

DIALOGOS AS THE ANATOLIAN TRADITION OF SOHBET

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Is there any way for us to reflect upon and criticize our own consciousness without being involved in any self-delusion and self-consolation? *Dialogos* is the only means for such an attempt. *Dialogos* is the conversation (or correspondence) between two consciousnesses. Unless we reveal our consciousness to another, and most particularly to a more competent consciousness (in other words, unless we are engaged in an activity of *inter-consciousness*), we are not capable of reflecting upon ourselves. To be able to reflect upon our own consciousness, we need to share our language and our thoughts with the others. Unless there is interrelatedness, what we are left with is just *monologos*. Yet, what is it that prevents us from *dialogos*, which is the very act of laying our own consciousness open to the others? It is lack of self-confidence.

It is *dialogos* that we refer to when we use the concept of *ashura*, as in the phrase “*ashura* cauldron”, which is used within the Anatolian culture as a symbol of interrelatedness.¹ In that cauldron, there is a “harmonious bonding”². I would like to emphasize the need for such harmonious bonding among people and its universalization. In the dictionaries under the influence of Western thought and literature, and also of orientalism, the equivalent of this term [here the Turkish term *bagdashma*] is given as “syncretism”. However, the two words do not have the same meaning. In our culture, there is the tradition of friends coming together and sitting cross-legged. This is not like standing opposite each other or sitting around a table. It is rather like the sitting posture of Buddha (the lotus position). This is the kind of sitting that could be seen in a *dargah* (a dervish lodge). You do not sit on your knees, so it means it does not involve bowing down to the other. People sit cross-legged, they sit freely and each one is equal to the other. This atmosphere makes *dialogos*, which can also be called as *sohbet* (*suhbah*), possible. The Anatolian tradition is the method of “fermentation” through *sohbet*. People come together to sit together, to be fermented, or to be brewed. *Sohbet* has such a kind of language that it “ferments” people.

Even in daily language, in the process of taking an object as the subject matter of our consciousness and trying to comprehend it, we are doing a translation. We take the information or perception someone has conveyed to us, translate it into our terms and explain it to ourselves. In order to have *dialogos* in this process, a common language has to be built, and it has to be built *not* on the basis of a doctrine or dominance over one another

¹ *Ashura* is an Anatolian dessert made of fruits that are brought together, yet no one fruit destroys the characteristics of the others and the flavor of each remains distinct. There is dynamism and exchange in taste. Just as in the example of *ashura*, the Anatolians never tried to destroy other cultures; they combined civilizations that had developed an understanding between each other. Many languages were spoken and various people with various backgrounds gathered on this land over time (from a talk by Metin Bobarođlu on “Anatolia and Ashura”).

² The Turkish word used in this context can be transliterated as *bagdash/ bagdashma* and means both “establishing a harmonious bond between each other” and “sitting cross-legged as in the lotus position”.

but on the basis of common sense, conveyance of information, and mutual consent. If we are to go into the phenomenology of *sohbet*, we can see that it involves mutual consent (*radiyatan mardiyya*). It is an Anatolian tradition to carry out a *dialogos*, or *sohbet* that is based on mutual consent. It turns lack of self-confidence into confidence within an atmosphere of consent. Yet, we have put this tradition away, changed it into other forms, such as conferences, seminars, etc. Unfortunately, *sohbet* is no more than a daily chat for the people of the modern world today.

Hence, “harmonious bonding among people” should be understood as in the example of *ashura*: not destroying but understanding one another, and sheltering each other to the degree of your level of understanding. In Anatolia this is called as *musahibhood*, i.e. a *spiritual brotherhood* in which people claim the rights of their brothers and sisters. What is claimed here is not the attributes that are the same, but the attributes that are different from each other. It is welcome that people are different from one another and that they bring different kinds of values to the table which has been symbolized as *Zechariah’s Table*. This table is not an ordinary one; it is a table for *food craving*.

Abraham’s Table is a table of feast, of celebration. However, *Zechariah’s Table* is the table of blessings that was brought unto Maryam (Mary) as a result of her cravings. This means that there is a demand for variety. Variety is asked for, diversity is craved for. If there is no craving for diversity, then there is a doctrinal, dogmatic, male way of thinking which would lead people to nowhere. The famous statement that reached its peak in Anatolia between 12th and 14th centuries, “*He who does not see the seventy two nations as one is not human*”, was the result of the fermentation of a gnostic understanding that craved for diversity. This fermentation was also reflected in people’s lifestyles, the examples of which are Ahi, Bektashi and Mevlevi Brotherhoods.

