

Esoteric Islam



Key thoughts

- » The idea of Unity is the core idea of every religion. Allah, as described in the Qur'an, is a Principle permeating every being.
- » The hierarchical structure of the Universe is easy to find in Islam.
- » All nations form one humanity: this is the original meaning of the word *Ummah*.
- » Islam teaches clearly that not war but study opens the path to Allah.
- » To return to Allah, we need to stand above our *nafs* – our animal instincts.

There is a lot of Islamic violence in the world. What is striking, is that this violence is often between Muslims themselves. That is one of the reasons why people think that Islam in itself is violent.

However, Islam is, like any other religion, in its core noble: a core that inspires an ethical and spiritual way of life. But if a religion is interpreted in a sectarian way, it divides people instead of unifying them, and thus it becomes the main source of evil.

Therefore, it is high time to take a closer look at Islam and its principles in the hope that more people will discover the *real* fundamentals of this religion.

The core thought of every religion is Unity. Practicing religion means to unify yourself with the divine and therefore with your fellow humans, for the divine is the unifying aspect of human consciousness.

Many influences

This idea of Unity does not exclusively belong to Islam. On the contrary, it is the core idea of every religion. That is why the Qur'an repeatedly refers to the other 'peoples of the Book', to other prophets that preached the same message. In fact, the word 'Islam' originates from the Arabic root s-l-m, which forms a great deal of words that relate to wholeness and peace. Most scholars translate Islam by 'voluntary submission to God'. A Muslim is someone who

'resigns himself', e.g. lives in the perception of unity.

One of the 'prophets' that is not mentioned in the Qur'an, but who exerted nevertheless a huge influence on Islam, was Plotinus. Plotinus was a philosopher who stayed in Persia in the company of the Roman Emperor Gordian III, and exercised much influence there, also on a group of mystics that in later days were called the Sufis.

It is not surprising that Plotinus had such a strong impact on the Sufis and Islamic philosophy in general, because he also put a strong emphasis on the ONE. But the ONE was for him not a personal God, but an impersonal Principle. We will later see that his concept of the ONE is more like the original concept of

Allah than the current belief of Christians about God. It is always difficult, if not impossible, to describe the underlying Oneness of the manifestation. You seek for words, but not one fits. That is also the problem with the word God. In the way Christians use that word nowadays, God seems to be a kind of superhuman being, a personal god. But that was not always so.

When you look for instance at books from the early Christians, the so called Nag Hammadi Library, you find a totally different description. Like Plotinus' idea of the One, God has no properties. It is not right to think of Him as a god or something similar. Everything exists in Him. He is illimitable, unsearchable, immeasurable, invisible, unnamable, eternal and no one can comprehend Him.⁽¹⁾ You should not consider Islam as a completely new religion. It's an undercurrent of that broad, religious river of wisdom and compassion, which has flowed through all cultures and eras. With ease, you can find all sorts of Jewish, Persian and Christian influences in it, but also, especially in his more philosophical side, it is very strongly influenced by the Neo-Platonists, particularly Plotinus. This Neo-Platonic influence is reflected in the doctrine of the underlying unity of all expressions of life and in the process of emanation.

Every Muslim, whether he is Sunni or belongs to the Shi'a, living in Europe, Pakistan, America or Arabia, uses the same word to express that Unity: Allah.

Allah: Unity

Allah is the Arabic word for God. And without any doubt many Muslims imagine Allah as a personal God, just like other believers of monotheistic religions, such as Christians, Jews or Sikhs, anthropomorphize their God. But is Allah, as presented in the Qur'an, a personal god? What stands out strongly is that all Muslims, whether illiterate or great scholars, highlight the unity of Allah. Rightly so, because in many places in the Qur'an, and also in the *hadith* – the recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad – that unity is strongly emphasized.

In the 112th *Surah* (chapter) of the Qur'an we read:

Say: He is Allah, the One!

Allah, the eternally Besought of all!

