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“Gnostics and Politics” – Opening Talk
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1. Introduction

If we get gnosis and politics right we are set on a path of worldly and spiritual success. The word “gnosis” is Greek in origin, meaning knowledge. It had become synonymous with mysticism, although its historical community origin is from early Christianity, whose adherents were renounced as heretics by orthodoxy. These teachings were confirmed by recent discoveries of Nag Hammadi texts. Politics is also Greek and Latin; its root “politea” means citizenship and its implication is activities associated with power, leadership and governance. In classical times political leadership implied care for people’s welfare, their moral quality, humanity and durable progress of the society. Nowadays politics entails popularity and appeasement of the public.

In this talk I will discuss, very briefly, the WHAT and THAT, and the HOW and WHY of the human quest in life by following the path of reliable contentment and happiness through self-knowledge, gnosis and appropriate response to others or the outside world – politics in the Aristotelian sense.

Thinkers, philosophers, prophets, sages, mystics, Sufis and spiritual seekers from time immemorial have been concerned with the WHAT that is at the root of the human quest. Plato, one of the early spiritual thinkers in the West, is echoed by dozens of great philosophers, sages and prophets, who appeared over different periods of time and in different parts of the world trying to deal with dualities, paradoxes and the elusive Oneness that connects them all. The ancient prophets, such as Noah and Ibrahim, had lived and acted in a manner that unified the eternal truth with responsible action in this world. Spiritual seekers throughout the ages try to attain that state of union. Often the more one tries the more elusive God becomes. Thus the question of HOW becomes critical.

2. Two from One; WHAT

Khayyam (Persian Sufi mystic poet):

*“For in and out, above, about and below
It is nothing but a magic shadow show,
Played in the theatre of our time,
Where phantom figures come and go.”*

Tao Te Ching:

*“Hard and easy only complete each other,
Long and short are relative to each other,
High and low are dependent on one another,
First and last only succeed one another.”*

With insight we observe that whatever appears and changes (all dualities) as well as that which is constant, interconnects at different levels of consciousness. Thus the WHAT and the HOW relate to harmony between the human self and higher consciousness or God (Supreme Consciousness or Cosmic Soul). The utterances and teachings of mystics throughout the ages reveal a consistency of the special wisdom of the sublime unity and its validity as a map in the human journey towards a horizon beyond reason and rationality.

William Blake:

*“To see the world in a grain of sand
And heavens in a wild flower.
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”*

Saint John of the Cross:

*“All things I then forgot,
Leaving my cares and shame
Among the lilies and forgetting them.”*

A beam of Buddhist teaching:

*“Abide not with dualism,
Carefully avoid pursuing it.
As soon as you have right and wrong
Confusion ensues and soul is lost.”*

3. Ever Present Truth; THAT IS “WHAT”

We are reminded consistently by spiritually enlightened beings that truth is eternal and thus beyond mental reasoning and human logic, and that consciousness of the divine will only becomes evident when all other awareness ceases or is transcended. Numerous prophets and messengers reminded the common folk of the importance of morality, ethics, and personal responsibility for the sake of social cohesion and goodness. They also talked about God as being beyond all of these virtues. As a result, the religiously dogmatic people and the institutionalised structures or authorities have been suspicious of mystics, Sufis and their likes, for in their utterance there were possibilities of abandonment of basic human duties, the established religious and communally accepted worldly behaviour in that particular culture.

Rumi says:

***“Reason is the chain of travellers and lovers, my son
Break the chain and the way is plain and clear ahead, my son
Reason is a chain, the body a delusion and self is a veil
And when you have risen out of reason, body and self
You have gone forth past shadows and illusions, my son.”***

In our present age science and related disciplines have advanced to such an extent that we now see the world as a composition of the relative physical creation and the quantum world with all its strange realm of energy based entities. Today we are all familiar with the interchangeability of energy and matter and how body, mind, heart and soul are intricately connected. We also realise the numerous levels and shades of consciousness (the conditioned personal consciousness) and the higher, or pure, or supreme, or divine, or soul consciousness. We also know that space-time’s laws and limitations do not apply to quantum world. We have no problems in accepting that total connection between the seen and the quantum world. We have no problems in accepting the total connection between the seen and the unseen worlds. Therefore, mysticism is not that mysterious in modern times, not is the idea of large scale or degrees and levels of enlightenment amongst human beings from different cultures or religions. We can easily imagine the meaning of not being subject to space-time; a strange situation, which Meister Eckhart only hints at:

***“The now where God made the world is as near to this moment.
The last day is as near to this now as was yesterday.”***

In the past, people referred to the kingdom of God as a strange or mythical entity, even though Jesus had said “the kingdom of God is within you”.

