narrates the open request of the prophet Yusuf from Pharaoh of Egypt of his time, the word ARZ is used denoting nothing but Egypt (Quran, 1997: 301 [Yüsuf, 12: 55]).

In the light of the Quranic verses presented so far, one can contend that through good deeds people not only would survive oppression they are possibly exposed to, they would also have the ability to implement peace in the whole world. They would survive oppression but they are not to be the oppressors themselves. In fact, the ultimate happiness is only granted to those who would never seek oppression or corruption: “As for the Abode of the Hereafter, We have reserved it for those who seek neither glory nor corruption in the earth; the ultimate good is for the righteous” [Quran, 1997: 442 [Qaşaş: 83]]. It should be noted that the Quran also promises people of righteous deeds that God will create love for them in the hearts of people: “Surely the Beneficent [God] will bring about love for those who believe and do good deeds” (Quran, 1997: 363 [Maryam: 96]).

The Prayer of Solomon

The way intelligence-based approach or the way —so to speak— a discursively-disciplined mind understands the verses mentioned so far is clear: people do good deeds and, as a result, God places love for them in the hearts of other people and they would have strong initiative to implement peace in the face of both local and global power struggles. On the other hand, the way an intuition-based understanding or the way a spiritually-disciplined mind understands those verses is not easy to spot and thus it requires careful investigation. Going through a sample of Sufi commentaries of the Quran, of course, would be helpful. However, in order to lay out this kind of understanding, attention should be focused on the Quranic verse that narrates the prayer of Solomon, both a prophet and a king of the children of Israel. We would like to give the translation of this verse in several versions. According to the Quran, Prophet Solomon prayed like this:

9 The word shirk in the verse means idolatry.
He [Solomon] said: My Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me sovereignty such as shall not belong to any after me. Lo! Thou art the Bestower (Quran, w.date: 326 [Ṣād: 35]).

... [Solomon] said "O Rabb [Lord]! Forgive me and grant me a kingdom similar of which may not be given to anyone after me. Surely You are the real Giver" (Quran, 1997: 508).

He [Solomon] said, "O my Lord!

Forgive me, and grant me

A Kingdom which,

(It may be), suits not

Another after me:

For thou art the Grantor

Of Bounties (without measure) (Quran, 1968: 1225-26).

"He said: 'Oh my Lord! Forgive me and bestow upon me a kingdom to which no one after me would be entitled. Surely, You are the Bestower.'"\(^{11}\)

This is probably the most difficult verse and surely one of the most difficult verses of the Quran to interpret. The meaning of the verse is actually simple: The Prophet Solomon wants a kingdom that no one after him will be able to have. Thus, he wants to be literally the greatest king of all times from his time onward. However, the verse is so difficult to aptly understand and thus interpret that even the intelligence-based approach (non-Sufi tafsir) would refrain from its analytic understanding.\(^{12}\) The reason for this is the thinking that if the verse is interpreted in the light of its literal meaning then it is nearly imperative to come to the conclusion that Solomon wanted the greatest kingdom so to be able to enjoy or brag about it. In other words, the intelligence-based understanding would tend to come to the conclusion that Solomon must have been arrogant or presumptuous in order to bring himself to say such a prayer.\(^{13}\) In fact, just to

\(^{10}\) The verse number in fact appears in Pickthall's translation as 36.

\(^{11}\) Translation belongs to me.

\(^{12}\) See: (Al-Maḥalli & As-Suyūṭī, w.date: 2/138). Two major explanatory books on Al-Maḥalli's and As-Suyūṭī's commentary book (tafsir), which was widely studied in the Ottoman madrasah, should be cited for clarification purpose: (Al-'Ajjūlī, w.date: 3/576); (Aṣ-Ṣāwī, w.date: 3/359). For the commentaries shortly called Tafsiru Ibn Abbās, Hāzin, Nasafi and Al-Bayḍāwī, see: (Ibn Abbās, Hāzin, Nasafi, and Al-Bayḍāwī, 1901: 5/284). Also see: (Ibn ‘Abdullah, w.date: 4/1649-51); (Al-Baghawi, 2004: 4/55); (Ibn ‘Aṣhūr, w.date: 11/262).