He begetteth not nor was begotten.

And there is none comparable unto Him.

Pondering deeply about this *Surah*, you don't get an image of a personal God, but of a Principle; a Principle of Life,

that is everything and everyone.

Allah is One and cannot be divided. Therefore there cannot be a thing that is not Allah. So He cannot be a person, an ego. In fact you should better refer to Allah with the impersonal personal pronoun 'It' rather than 'He'. Furthermore, Allah is eternal. He has always been and will always be. A very interesting phrase is: *He begetteth not nor was begotten*. When Allah does not beget, nothing flows forth out of it. That means that He has created nothing. Allah cannot create, because then there would be something separated from Allah that nevertheless is rooted in it. Then there would have been two Unities, two Gods, and not one.

The only positive thing you can say about Allah, is that Deity is there, eternal and unchangeable.

There are Muslims who interpret this Quranic verse as directed against Christianity, for Christians assert that Jesus is the son of God. To prove they are wrong, these pious Muslims quote this verse, "Allah has not begotten". But the meaning of this verse goes much further. Allah has begotten NOTHING, for a principle cannot conceive, nor can it create. That is why the whole idea of Allah is beyond our comprehension. Exactly as Lao Tzu says that the true TAO – the infinity – cannot be named, this verse expresses that Allah is in fact everything but nothing in particular and thus beyond our understanding.

Allâhu Akbar

This idea is also reflected in the saying *Allâhu Akbar*, which is usually translated as *God is great*. That phrase is frequently uttered to justify the most terrible things, but in fact it means, that God is greater than anything we can conceive.⁽²⁾ Allah goes beyond our imagination, beyond the horizon of our existence. This is the same as the Hindu idea of *Parabrahman*, which means 'beyond Brahman', beyond the top of our hierarchy. The divine is greater than our grandest imagination.

On the other hand however, the Qur'an states that Allah is also very close. He is closer than the jugular vein (Surah 50:16). Also interesting is this statement: *...whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's Countenance.*(2:115) There are Muslim scholars who place this Quranic verse in the light of the fact that Muhammad changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. That may be so, but Ali ibn Taleb, the cousin and son in law of the Prophet, says that each Quranic verse has four meanings, four layers of interpretation.⁽³⁾ This verse means without any doubt more than just the direction of prayer. The divine is everywhere.

Up, down, left, right, closer than your jugular vein and yet above and beyond your greatest imagination. Allāhu Akbar. Or the deity is both transcendent and omnipresent at the same time: beyond or behind the phenomenal world. Too great to understand, not even approximately. And on the other hand, the divinity is everywhere in the phenomenal world. Everything is imbued with the divine. That is the image of the immanent deity.

Shahada

That picture is also evoked by the *Shahada*, the first of the five pillars. You may call it the creed of Islam. *La ilaha illa Allaah*. Literally this means: *there is no God; there is one God*. The usual translation is: *there is no God but God*. A remarkable phrase, composed of both a confirmation and a denial. Like all paradoxes, it should be food for thought. What is meant by the phrase that there is no God, and there is one God?

It means that you can say nothing at all about Allah. Anything you say about it, does detract from it. The only thing you can say about the Deity, is that it is everything. It is boundless, timeless, unchanging.

You can come to profound meditations on *La ilaha illa Allaah*. There is affirmation and negation, but affirmation and negation are only applicable in the manifested world. But Allah is both the manifested and non-manifested, and at the same time it is not, for it is more.

So, Allah is, as said, the transcendent divinity, the Force beyond the world, beyond the universe, beyond the phenomena; unknowable in its essence. The first part of the Shahada – there is no God – relates to this aspect. It is too far, too high, too dark and too incomprehensible for us. Beyond our imagination.

And yet the divinity is present in the manifestation. It is a force that is everywhere. That is the part of the Shahada which says there is one God.

