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In an interview I had with Professor Toshihiko Izutsu(1914-1993) in London in March 1984, one of the questions I asked him was: what made you interested in

Islam and Islamic studies?

Izutsu had started his studies on Islam with Arabic Language. Since Arabic was not taught in Japanese universities at that time, he started to study it by himself. Then, when he met the Tatar Muslim scholar Musa Jarollah, he continued his studies with him for a couple of years. Several years after that, he travelled to Arabic countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon, before going to Montreal in 1961 to teach Islamic thought.

The answer that Izutsu gave me was somewhat vague. He said since he had studied languages and linguistics, it was rather natural for him to study Arabic, even though Arabic was not commonly studied in Japan. Though Izutsu started his career as a philologist, he became interested in philosophy. Having learned the Arabic language and grammar, he began to study Islamic thoughts. In his interview he mentioned that there was something mysterious in Islamic thoughts, in philosophy and mysticism, which brought him to Islamic teachings.

My first encounter with Izutsu's name was with Sabziwari's book on Islamic Transcendental philosophy. Izutsu had edited this text book with Dr. Mahdi Muhaqqegh and written an essay as an introduction to it in English. I must admit that I knew nothing of Islamic philosophy when I started

reading Sabziwari's book and Izutsu's essay proved to be an excellent introduction for me. Izutsu's interest in Islamic philosophy had not brought him to the study of Transcendental Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, but to the more fundamental books on the subject, particularly the works of Ibn Sina. Izutsu had, in fact, taught Ibn Sina's *Isharat* at Mac Gill and told me the edition he used in his classes was Tehran lithograph edition. Though Izutsu had travelled to Arabic countries for a number of years and had studied Muslim philosophy and Mysticism in Arabic, he became informed while at Mac Gill with the role of Iran and Persian language in the history of Islamic intellectual activities, particularly Sufism. It was in fact Sufism that brought me to a more personal contact with Izutsu in the late 60's.

The first time I encountered Izutsu was in the Ni'matullahi Khaneqah in Tehran. He had come to visit the Shaykh of this order Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh and he was accompanied by his wife and Professor Herman Landolt. Thanks to the endless efforts of Dr. Mahdi Mohghegh to make Mac Gill University and Tehran University join in some academic ventures, Izutsu and Landolt had had a chance to visit Iran more often and that made Iranian students such as me, benefit from Izutsu's presence more regularly.

Throughout the 70's and until the Islamic revolution in 1978, Izutsu regularly came to Iran each year and spent a few months there, teaching not only Ibn Arbi's *Fusus al-Hikam* to a number of closer students, but also a course on comparative oriental philosophy as well. I attended every class he taught, as well as meeting him at his apartment once or twice every week. In his apartment he taught ancient Greek to Gholam-Reza A'vani and myself. I also met him personally to discuss the translation and commentary of a book that both Izutsu and myself had developed a deep interest in, namely *The Sawanih* of Ahmad Ghazzali.

Izutsu and I both knew about *The Sawanih* and its importance in the field of Islamic mysticism and Persian mystical literature. Izutsu, I believe, had heard about this book from Professor Landolt and I had happened to stumble upon it at the Library at Tehran University by chance. I remember the first time I read some of the chapters of this book I felt deeply impressed by it. This book had been edited and published in Istanbul by Helmut Ritter the year I was born and the poem that Ritter had put in front

of the first page as an epigram proved to be appropriate to express the effect that this book has had on me.

I did not know that the roses were colored so beautifully,
Intending to allure me.
Yes, flowers they were, only when I looked from afar,
But when I came closer and looked, I saw nothing but fire.

Fire is a metaphor in Persian and Arabic literature used to represent love. It was first the Sufi Martyr Hussain b. Mansur al-Hallaj who used this metaphor in one of his poems. Love, for Hallaj, is a divine attribute, which is identical with the Essence. It shows its nature, as fire, when it comes into the temporal world along with the holy Spirit and manifests itself as the lover and the beloved. This is basically the mystical philosophy of Hallaj that Ahmad Ghazzali had adopted and tried to discuss in his book.