Imam Ali has said:

***“Your sickness is from you
And your remedy is within you
But you do not perceive it.
You claim you are a small entity
And with you is hidden the whole cosmos”***

There has been a great deal of scholastic work and research focused on discovering what is it that brings about gnosis or enlightenment and what are the qualifications or characteristics of the enlightened person. Can one be a family man, a business man, a trader or a leader? Or is it exclusive to hermits, prophets, renunciates and other marginal beings. What about the heroes, fighters, martyrs, kings? Then, there are the questions of relationship between an enlightened person and religion, the public at large, other creations (especially animals) and unjust rulers.

The question of authentication of a Gnostic is a most difficult topic for numerous reasons. The most important one is the general behaviour of the enlightened person and our inability to reproduce the exact and total context of their actions and their specific intentions, which may not always conform to the norm. Then, there are always issues like initiation, spiritual lineage, the need for a teacher or guru and many other questions. I hope this conference will throw some light on many of these issues.

4. HOW; To Be Enlightened

The HOW question has preoccupied seekers and religious minded people of every culture for thousands of years. The Prophet Ibrahim's final test was regarding his attachment and love for his son was his willingness to sacrifice him as an offering to God, as was the practice in those days. All paths and prescriptions can only take you away from that which is not true or absolute. Then by its own grace the truth overwhelms in devastating clarity.

Bistami says:

***“I sought God for thirty years thinking it was I who desired Him.
But it was He all along, who had been calling me.”***

The HOW relates to the inner discovery and knowledge of the inner sacred soul and its attributes as an overflow of the cosmic soul and its qualities.

“He who knows himself, knows his Lord”, mean he who knows his soul, which carries and transmits God's numerous attributes such as mercy, compassion, knowledge, wisdom, etc. This explains the declaration that God has created man in His image. There is of course the lower basic consciousness, which brings about nature's evolution of survival and procreation. In us this consciousness is the local, conditioned or ego consciousness.

Two great Sufi teachings sum up the path:

ONE: “Not until you are free from fear of provision and of creation you are ready for enlightenment”.

TWO: “If you don't cut time (transcend it) it will cut you up”.

Healthy body, heart, mind, clear head, sharp intellect, piety, goodness, selfless acts, etc., all are necessary conditions but not sufficient for enlightenment, which requires self abandonment and emptiness as a prelude to direct experience of the eternal light of the soul within the purified heart. Supreme finding can only be unlocked by

supreme loss. Only by turning the heart away from earth will it perceive the ever-present heavens. Only by blocking outer sights by closing the eyes, insight begins to open. Only by dying to the world of things and changing shadows we begin to perceive the ever constant, perfect divine light, which is the essence and source of all created entities is ever-present, yet veiled.

In the Gospel of Thomas, which is one of the main references of the Christian Gnostics, Jesus said:

“Blessed are the solitary and the chosen that you will attain the kingdom, for you are from it and to it you will return.”

Those who are meek and weak in the worldly sense have greater possibilities in the inner domain. It is not for no reason the city of Calcutta used to be called the city of light and joy.

Rumi describes this interior journey as follows:

***“Since within you lurks a hidden enemy,
Only by repelling the monster by harshness, you are saved.
The man, who beats a stick on a rug, it is not aimed at the rug.
The purpose is to rid the rug of dust. Layers of dust are within you consisting of the
veils of egoism and dust cannot be gotten rid of by a single blow.”***

This wonderful, natural yet heroic act of transcending the self and discovering the soul may not be a common experience because the majority of human beings are absorbed with self or ego interest and have a lot of cares, worldly attachments and concerns. But the occurrence of even one enlightened person is a boon to whole society. By the sheer presence of such a being spiritual qualities and higher levels of consciousness permeate the atmosphere. This is where spiritual politics comes to play its part in human evolution and the rise of common consciousness.