This idea is also expressed in the following verse:

[He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things. \(57:3\)](#)

The Outward is the manifestation and the Inward is which is not-manifested. It is the picture of the transcendent and immanent deity. In other words: being and non-being. You might think that Allah is the synthesis between affirmation and negation, between non-being and being, between transcendent and immanent, but even that word synthesis does not express the correct understanding of

Allah, because Allah is UNITY *per se*. God is absolute UNITY, indivisible, and impossible to define. That unity is the starting point, the principle, on which the entire Islamic philosophy and mysticism is based.

Names of Allah

However, there still rise a few questions for people who have studied Islam. Allah is given a number of names, such as: the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Seer, the Creator and the King. Thus Allah is indicated with 99 names, of which, by the way, only 84 are mentioned in the Qur'an. It may seem as if those names prejudice the vastness and infinity of Allah. After all, a name indicates a property. And if someone has a certain property, then he lacks another property and is therefore not boundless. A property – how exalted it may be – always has a certain limitation in itself, while we already had determined that the Allah-Principle is the boundlessness itself. That is the reason why the *Mu'tazili* – an influential group in young Islam – taught that each property or characteristic that you grant to God, is a form of anthropomorphism and in fact polytheism, which is the biggest heresy in Islam. And indeed, when you consider the names as attributes of Allah, you interpret the great idea of the boundlessness anthropomorphically. You modulate the big picture according to your little human perceptions.

But you may interpret these names in another way. Ibn al-Arabi, for example, who lived from 1165 to 1240, has a very different idea. The central idea of his philosophy is, of course, the unity of Allah. He calls it the unity of Being. And since everything must be, by definition, *Being*, and since there are not two *Beings*, or two Absolute Truths, the universe must be permeated by *Being*, or is identical to *Being*. That does not mean that *Being* – or Allah – is the universe, or that the universe is Allah, because Allah is more than just conditional existence.

Allah, says al-Arabi, is exalted above all the properties, and the manifestation exists due to properties. Properties are neither God, nor is God, paradoxically, different from those properties. God manifests only by means of his names, which never can manifest its essence. And with those names al-Arabi refers to the names of whom Allah is known in the Qur'an. In its essence, in what you can call Necessary Being, Allah cannot be understood to experience, not in any way to become aware of. Nevertheless, from the divine flows forth life and life returns back into it. That life is presented as the names of Allah.⁽⁴⁾

Emanation

This idea of flowing out or emanation of life, so well-known in young Islam, is deeply rooted in the doctrines of the Neo-Platonists, especially the greatest of them: Plotinus. The doctrine of emanation implies that each being is the starting point of a flow of life. It is like a fountain source in which other beings are originated.

Imagine a being that creates an atmosphere, in which less developed beings can manifest themselves. These are entities with the same kind of characteristics as the Source-Being who created that atmosphere. In that sense, every entity is the result of a further developed being, and is also the source for less developed entities. We humans stem from higher beings

and create an atmosphere for less developed entities. Some of those lesser beings are the trillions of cells that make up our body, or the atoms that compose the cells, et cetera. So we are the ‘creators’ of those less developed beings, not in the literal sense, but in the sense that in our atmosphere they can live, have their existence and being. In Arabian scriptures these lower beings are referred to as *Jinn*, elemental beings, primitive, barely evolved beings, completely unselfconscious.

In turn, we emerged, or rather were attracted, to the sphere of what we may call a divine being that comes out of a still nobler being, et cetera. In that way, hierarchies of life come to being, in which each link switches, or transforms the life to a lower link. Each being is a link in a current of life. The hierarchical structure of the Universe is easy to find in Islam, albeit sometimes in symbolic form. Take for example the so called Night Journey, the journey that Muhammad made on the *Buraq* – the mythical steed – to Jerusalem, where he was taken to the seven heavens.

If you study the teachings of the *Ismaili*, a group of Muslims who in the 10th and 11th century were very influential, you will see that they strongly emphasized these hierarchies, which they divided in seven steps.