Izutsu had a vague idea of this mystical philosophy. He knew that when Ghazzali spoke about love, he did not simply mean the feeling that one has for his or her sweetheart. Ghazzali was a mystic, a Sufi, and his interest in psychology was more philosophical than the Psychology of the peripatetic Philosophers. Once he suggested to me that it is better to call Ahmad Ghazzali's mysticism "Metaphysics of Love".

One day when I was discussing one of the chapters of the *Sawanih* with him, he said: "Why don't you translate it into English?" That was the first time the idea of translating the *Sawanih* came to my mind, and I must say that it took me by surprise. I had translated some of the Sufi poems of the Ni'matullahi masters with the collaboration of my American friend Peter Wilson and Peter used to attend Izutsu's classes in the beginning of the course. But translating the *Sawanih* seemed a challenging task which I was not prepared to undertake at the time. I must admit that the difficulty lied not in Persian language, but rather in the mystical philosophy, or, in Izutsu's words, the Metaphysics of love.

My first reaction to Izutsu was: "I can't". After that, we did not continue the talk about the translation. But sometime later, as I was speaking about another idea in the *Sawanih* and comparing it to the similar idea in Ibn

Arabi, he repeated the same question: "Why don't you translate it? " To which I replied again: " I can't." "Yes, you can, " He said." What makes you think you can't?"

"There is no use in simply translating this book. This is a book about the basic ideas behind Persian mystical poetry. It is a book which contains most of the metaphors that were used by the great Persian poets such as Sana'i, Attar, Sa'di and Hafiz. You need a commentary to go along with the translation. Without a commentary the work would be mostly incomprehensible for the English readers. It would be like translating Hafiz into English without a commentary.

"That is good", he said. "Write a commentary too."

When I think back, I believe this conversation was repeated at least one more time, until I said to him: "Would you be willing to help me and go over the translation as I proceed? I will do the translation and write the commentary provided that you go over the translation and the commentary."

He accepted, and after a few weeks I brought him the translation of Ghazzali's introduction as well as the first chapter, and thus our work begun.

Sawanih is a short book, comprising some 77 chapters of various lengths. Some chapters are only three or four lines and some more than one page. It is basically a literary work, and the author uses literary devices, such as metaphors, anecdotes, poems, quotations from famous Sufis to explain his ideas. The author refers to his metaphors and his symbolism as allusions (*isharah*), a term used by classical Sufi masters when they wanted to refer to their particular style of speaking or writing. As an allusion, *Isharah* is an expression holding an unexpressed idea. The speaker or the author might use one word which is taken from a line, a Koranic verse, a poem, or a story that was meant to explain a metaphysical or mystical idea. For example, when the author wants to speak about his idea of the primordial love and the precedence of the Creator's love to that of his creatures, he would write:

The root of love grows out of the infinite pre-existence. The diacritical dot of the letter ba of yuhibbuhum (He loves them) was

cast as a seed on the soil of yuhbbinahu; nay, that dot was cast on hum (them) till yuhibbunahu (they love Him) grew out.

These sentences obviously may sound cryptic, somewhat gibberish. But if we know what those Arabic words refer to and remember what the Sufis say about the eternal and primordial love, then we will see that the meaning is not difficult to grasp. Ghazzali here is referring to the famous Koranic verse which speaks about the reciprocal love that exists between God and human beings. It says in two words: *yuhibbohum wa yuhibbunahu* (V, 54). God says that He will bring "a people whom He loves and who in return love Him." This, according to the Sufis, means that God's love for human beings preceded man's love for Him, because the word *yuhubbuhum* is mentioned before *yuhibbunahu*. Using the metaphor of the tree and the fruit, Ghazzali says that God's love for man was the tree and man's love for Him its fruit. Naturally the tree comes first. But how does the tree come into being and how does the fruit grow out? The answer is very simple. For a tree to come into being one has to plant a seed. The seed is obviously love, not the love in *yuhubunahu*, but the love in *yhibbuhum*. So , Ghazzali takes the diacritical dot in the word *hub* to symbolize the essence of love as it existed in God.

The meanings that Ghazzali is alluding to by using the Koranic words are easily recognized, but sometimes Ghazzali uses words that are not easily recognizable. For example, he uses an Arabic word in the fourth chapter which I used to think to be Koranic, but after years of study, I found out that it was not exclusively taken from the Koranic verses but also from a line by Hallaj.