\(^{13}\) Interestingly, to draw upon a personal experiment, I have occasionally brought forth this prayer for several years now in some circles of aged Muslims and university students without attributing it to the prophet Solomon and without specifying that it was actually a verse from the Quran. When I asked them how they would think of a person saying such a prayer, they said things like 'I wouldn't pray like that,' or 'The person who says such a prayer seems to be
allude to this type of remark, Az-Zamakhshari (d. 1095), a renowned commentator of the Quran whose commentary is considered as ‘the mother of all linguistic commentary books (tafsirs)’, records a narration. According to this narration, “Hajjac,” a despot governor of Umayyad dynasty, “was once told that he was selfish. And he reacted: The one who said (Bestow upon me a kingdom to which no one after me would be entitled) is more selfish than I am” (Az-Zamakhshari, 1987: 4/95).

In order to present a general outlook of the accounts of this verse provided by the commentators of analytic-rational approach, a delicate and careful account by Al-Baydawī (d. 1286) seems to be worth mentioning here. In his masterpiece called Anwār u-Tanzil wa Aṣrār u-Tawīl, “which has attained among Muslims a place that was never granted to any other commentary” (Cerrahoğlu, 1988: 2/297), Al-Baydawī makes the following remarks on the verse:

... (He said: ‘Oh my Lord! Forgive me and bestow upon me a kingdom to which no one after me would be entitled), that is, this kingdom would not become easy and would not become possible for anyone other than me, so that it becomes a miracle for me parallel to my situation. Or: It would not become possible for anyone to take it from me after the first takeover [The prophet Solomon had lost his kingdom before, as a result of a conspiracy]. Or: It does not become appropriate for anybody after me indicating that it should be big and marvelous, as in the example when you say: there is the kind of magnanimity and wealth for somebody that no one has, meaning to attribute greatness to the wealth. Not that not anyone can be given the similar of that kingdom, because in that case there would be jealousy involved. The fact that Solomon mentioned his petition for forgiveness before he wanted God’s bounty is because of his taking the religious matters seriously and of the imperative to mention first that which can put the prayer in the context of acceptance. Nāfi’ and Abu ‘Umar [two early scholars of the Quranic dialects] read the words ba’dī (after me) with open pronunciation of the last letter. (Surely, You are the Bestower): the one who gives what You wish to whomever You wish (1886: 2/346).

As seen in the account of Al-Baydawī, comments of intellectual mode refrain from the necessary conclusion stemming from the analytic-rational understanding of the

14 According to the scholar of the methodology of the science of Quranic commentary, Muḥammad ‘Abdu’l-Azīm Az-Zarqānī, “Az-Zamakhshari’s commentary is the best book or one of the best that is referred to in terms of rhetoric in the science of Quranic commentary.... And most of the commentaries written afterwards took from it and depended upon it” (Az-Zarqānī, 2003: 2/66).

15 It should be noted that the author of one of the many supplementary books and probably the best one on the commentary book (tafsir) of Al-Baydawī, Shihābuddīn Al-Khafājī, just goes along with him: “Whoever takes out a meaning such as great kingdom from the verse is somebody who never understood it” (Al-Khafājī, 1997: 8/152).
verse. Moreover, when looking into relatively recently-written commentaries regarding the prayer of the prophet Solomon, the general impression is that they are just reflections on the classical ones. For example, Al-Uramî, concerning the verse that narrates the prayer of the prophet Solomon, depends on both non-Sufi and Sufi scholars (2001: 24/386-388). To cover another example of this category, according to another contemporary commentator of the Quran, Al-Huweyzî, the whole point of the prayer of the prophet Solomon is to indicate that his kingdom was granted by God (2001: 6/261).

Moreover, when looking at Sufi commentaries, one can find that the accounts provided by them are basically not much different than those of non-Sufi scholars. In this context, we would like to look at four Sufi commentaries.