As mentioned, the doctrine of emanation was emphatically taught by Plotinus. The One, the Divine, seeps by means of a process of emanation, just briefly described, into the outer world.



Buraq, the mythical steed on which Mohammad made his Night Journey to the seven heavens. Illustration made in the Mughal empire, 17th century.⁽¹³⁾

Light Verse

Let us now take a look at the famous Light Verse (24:35) of the Qur’an.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light!

Many scholars have studied this verse. And although you can interpret it in different ways, it seems clear that the divine life-principle – the Light of the heavens and the earth – transforms via a number of links, into the material world. The expression “Light upon Light” is a phrase that you can also find in the work of Plotinus, who therefore uttered the same words six centuries before the Prophet of the Islam.⁽⁵⁾

This doctrine of emanation was widespread in Islam. Ibn Sina (980-1037), known in the West under the name of Avicenna, the great philosopher who has exerted so much influence on medieval thinking, uses the following comparison to make this thought clear. You can compare Allah – or Being – with the Sun. Of course, every comparison detracts from the reality of the unity of Allah, but to get at least to some extent an image, you

can compare Allah with the Sun. The universe is formed by the rays of the sun. Of course those rays are different from the sun, but at the same time, they are nothing more than the Sun. This comparison was probably well known among the Neo-Platonists. It goes back to the great Plato himself.⁽⁶⁾ It is basically the same as what Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*:

I establish this universe with a single portion of myself, and yet remain separate.⁽⁷⁾

The Ummah

The doctrine of the Oneness of Allah in combination with that of emanation is of paramount importance. First and foremost, all ethics are based on it.

If unity is the basis of all life, we have all emerged from the same source, yes, we are essentially the same. We consist of the same life. So we are brothers of one another. We must live for each other. We should not only help each other, no, we have to pay service to the whole community. In Islam the community is called *Ummah*.

To see this in its proper perspective, we need to place it in historical context. So we take you back to the Arabia of the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

There was at that time not the slightest feeling of general interest. It was a time of tribalism. Every tribe had its principles and laws and was almost constantly at war with other ones. So there was no sense of interconnectedness. The message of Muhammad was to bring about that unity. Every man, every nation, every tribe is a facet of the unity. So the Ummah is not explicitly the community for Muslims, but for every human being. When you read the Qur'an well, you will find this idea easily. We give two quotations:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you from male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. (49:13)

Mankind were one community, ... (2:213)

According to a *hadith* Mohammad also said that an Arab is not better than a non-Arab, a white man no better than a black or vice versa, except in terms of piety and good deeds. When Muhammad was forced to flee from Mecca to Medina, where he became the leader of the emigrated Muslims who had fled with him, a document was drafted under his leadership, which is nowadays known as the

'Constitution of Medina'. It expressly stated that the community does not only consist of Muslims but also of the Jews, Christians and pagans residing in Medina. It was a universal community, where people of all faiths and races belonged to.

A community can only function harmoniously, if people respect each other. So you should never force someone to accept a faith that you adhere yourself.

It may be dangerous to quote Quranic texts as evidence for your opinion, especially if you pluck them out of their context. Fanatics do that too much. Yet it seems to us that the famous verse 2:256 – *There is no compulsion in religion* – can be explained in no other way than by cherishing freedom for everybody to believe whatever they want.

Today the word Ummah is often limited to the Muslim community, but that shows a cramped form of separation and is in fact contrary to the message of the Prophet Muhammad, who emphasized so strongly the unity of everything and everyone.

Polytheism

Unity is very important throughout Islamic thought. It explains the aversion to polytheism, the belief in various gods.