I don't believe I was able to translate more than one third of the *Sawanih* and write commentaries on those chapters while Izutsu was still in Iran. My commentaries on the earlier chapters were naturally more extensive and I had to rewrite some of them after having discussed them with Izutsu. I stopped the work temporarily when the Revolution started. The last couple of months when Izutsu was stranded in Tehran waiting for his flight to take him to Japan, I used to see him almost every day. Tehran, and in fact the

whole country, was on fire those days, and we couldn't ignore what was happening in the streets. Izutsu was afraid to go out and he would wait every evening for me to come to visit him. Instead of talking about Persian mysticism we would talk about the revolution that was taking place in the streets. " This is going to change everything", he used to say. One day he talked about his memories of the war in Japan and how it changed everything. He said he can never forget when they were throwing bombs on the streets of Tokyo. Now that I think back, I think he was somewhat predicting the eight year war we had with Iraq.

I remember one day he said: "They will throw bombs at you." I didn't know his predictions will come true less than two years. When the dictator of Iraq Saddam Hossein throw the first bombs on Tehran, I recalled what Izutsu had told me before.

When the war begun is 1980, I was almost through with the first draft of my translation. I had continued the rest of the translation and commentary, without having the benefit of discussions with Izutsu. Two years later when I finished the task I wrote to Izutsu in Japan and asked him whether he would be willing to write an introduction . He apologized and said he is too busy with a book he was writing in Japanese.

The most important thing I did during Izutsu's stay in Tehran was the reconstruction of the metaphysical system that Ahmad Ghazzali had in mind. Ghazzali was aware that in writing his book he was venturing on a new task. He was going to write somewhat systematically on a mysticism which was based on the idea of Love. Other mystics had talked about love before, but to use it as a central idea around which a whole series of interrelated ideas developed was not done systematically. This central idea is not what we ordinarily think it to be. Commonly we think of love as a strong emotion directed to another person, considered as the beloved. Without rejecting this common notion, Ghazzali makes it clear that this is not what he means by love and what he expects the reader to understand by the word 'love' (*ishq* or *hubb*). Thus, in his introduction to the *Sawanih*, Ghazzali warns his readers that they should not interpret love simply as a strong affection one has, as a lover, towards another person, as the beloved. The reader should take this concept unconditionally, i.e. in an absolute way.

What does it mean to understand love in an absolute way? Ghazzali responds to this question by simply saying that it should not be related solely to the creatures, nor to the Creator (به شرط آن که در او هیچ حواله نبود نه به (خالق و نه به مخلوق). Thus when Ghazzali speaks of the lover and the beloved, he speaks not merely of human beings. For Ghazzali, God can enter an amorous relation with His creatures. In other words, God can be the lover while human beings are His beloveds. Or a human being can fall in love with God, thus making God his or her beloved. But before God enters such a relationship with his creature, he falls in love with Himself. This means that God essentially loved Himself. Before any creature came into being, God loved Himself in His own Essence.

The idea of God loving Himself from eternity is usually called the Essential Love (*ishq-i dhati*) and it is expressed by the Neo-Platonic philosophers such as a Farabi and Ibn Sina who were before Ahmad Ghazzali. It is in fact quite likely that Ahmad Ghazzali had read the works of these philosophers, particularly Ibn Sina's treatise on love. But Ghazzali's primary source must have been the writings of Hallaj, particularly his poems, as well as Mustamli's commentaty on the *Kitab at-ta'arruf* of Abu Bakr Gulabadi (commonly known as Al-Kalabadhi) . In any case, Ghazzali expresses the idea of Essential Love not in the manner of the philosophers but in the manner of a poet, such as Hallaj. *Sawanih* is written in prose, but Ghazzali's prose is very much like poetry. This can be seen particularly in one of the chapters where he tries to explain the idea of Essential love.

It is its own bird and its own nest, its own essence and its own attribute, its own feather and its own wing. It is the air as well as the flight, the hunter as well as the game, the goal as well as the searcher for the goal, the seeker as well as the sought. It is its own beginning and its own end, its own king and its own subject, its own sword and its own scabbard. It is the garden and the tree, the branch and the fruit, the bird and the nest.