5. Divine Politics

In our history of philosophy, religion and culture, we have numerous past descriptions of the character and behaviour of the Gnostics, especially when it comes to politics. Historically successful politics is to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. We live in a world of ever changing values and relative relationships. Sustainable ways implies reference to the level of the absolute, or truth, or essence, or source or God. I can even go as far as saying that gnosis and politics in the broadest sense are ever complimentary and mirror each other like the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The names that describe Gnostics, such as sage, rishi or friend of God (*wali*), *shaykh*, guru or others are attempts to show certain levels of differentiation of spiritual stations and cultural understanding and respect. In all situations the extent of a person's enlightenment relates to frequency and accuracy of reference to the absolute light or consciousness within the soul.

From the eye of the enlightened being all human life is seen as an incarnation of the divine soul, apparently dispersed amongst the many (as different souls), but connected and gathered by the cosmic light of the Creator. Whenever there is less of the self, ego or mind there is the potential of more heart and soul. When there is inner harmony and unity, all conflicts and dualities merge and reveal their original essence of unity. When head and heart (self and soul) are in unison, then heaven and earth compliment each other in perfect wisdom.

The Persian mystic, describes this vision of unity:

***“In the market, in the cloister, only God I saw
In the valley and on the mountain, only God I saw
In wealth and poverty, only God I saw
In health and illness, only God I saw
In good and bad, only God I saw.”***

6. WHY

So far I have tried to give a quick impression as to the WHAT, THAT and HOW of enlightenment. Now I will attempt a glimpse of the WHY. It is like describing to a child the taste of honey for the first time. No matter what description you may give, the experience itself is far more informative and transformative. Inner awakening opens up a vista that is beyond worldly measure and experience. It brings, thereby, a new reference and secure base, which is not relative or subject to change or uncertainties. The boundless thrill and joy that comes with realization of eternal light that is ever present and ever perfect is the WHY. We are essentially seekers of the eternal light within our heart. WHY we seek it is because by gnosis of it we become content and ever joyful with that sacred presence so the all pervading divine essence, which contains all the known and unknown, the ephemeral and the eternal. This is why the WHY is answered after the event and not before.

Ibn Arabi describes his state most eloquently:

*“My heart has become capable of every form
A pasture for gazelles and a convent for monks
A temple for idols and a pilgrim’s Ka’ba
The tablets of the Torah and the book of the Qur’an
I follow the religion of love wherever its Caravan goes
And that is my faith and religion,”*

Lastly, I want to share with you my optimism regarding the quest for gnosis in our present day. In spite of considerable global disturbances and unharnessed materialism in the world, I see a new phase where the traditional teachings of mysticism are becoming easier to understand and accessible across different cultures and religions. I see a major convergence between science, religion and spiritual pursuits. It is common nowadays for us to accept the dual nature of human beings, of being in this world and not of this world, of having to deal with the outer physical realities, whilst realizing (as quantum physics), there is no such thing as fixed matter. Even politics and business the ways of Machiavelli are yielding to the original way of the Prophets.

Our world is composed of energies caught in a form for a while or interacting fields of energies at different levels of intensity or quality. Whatever is created has its foundation in light and space-time, with the constant interchange of matter and energy, whose origin is pure light. My advice to whoever is serious regarding success in spirituality and politics is to aim in perfecting relationships with others, and act in the world with wisdom and accountability. This state of high awareness may lead to witnessing perfection with the inner eye at all times, irrespective of outer events or personal evaluation or preferences. The All-Perfect is Ever-Present. There is no God but the one and only God.

All Perfection

*The most amazing fact about life and creation
Is the ever constancy and presence of utter perfection,
In spite of personal faults and misconceptions,
For the outcome in every case is due to natural laws,
Decrees and channels of manifestations,
Emanating from a source and fountain of life,
Ever true, ever harmonious and ever perfect in its Oneness,
Nearer than nearness, present before time,
Permeating heavens and earth with light and consciousness.*