Now you can find in the Qur'an a whole army of archangels and angels. This Holy Book itself – so is the tradition – was dictated by the archangel Jibril or Gabriel. So there is no doubt that there are beings that are more advanced than humans. The Qur'an tells also about beings that are less developed than humans: the jinn, extremely primitive entities. But this whole hierarchy forms a unity. This emphasis on the unity of Allah leads to the rejection of more gods. For the gods in ancient Arabia were all tribal gods. Each tribe had its own god, who was of the greatest importance for the ancient Arabs, even when this feeling was to the detriment of other tribes. That's why morality was limited to one's own tribe. As a result, there was much war and discord. There were no overarching ethics.

But because of the *Hijra* – Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina – Islam got a universal character. Initially the preaching of Muhammad was only addressed to the Meccans, but now he spoke to all mankind. Polytheism was thus rejected as being the return to the separateness of living in one's own tribe. For every tribe had, after all, their own tribal god. So if you denied the existence of all those gods, you put an end to the tribal sense of separateness. Compare it with today's national symbols. The symbol

of the USA is an eagle, of France a rooster, of Spain it is a bull and of the Netherlands a lion. Suppose that all those peoples grant their symbol great power. They pray to it. They beg to it for prosperity. In doing so, they isolate themselves from other nations, with hatred and war as a result.

You can counteract this by saying that all those symbols are illusions and false. There is unity. People need to know each other and learn from each other, so they can better shape the unity.

An important conclusion that can be drawn from the doctrine of emanation is that the divine is not outside but within us. When all is One, there can be nothing but Oneness. So every being is rooted in the Oneness. Rooted in a common divine Source, the divine is in all. Nevertheless, there is a great variety of beings in the world. Humans are different from animals, animals differ from plants, et cetera. And mutually men also, of course, differ from each other. The doctrine of emanation explains that too. Every entity gives in its own unique way shape to the unity. Therefore beings always differ in their outward form from each other and due to those differences they can learn from each other.

Evolution

The Light Verse shows that life – the Light of the heavens and the earth – is cascading down via various steps to the material world. The divine falls as it were in the materialistic fabric. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, we find the same thought:

*We have certainly created man in the best of stature;
Then We return him to the lowest of the low. (95:4-5)*

This idea is perhaps more understandable, if you take in consideration the hadith, popular by the Sufis, that the Prophet had told that all things were created in Darkness, but every being attracted light to himself according to his ability, and by doing so, got himself illuminated. Every being comes from the depths of the depth, from what we just called the unknown transcendent deity. That is the aspect of the Shahada that says there is no god. That is to say: there is no god for *us*, because the abyss for us is formless, it is the great Void, as Buddhists say. It is nothing, in the sense of *no thing*. But then a being comes into manifestation, just like fire throws off sparks, or, as Ibn Sina says, like the sun radiates rays. Every being is a spark of the divine light. The gloss of every man is like

a sparkle of the deity. That is the aspect of the Shahada that says there is one God. Everything is the one God, because everything comes from that depth into being and is therefore at the core of the core of his being that God. This idea is expressed in another way. A tradition states that every human being is in fact a Muslim, 'someone who resigns himself'. When God created all souls, he would have said: 'Am I not your Lord', and all souls answered: 'yes'. (Surah 7:172)

The consequence of this idea is of great meaning. Man is basically 'good'. Few doctrines erode ethics more than those which say that man is always inclined to be evil. No, man is created 'in the best of stature'. In the depths of his heart man is a noble creature. But apparently he does not realize this yet. He must learn to be who he really is. And in order to learn, he descended into the material fabric. He became 'the lowest of the low'.

So the divine being by origin descends into matter, thus loses the divine state, loses the knowledge where he once resided.

And how can he learn? How can he remember that he has to return to that divine state? By knowledge.

Knowledge and return

Knowledge, said Muhammad, is light.⁽⁸⁾ The ink of the scholar is therefore more valuable than the blood of the martyr, according to a hadith.