First, when looking at As-Sulami’s Ḥaqāʾiq u’l-Tafsîr, what we see is only a compilation of Sufism-oriented approaches that seem to refrain from the logical-analytic meaning of the verse. As-Sulami (d. 1021) first lays out a comment on what the prophet Solamon really wanted: “That is, knowledge of You [God] so that I would not see nothing other than You and so that You do not make me busy with the abundance of worldly things (urūḍu’d-dunyā) away from You” (2004: 2/186). And then he brings forth some accounts taken from some of the early scholars of Islam (2004: 2/187).

Second, when we look at Al-Qushayri’s Latāʾif u’l-Ishārāt, we see that his comment on the prayer of the prophet Solamon seems to be a compilation of both scholarly understanding and Sufi understanding of the verse. But it does not represent the integrality of both approaches, i.e., it does not present them in an accord with each other. Nevertheless, to show that how Al-Qushayri (d. 1072) mainly perceived the verse, three Sufi comments that he includes in his commentary should be mentioned here:

It is said that Solamon did not want a materialistic kingdom. He only wanted to have a command on himself (nafs). For the real king is that who controls his fleshy cravings (ḥawāḥ).

It is also said that Solamon, with his prayer, just wanted the perfection of his spiritual condition in experiencing God’s presence so that he would see no one but his Lord.

Moreover, it is also said that Solamon [through his prayer] actually wanted the kind of frugality with which there would be no mention of his individual will (1983: 3/256).

Third, a Turkish Sufi-scholar of 18th century, İsmail Hakkı Bursevî (d. 1725), in his commentary called Ruhu’l-Bayān probably gives the most interesting Sufi account concerning the meaning of the verse being depicted in a sense of integrality of analytic and esoteric modes of understanding. According to Bursevî, what the prophet Solamon wanted was in fact inclusive of both physical and spiritual kingdoms. In other words, even though the word kingdom as mentioned in the verse is not necessarily inclusive of spiritual kingdom in its own context, Bursevî perceives the word as inclusive of both physical and spiritual kingdoms. However, though it is innovative and more insightful
than the other Sufi accounts, there are two flaws associated with his overall account: 1) He perceives the verse in a sense of making comparison among prophets, 2) He makes the impetus of Solomon that led him to say such a prayer subjected to the inspiration of God and through this correlation he avoids the necessary conclusion stemming from the analytic understanding of the verse: "The ability to lead all and to have a widespread kingdom was existent in Solomon. For this reason, God inspired him to ask for a kingdom that will behove no body after him. His asking was not because of envy, greed or his tendency of monopoly on worldly pleasure and desire for it, as the ignorant people assumed" (1969: 8/34).

The fourth Sufi commentary is Ruḥuʾ-ʾl-Maānī of Al-Ālūsī Al-Baghdādī (d. 1854), considering that it is not strictly a commentary of analytic mode. Like the others, he points out that what Solomon prayed for was that God will not take his kingdom in his life time (Al-Ālūsī, w. date: 12/300-1).

Rūmī’s Account Regarding the Prayer of Solomon

With respect to the commentary of the Quranic verse narrating the prayer of the prophet Solomon, one can contend that accounts that were provided by Sufi commentaries are different than those of non-Sufi commentaries, in that Sufi commentaries are mostly dependent on a standpoint of spiritual nature. Nevertheless, both kinds of commentaries are almost equally ineffectual in coming up with the integrality of analytic and intuitive modes of thinking in a sensible, meaningful form.

However, concerning the comment on the prayer of the prophet Solomon, Rūmī provides the best account of spiritual nature that presents the integrality of commentary of analytic mode and that of esoteric mode. The great figure of Turkish Sufism, Rūmī (Mevlânâ Celâlêddîn-i Rûmî), in his much liked book called Mathnâvî, which is considered both as a book of Sufism and a book of Quranic commentary (Efliildî, 1986: 2/237), states that the prophet Solomon did not say such a prayer out of conceit or envy; on the contrary, he did pray the way he did out of his love and mercy for people. Rūmî’s account as recorded in Mathnâvî is as follows:

If the saint drinks a poison it becomes an antidote, but if the seeker (disciple) drinks it, his mind is darkened.