او مرغ خود است و آشیان خود است. ذات خود است و صفات خود است. پر خود است و بال خود است، هوای خود است و پرواز خود است، صیاد خود است و شکار خود

مستقبل خود است، طالب خود است و مطلوب خود است. اول است، قبله خود است
خود است و آخر خود است. سلطان خود است و رعیت خود است، صمصام خود است و
نیام خود است. او هم باغ است و هم درخت، هم شاخ است و هم ثمره، هم آشیان است
و هم مرغ.

This chapter is indeed one of the most profound and at the same time beautiful chapters in the *Sawanih*. It is indeed an artistic creation, like a music composition. It starts with calling love a bird, residing in its own nest, and ends with the same metaphor and in fact the same words. All of the metaphors refer to one and the same idea, the idea of Essential love. While the philosophers say the First, i.e. God, loved Himself in His essence, Ghazzali says it is its own bird and its own nest, i.e. in the divine Being the lover and the beloved are one, or the Essence is identical with its attribute.

The idea of the Essential love runs through all Persian Sufi poetry, particularly the Neo- Hallajian Sufi poets such as Attar and Hafez. One of the things that kept Izutsu interested in Ahmad Ghazzali was the impact that his love mysticism had on later Persian Sufi writers and poets.

Before coming to Japan, I happened to see the publication of one of my books in Persian on the idea of the primordial Covenant, a covenant between God and human beings that is the subject of one of the Koranic verses. The book is entitled '*ahd-e alast*, and as I have mentioned in my introduction, the idea of primordial Covenant is one of the topics of discussions I had with professor Izutsu. I mentioned to him that this covenant plays an important role in the poetry of most Persian mystical poets, including Hafez. Izutsu of course knew about the Koranic verse where God says that he made a covenant with the seeds of the children of Adam and asked them: "Am I not your Lords," whereupon they all responded by saying : " yes". He was also familiar with the mystical interpretation of this verse done by the Sufis. But he was not aware of the impact of this idea on Persian Sufi poetry. I asked him whether or not this idea could be found in one of the Oriental religions or philosophies. His answer was: "no".

The idea of the primordial Covenant between God and the human beings,

is based on a Koranic myth which was made the subject of discussions among classical Sufis, particularly the early Sufis of Baghdad, and then caught the attention of the Persian Sufi poets. Long before the Persian Sufis talked about this covenant in their poems and before some of them tried to relive the myth of " *alst*" in their poetry, it was Ahmad Ghazzali who discussed it in one of the chapters in his book. I will end this talk with a brief account of the mystical interpretation of this myth among the Persian Sufis, particularly Ahmad Ghazzali.

The basic story is rather simple, with some minor differences in different versions of the story. According to a more popular version, after the Fall of Adam and Eve, one day God stops Adam and actually pushes his hand into his back and brings out from his loins all the seeds of the children that will be born in the future. The seeds are then made to stand before God and He makes a covenant with all of them by asking them: Am I not your Lord? To which they all say: Yes. The Sufis have then interpreted this primordial and mythical event as a covenant between human beings as lovers and God as the Beloved. For orthodox Muslims, human beings have made a pledge to be the servants of the Lord, but the mystics who define the relation between man and God in terms of love, consider human beings as lovers of God.

Though they are naturally predisposed to be in love with the divine Beloved, human beings do not actually direct their love towards this Beloved. Once they leave the spiritual domain, where the pledge was made, and the children come to this world, they forget their pledge and fall in the trap of illusion. Instead of directing their love towards the divine Beloved, human beings fall in love with the relative beings. Only a small group of people are actually able to escape from this trap and fulfill their pledge. These people are called the friends of God and they are identified as the Sufi Saints. In other words, all people are naturally predisposed to be in love with the divine Beloved, but they do not all practice it and therefore they do not all reach union with the Beloved. Only the mystics, i.e. the Sufis, are actually able to practice their love for the Beloved and attain union. Persian mystical poetry is in fact the story of how these friends or lovers practice their love and how they experience their vision of the

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Beloved and finally their identification with the Beloved, an identification which takes place by way of surrendering one's being to the Being of the Beloved. This is how the Sufis interpret the name Islam. To be a Muslim, it is not enough to give up to God your possessions, but your very soul, your existence. Could this have been the idea that attracted Izutsu to Islam?