It is obvious and it does not need further discussion that so many cruelties executed by the so called *jihadis*, have nothing to do with genuine Islam. Many Islamic scholars have noticed that.⁽⁹⁾ Islam disapproves of cruelty and revenge sharply. See what the Sufi Shaikh Sharfuddin Maneri says about this:

Find him that flees for you; forgive him that offends you; do good unto him that does not want to bestow you anything.⁽¹⁰⁾

Islam teaches clearly that not war but study opens the path to Allah. That's why there is no other religion that emphasizes more the accumulation of knowledge than Islam.

The light of the heavens and the earth streams through links into the manifestation. The more it descends, the darker it gets. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is almost completely extinguished. Then people hate each other, then they live in the separation of their 'tribe'. Whether they give their 'tribe' the name of their religion, their country or race, is actually an afterthought. They are in

the illusion that others, who do not belong to their 'tribe', are different, evil, heretics, don't have the right faith. Then they kill each other. Then there is no knowledge, and so there is no light.

But we can come to knowledge. Then we return to where we came from, and we learn to live in the light that is in us. The whole Qur'an, the entire Islam, and in particular the mystical branch of it, is therefore dominated by *tauba*. This Arabic word is often translated as 'repentance', or 'remorse', but a better translation is 'repent', or even better 'return'. After all, if it is true that all souls emanated from Allah, then they will return to the Source one day.

That is exactly the meaning of religion. You will reconnect to the Source from which you come. We return to Him, we read constantly in the Qur'an.

The methods for 'going home' are the rules of the exoteric Islam: the five pillars that you can find in every book on this faith. But for those who want to go faster, there is the esoteric path, such as the different *tariqa's* (Paths) of the Sufi-masters. They practice poverty, asceticism, detachment and meditation.

Nafs: the lower self

The difficulty is that the light inside oneself is dimmed by what is called the *nafs*.

Man does have a spark of light in his soul, but that soul is composed of several parts. There is also a part of that soul that identifies itself with the earthly, the transient. That part is the *nafs*.

The *nafs* did not exist in the garden of Eden, the heavenly state, the initial stage in human evolution, when we still lived in Allah and were created in the best of stature.

Then we descended. In this process of emanation in which we became the 'lowest', the *nafs* was developed. *Nafs* is the instrument with which we could work in this outer world. We identified ourselves, however, with this external instrument, so that we forgot who we really were.

Nafs is described as the seat of the passions. In many Sufi writings it is presented as a very real thing. It sometimes lives as a separate entity outside the body. It is compared with the cruel Pharaoh; so it is the tyrant in us. It is compared with a woman (*nafs* in Arabic is a feminine noun) that seduces men. More often it takes the form of an animal, frequently a pig.

Those who are aware of the composite constitution of the human being, as Theosophy teaches, understand this metaphor all too well. The personal man may easily focus himself on his animal nature and then he banishes

the divinity.

Sometimes the *nafs* takes the form of hypocrisy; it comes with the Qur'an and rosary in one hand and with the scimitar and dagger in the mews, says the Sufi-poet Rumi. Hence, you find many warnings in Islamic literature not to give in to the desires of the *nafs*.

Yet it is not that we should eliminate the *nafs*, not in the absolute sense, but we must not listen to its voice. We should not be affected by it. *Nafs* is the element in us that attaches us to the phenomena. Therefore, we must rise above it.

The fight against this *nafs* is the true *jihad*, the true holy war. A hadith says: the worst enemy – the *nafs* – is between your sides. And the Prophet Muhammad would have said, when he returned from a battle field: we are going now to the *jihad akbar* — the great battle, the fight against the *nafs*.

In the Qur'an we read:

I do not exculpate myself. Lo! the (human) soul enjoineth unto evil, save that whereon my Lord hath mercy. (12:53)

The *nafs* is here translated as soul, which could be misleading, for one could draw the wrong conclusion, that man is prone to evil. But it is the *nafs*, the lower part of the soul that, left to itself, focuses on the material side of life.

But as evidenced by the Qur'an, the *nafs* may be also used for good. Live in unity and you win the big *jihad*. Sufis love to compare the attempts to master the *nafs* with the training of a dog. The lower aspects should not be slain, they must be controlled, so that they can serve us.