Spiritual life is established through “language” and this language has to be built through the participation of people. In the book called *Ein Gespräch*³, four outstanding artists from Europe come together around a table and discuss art. You can witness *dialogos* in their discussion. While discussing art, they do not invite us to a “ready-built” temple but they build a cathedral, a temple themselves. This temple is the meeting tent of Moses, namely the *Tabernacle*. The tent that was gathered in throughout the journey in the desert after having left Egypt is this *Mishkan*, the dwelling place (*mesken*). It is the place where you reside in stillness (*sâkin*) and find peace (*sukûn*), it is the tent of the *Shekhina*.⁴

This tent is not “ready-built” in some place. People come and build it together just as they used to do in the village institutes⁵ or the kibbutzim. People go into the tent they have built

³ This book has been published in Turkey under the title *Bir Katedral İnşa Etmek (Building a Cathedral)*.

⁴ The Hebrew words *Mishkan* and *Shekhina* are derived from the same root that means “dwelling” or “settling”. *Mishkan* is “the dwelling place” and the feminine word *Shekhina* refers to “the settling of divine presence”. There is a similar parallelism among the Arabic words *Mesken* (مَسْكَن), *Sâkin* (سَاكِن) and *Sukûn* (سُكُون) that derive from the same root. *Mesken* is “the dwelling place”, *Sâkin* means both “the resident” and “peaceful or calm”, and *Sukûn* is “stop and rest in a place” and “peace or tranquility”.

⁵ A group of co-ed, public, boarding schools that was operational between 1940 and 1954 in Turkey. These schools were the cornerstones of the rural development project. At the time there were not any schools in

together, become initiated and perform their prayers. This ritual is repeated throughout the whole desert. At the end of the journey, a common language and conscience is formed. In other words, every individual goes through the initiation and a nation is created. The Law (*Torah*) of this nation is its very land and the nation has come to live on the Promised Land as a result of their commitment to the Law.

The Spirit, by manifesting itself and reflecting upon its manifestations, establishes its own life. The type of intellect that comes out in this process of reflective thinking is the universal intellect (*aql-i kulli*). The universal intellect encompasses the partial intellect (*aql-i juzwi*). In other words, the partial intellect is significant only under the universal intellect. Ibn Arabi says: “Only he who has found his Divine Self can know himself, he who has not found his Divine Self cannot know himself.” Not knowing himself means he does not understand himself so others assign a meaning for him. There is hermeneutics here: Those who do not assign any meaning to their own lives are assigned by other people and they become the slaves of others. One of the gnostics has once said: “Search for, know and find your Rabb (the spiritual guide).” This leads us to the universal intellect and universal values, and is the way to freedom.

The formation process of the Spirit also corresponds to the history of humanity. The positivist teachings of today lack the awareness that “language” has been built by the efforts of thousands of people and has been passed on to us as a gift throughout history. This kind of intellect lacks conscience and fidelity. This is an intellect without any conscience and we know that it does not bear any spiritual meaning. Therefore, looking back at history and establishing a historical awareness enables us to understand that “language” is the result of certain periods of processing, that great civilizations have contributed to certain periods of this process, and that these come together to form a whole, or a network. Then, we are able to obtain a language that is composed not only of our projections on conceptual philosophy but also of the values of civilizations, and this language provides the human being with an *identity*.

A merely conceptual or factual language does not provide the human being with an *identity*, but merely with a *personality*. Therefore, he “lacks an identity” (*huwal ghayb*) and can never truly answer the question “Who are you?” In the case of such a question, he could only give the information written on his identification card. In a rationalistic society, saying “I am Turkish” or “I am Chinese” implies nothing more than the fact that you own a passport bound by a certain constitution. It has no further appreciation of or commitment to history. This is a project carried out within the nihilistic perspective of positivism that is keen on deliberate undervaluation.