From Solomon have come the words, "O Lord, give me (a kingdom that it behoves not any one after me to obtain)," that is, "do not give this kingdom and power to any but me.

Do not bestow this grace and bounty on any but me." This looks like envy, but it was not that (in reality).

Read with your soul the mystery of "it behoves not," do not deem them the inward meaning of "after me" (to be derived) from his (Solomon’s) avarice.

Nay, but in sovereignty he saw a hundred dangers: the kingdom of this world was (has ever been), hair by hair (in every respect), fear for one’s head.
Fear for head with fear for heart with fear for religion—there is no trial for us like this.

Therefore one must needs possess the high aspiration of a Solomon in order to escape from these myriads of colours and perfumes (enticing vanities).

Even with such (great) strength (of spirit) as he had, the waves of that (worldly) kingdom were stifling his breath (choking him).

Since dust settled on him from this sorrow, he had compassion for all the kings of the world.

Hence he interceded (with God on their behalf) and said: “The kingdom that You already have given me, give it only to me with all its perfection.”

To whomsoever Thou wilt give (it), and (on whomsoever) Thou wilt confer that bounty, he (that person) is Solomon, and I also am he.

He is not ‘after me,’ he is with me. What of ‘with me,’ indeed? I am without rival.”

‘This my duty to explain this, but (now) I will return to the story of the man and wife (Rūmī, 2004: 1/235-6 [number of couplets: 2603-2615]).

16 The translation of the lines in italics in the tenth couplet of the excerpt belongs to me. Nicholson’s version of the same lines are as follows: “Hence he interceded (with God on their behalf) and said, “Give this kingdom (to them) with (accompanied by) the (spiritual) perfection which Thou hast given to me.”) Apparently, his version is wrong. Besides, one can infer from his usage of parentheses that his version does not match the original lines. In fact, his own edition of Mathnawi, the same lines in original are as follows:

(Rūmī, 1376H: 118)

In addition, one can say that Nicholson’s wrong perception of the lines only shows the difficulty of the remark Rūmī made, which does not seem to be spiritual at the first glance but in fact is only a good combination of both modes though starting from a spiritual point of view. As the Quranic verse is difficult to understand and interpret, the couplet of Mathnawi explaining the verse is difficult to understand too. We would like to cite four Turkish translations of Mathnawi, two of which made the same mistake Nicholson did. First, Abidin Paşa (d. 1908) translates the couplet as meaning that the prophet Solomon wanted God to give the likes of his kingdom to other kings (Rūmī, 1907: 3/239). Second, Veled İzbudak (d. 1953) translates the couplet as “… give this kingdom also to those who have perfection” (“... Şefaat edip ‘Bana verdiği bu saltanattı, kemal sahibi olanlara da ver’”) (Mevlâna, 1988: 1/209).

Third, an eighteenth century Ottoman scholar, Süleyman Nahifî (d. 1739) translates the same couplet as “... do not deem this kingdom worthy of others.” (Pes Şefi’ olduğu ki bu millet ü lâvâ / Bana virdin gayr içün görme revâ”) (Nahifî, 1967: 2/103-104). Finally, the eminent Turkish scholar of Rūmî and Mawlawism, Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı (d. 1982), translates the couplet as “… give that kingdom to me with all its perfection and magnanimity” (“Şefaat etti de bu saltanattı, bu bayrağı bana verdin ya; bütün yüceliğiyle, bütün olgunluğuyla bana ver”) (Mevlâna, 1990: 1/254).
It is apparent that a spirituality-oriented understanding of the verse centers on the concept of love. In other words, in the light of Rûmî’s account concerning the interpretation of this verse, one can reach the conclusion that even when it comes to power struggle, whether local or global, people have to be oriented toward love as opposed to greed or blind pride. Because, according to Rûmî, “perhaps the greatest mystical poet of Islam” (Stoddart, 1985: 57), the prophet-king Solomon did not say the prayer out of greed or pride; he simply did say it because of his mercy and love for people. The calamity to which the great kings would be exposed would be just as great. The prophet Solomon wanted to spare all other kings and thus their peoples.