Rumi compares that struggle with a man trying to maneuver his camel in the right direction, e.g. to the tent of the beloved. If you live in the knowledge of Allah, the soul obeys his master.⁽¹¹⁾

Extinction

Returning to the Source is described as a journey full of perils and temptations.

It is often expressed in symbolic language, as in the famous allegory *The Birds' Conversation* of Farid ad-Din Attar. In this inspiring story the birds – symbols of souls – set out to find the mysterious Simurgh. They pass through seven valleys. The last is that of destruction. What does that mean?

It is basically the same as Nirvâna. Nirvâna means literally 'blown out'. But what is blown out?

The lower part in man is blown out. The lower principles are destroyed. The nafs is destroyed. Only when that is the case, you can merge into the unity. There is an absorption in pure cosmic Being.

The Sufis use this image of destruction. In Arabic it is called *Fanâ*, or *Fanâ' fi-Allah*, which means annihilation in God. But to fully understand this, they link it with *Baqâ' bi-Allah*, 'be eternal in God'. You destroy the personal man, you detach from all the limited, oppressive, small, deciduous shadows and illusions. In fact you detach from all emanations. And because of that destruction you live in Allah. You are aware of the all-encompassing unity of life. You do not see yourself as a separate being, but as a drop in the sea of life.

However, the voyage does not end. For as various Sufis assert: the journey to God stops, but the journey in God begins.⁽¹²⁾ After all, there is boundlessness. So there can never be limits.

There is yet another stage in *Fanâ' fi-Allah*, and *Baqâ' bi-Allah*, which, according to Theosophia, is the highest, and that is: the journey from God with God. This means that after the destruction, when you 'live in Allah', you descend again into the world of phenomena. You remain conscious of the unity, but nevertheless live in the multiplicity of the outer world.

Why is this the highest form of unification? Because there is the greatest perception that an individual is essentially the same as another. Therefore we should not live for our own bliss and salvation, but we should identify ourselves with the whole, the Ummah. Compassion is the highest form of unification.

Wherever there is a form of 'I', where one's own 'I' desires to be destroyed, where that 'I' wants to live in Allah, there is still a form of illusion. When the ego is on the foreground, man limits himself.

You can never wake up the divine completely within yourself, if there is still some form of 'I'; if the 'I' is still the dominant factor in your consciousness. There is nothing that describes this clearer and more beautiful than the poem of the greatest of the Sufi poets, Djalaal ad-Din Rumi:

Someone went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.

A voice asked, "Who's there?"

He replied, "I".

The voice said, "There is no place for Me and You."

The door was closed.

After a year of solitude and deprivation he returned and

knocked.

A voice from inside asked, "Who's there?"

The man said: "Thou."

The door opened for him.

References

1. James M. Robinson (general editor), 'The Apocryphon of John'. *Nag Hammadi Library in English*. E.J. Brill, Leiden 1988, p. 106.
2. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York 2004, p. 5.
3. Henri Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie islamique*, Part I. Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 20.
4. See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. State University of New York Press, New York 1973, p. 202.
5. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V 3.12.
6. Plato, *Politeia*, p. 508c.
7. *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, chapter 10, verse 42.
8. See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York 2007, p. 32.
9. In September 2014 more than hundred prominent Muslims, including professors from different countries, have written a letter to the leader of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In that Open Letter to al-Baghdadi, Muslims condemn the actions and positions of IS. They call 24 ways in which IS is violating Islamic teachings. See: <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>.
10. Shaikh Sharfuddin Maneri. *Letters From A Sufi Teacher*. Translated by Baijnâth Singh. Theosophical Publishing Society, Benares/London 1867, p. 74. Online: www.gutenberg.org/files/47749/47749-h/47749-h.htm.
11. See for nafs: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1975, p. 112-4.
12. See ref. 11, p. 306.
13. Source: Wikipedia, 'Buraq'.