When it comes to *Rabb’s language*, it is not a daily language but a *meta-language*. It cannot be given by someone else and we can attain it only through our own abstractions. And only if it is the product of our own efforts are we able to reflect upon ourselves. Otherwise, learning how someone else evaluates us does not lead to any form of enlightenment. *Meta-language* is certainly the language of the intellect; however, it is *the language of the*

most of the villages. Village Institutes were established to train teachers for each village and send them back to form new village schools (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village_Institutes).



intellect's intellect. In other words, it is the togetherness of two ways of reasoning, one working on the basis of *tanzih* (abstraction, or declaration of incomparability) and the other working on the basis of *tashbih* (declaration of similarity).

In this case, the intellect that is attained through *abstraction* observes the intellect that is engaged with *sensory perception*, and this kind of an observation is a *reflection*. Hence, a dialogue that would encompass all the human beings can neither be among the ideologies nor among the religions. Such a dialogue could only be established through *interculturality*, on condition that its language is that of *intercultural philosophy*. Being involved in this kind of a dialogue would lead us to a path that would enable peace and the unity of the ideals in the world. This is not the way of science. There may be those who say science is universal and its methods are also universal, and hence, what will unite the world is science. However, scientific concepts imply the facts and not the values. *The Temple* is built with the bricks of values, not with the bricks of facts since a human being is not a machine.

The conclusion we are to arrive at is this: Philosophy is the language of *dialogos* among the intellects, and if it succeeds to reach *theoria*, i.e. universal concepts, those abstractions will lead us from all kinds of ethnic, religious and local attachments to *the Universal*, to *the Language of Rabb*. Hence, this is a language that no one culture or civilization can engage with itself and claim its right to possess it, but it is rather a language that has such a capacity that a person can have his share in it and can perceive himself as a human being as much as he is aware that this language belongs to the whole of humanity.

“Language” is an instrument for the attainment of truth. It is also the form of knowledge, the form being *libas*, or dress. If the dress, *libas*, does not indicate the *essence*, i.e. if the form is without its essence, if the language is used without referring to its essence, then it is called as *iblis* in this tradition. The concept of *iblis* derives from two roots in Arabic: *libas* (dress) and *eblese* (bewilderment). When it derives from *eblese* it includes bewilderment, and when it derives from *libas* it includes a form, dressing, or covering. Everything that exists, all the existence (*mawjud*) has a form, a *libas*.

We are talking about the forms that are “with essence” or “without essence”. There is no problem with the ones with essence as they indicate their essence through their forms. However, the ones without essence are called as *pornography* in terms of contemporary art. Pornography should not merely imply sexuality as the term indicates an appearance without any essence, and hence it means *iblis*. *Iblis*, which is a form without essence, bewilders (*eblese*) and distorts your insight so you cannot see the truth (*haqiqqa*) and *Haqq*. What shows us the truth is “the dress”, in other words, truth can never be seen without a form. Then, the problem is either having an essence or not and this applies also for “language”.

This matter of having an essence or not has been focused on within all the gnostic languages, including that of *tasawwuf*. So, what is it to have an essence? People who are merely interested in the sufi tradition occasionally come together and talk. They have read what is in the sufi literature; they talk about love, nirvana, and satori, yet no one among them has had the experience of these. The words are there but they lack the essence, so they do not make you intoxicated. There is a demand to get intoxicated but as it does not

happen there are false emotional arousals. These kinds of so-called sufi gatherings frequently take place in many parts of the world. *Gnostics* (people called as *arif*) say about these kinds of gatherings: “*The false implies the true.*” False (counterfeit) money points at the genuine money. Unoriginal statements make you look for the true ones. Therefore, the false will exist forever.

In *dialogos*, in the very beginning, it is essential to get into touch with a higher consciousness and experience the clarity in it. The next step in *dialogos*, where the consciousness is raised to a higher level, is the level of *friendship*. There is no more superiority or inferiority at this level, there is the unity of the two. At the very last step there is *quietness* and no language is used. In the very beginning it is essential to experience the clarity, which is the opportunity to observe yourself from a higher consciousness. “Language” is a manifestation, an expression and is formed in the relationship between “the addresser” and “the addressee”. The language of the addressee determines the level of the language used. However high your level of consciousness and language is, it descends in accordance with the consciousness of the addressee in the *dialogos*.⁶

⁶ This excerpt is taken from a talk by Metin Bobaroğlu on “Language and its Analysis in Multiple Dimensions”, on January 24, 2012, and translated by Nurgül Demirdöven.