Moreover, one can also easily contend that the verse narrating the prayer of the prophet Solomon is one of the most difficult verses to interpret in the Quran. This is easily understood from the fact that even mainstream scholars of Quranic commentary who basically use the intellect-based approach in their interpretation refrain from the rationality-oriented understanding of the verse. Because then there is no reasonable explanation why the prophet Solomon wanted God to give him the kind of kingdom that no one would get after him, without taking refuge in a spiritually-oriented interpretation which is based on the concept of love.

The integral understanding and interpretation of the verse came only from Rûmî, who “praises the intellect but holds that love is a higher reality, since it alone can bring about union” (Murata, 1989: 335). In other words, in terms of the exact and precise interpretation of the verse, whereas intelligence-based approach fails, spirituality or love-based approach prevails. And this amounts to say that while intelligence-based approach fails to lead to the integrality of the two sides of the distinction between analytic and intuitive modes derived from the hadith of Gabriel, love-oriented approach seems to be able to pave the way for that integrality.

Conclusion

Defining the terms of religion, mysticism and spirituality in a way in which one definition of a term does not apply to another is not without difficulty. The concept of operational definition is a fundamental quality in social scientific research. However, before coming up with any operational definition of any term, trying to define it inclusively only adds up to the effectiveness of any operational definition and thus to the effectiveness of social scientific study of religion.

A prophetic tradition of the religion of Islam, the hadith of Gabriel, is aptly entitled to provide insights concerning the relationship between the terms religion, mysticism and spirituality. It seems that there is a rational-analytic side and a mystical-intuitive side of religion and that the integrality of these two is required. Whereas the core concept of the rational side of religion seems to be the concept intellect, that of the mystical side seems to be the concept of love. Moreover, in this context, what applies to mysticism seems to apply to spirituality as well. The rational-analytic side of religion should be coupled with the mystical side of religion. This helps avoid the dark side of religion, which essentially stems from favoring a positivistic conception of religion with
almost no spiritual aspect. On the other hand, mysticism needs the rational-analytic side of religion to avoid tendency to lose sight of physical reality.

The all legitimate or the perfect form of combination of the two sides of religion is an ages-old question. One striking exemplary form of this combination comes forth with respect to both local and global power conflicts. The great figure of Islamic mysticism, Mawlānā Jalāluddīn Rūmī of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), provides this exemplary form in his unique account concerning the commentary on the prayer of the Jewish prophet-king Solomon as recorded in the most basic text of the religion of Islam, the Quran.

Based on the samples of the Quranic commentaries we have included in this essay, it seems that whereas commentaries of intellectual mode are focused on linguistic analysis, the Sufi commentaries are focused on spiritual evaluation of the prayer of the prophet Solomon. And both types of commentaries fail to reach an integrality of both sides of the distinction between analytic-rational mode and esoteric-Sufi mode of understanding of the prayer of Solomon. In addition, because of the lack of this integrality, both types of commentaries avert from the necessary conclusion of the prayer of Solomon that the prophet must have said such a prayer out of arrogance or envy.

Unlike the mainstream Quranic commentaries in the tradition of Islamic sciences, Rūmī's account is all consistent: the prophet-king Solomon did say such a prayer not because of envy or any similar attributes. He did say his prayer for he had love and mercy for other kings and for all people.

The fact that the all consistent account concerning the commentary of the prayer of Solomon came from Rūmī, probably the greatest Sufi of the history of Islam, points out the crucial function of the concept of love in resolving both local and global power conflicts. Espousing love intrinsically and employing it in power conflicts with desire of service for people seems to be a very effective way of resolving them.
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