

JERUSALEM: THE HEART OF THE WORLD

Part 1

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When we say Jerusalem, we mean the old city surrounded by walls. With its other parts which remain out of the city walls, Jerusalem is a modern city with new settlement areas; a modern Mediterranean city like Tel Aviv, Haifa or Akko. But in Jerusalem there is a history, a religious history as well as a cultural history. And in terms of art, it is also a sophisticated city. What attracted my attention in the first place was the cult of Stone. They have used the specific Jerusalem stone everywhere. There are no ferro-concrete buildings, no other building materials but only Jerusalem Stone. It brings in something magical, it seems as if there is a smell of this stone, a colour, a magic: the whole city made of stone. I always say that Jerusalem and Rome offer us the culture of a city very well; but this is true especially for Jerusalem, where Christianity, Judaism and Islam are so close to one another.

(...) In Jerusalem, neighbourhoods are like different states. To pass from one neighbourhood to another, you are controlled at checkpoints. Of course these are security precautions and they take these precautions for the safety of people who live in a conflict zone under tension. But one would wish a peaceful environment. I dreamt of a society which consists of interpenetrating communities. I wish this kind of culture, which we call as *ashura*, would exist in Jerusalem. This is probably the most urgent need for the world.

When we say Yerushalayim or Jerusalem, we mean something two-sided. Yerushalayim means double peace, it is Dar-us-Salaam (House of Peace); a place which represents the inner and outer peace of man, in other words the communal peace and the cross-cultural peace. When we call this centre as heart, which is a common saying and I embrace it too, Jerusalem is the heart of the world. And if there is no peace in Jerusalem, there is no peace in this world. It's like, if someone's heart is sick, if there is dissension in it, his body is also sick.

The delight, the joy of the living culture must be re-created for those who would appreciate it. I have made these *sohbets*, this study we have been carrying out, to invoke an intellectual insight. And also to light the Alawi fire again, to enliven the fire, this intellectual insight. When we say intellectual insight, we don't mean reading books, explaining them to each other, writing new books, so on. We mean reproducing this insight in life.

What we wanted to say in this study, in this joy of *Ashura* that we have been sharing, is that there's only one tradition and it is Hermetic tradition. And it flows like a river. Of course



there are varieties, different tones and colours in different cultures and geographies. But the underground waters beyond these varieties are the same. The discourse is the same, the world of spirituality is the same.

Jerusalem means “*quddus*”, pure. It is a word related to heart, to the purity of heart... We have said before that it is Dar-us-Salaam, the city of peace. But there is peace where there is purity. Our heart must be free of infidelity, dissension, and associating partners with Allah, only then it can be *quddus*. When the heart is *quddus*, the Temple of God is built in it. It was a divine order to Prophet David and Prophet Solomon to build a temple in the heart. And the Temple of Solomon is the Temple of Peace.

We may be living in different cultures and under different regimes as the people of the world, but we have to give up this attitude of condemning or praising societies on the whole. And putting aside all the differences among states and nations, maybe we should work hand in hand with the volunteers of peace among them for the peace of humanity. (...) We have to work hand in hand with the volunteers in all societies for peace in the whole world. We shouldn't mind the politicians or political interests. We generally condemn societies because of the leaders of countries and their political attitudes. We condemn people living in these countries. However, governments may change and other people may get in charge. If we, the civil society, work hand in hand as volunteers of peace, the seeds of dissension in Jerusalem may be destroyed, and then there can be a *Cem* (gathering).

There is only one God and his people, called mankind. And of course there is variation. Variation is not bad. People say “Why are we different? We shall be the same.” Not at all, it would be unpleasant if we were all the same. This is why we constantly emphasize the *ashura* – the tasteful unity of varieties. It is good to be different from each other. It is good to have variations. We should feel the joy of being different from each other. Otherwise we would ask why someone else is not like us. Then it would be like wearing soldier uniforms or scout uniforms; everybody would be the same.

We are always singing our song, but in fact we should sing the other's song. What do we mean? We are always talking about ourselves. When we look at people from all over the world, they may have different beliefs, different ideologies, different cultures, yet they introduce themselves like market products, they propagate themselves as being this or that. But it seems this is not we need as mankind in the name of peace. We should sing their song and they should sing our song.



Then, we can build bridges. That is, we have to understand each other. As long as we do not understand each other, it is not important to come together for the sake of peace. (...) We should stop accepting and try to understand one another. We need the philosophy, the tastes and the smells of the ancient wisdom behind this philosophy.

This is not allowance. This is “understanding the other, sharing your feelings with the other”. I don’t think allowance is a positive term. When you say tolerance it is not exactly like allowance. Tolerance is a rational act; we can tolerate people in many different ways. It is a rational concept. Today we use allowance in a positive sense, but there is some humiliation in this word. Don’t despise but allow the poor. It means that you are looking down on an inferior one, such as someone who has behaved naughtily. Therefore this word is not the right word. I can punish someone but I choose not to. This is allowance. But we need equality, balance. Allowance itself is not enough for peace in the world. We need balance, and for it we have to sing the other’s song.

(...) Only when we sing one another’s song can we have a common sound. We are the people of the world, this world is our temple. We are on the same ship, and we are turning around the sun on this ship. But we saw the state of the world in Jerusalem. There are separations; there is only a balance in tension in which we negotiate. But no, we have to open our hearts to each other.

Only Allah is complete, perfect. Perfect is Allah. We need each other with all our imperfectness. We come up to each other to complete our imperfectness. If we were perfect, if we didn’t need each other, we would be pharaohs. Pharaoh thought himself as being perfect. But we need each other, we are imperfect. There is this new method called sampling; the sound of an instrument or the voice of a person is taken while making music, and then excellent, perfect choral music is produced; we listen to them but we don’t get any taste from them. There must be imperfection in it, it shouldn’t be perfect, and we have to enjoy imperfectness. You know, there is a verse from the Quran related to this. It says: “If you have never committed a sin, Allah would destroy you, create another tribe instead of you, they would commit a sin, and then repent, and Allah would forgive them.” This is a really critical issue. There is also another verse in the Quran and it says: “You, the self committing a sin, you shall never give up hope of Allah.” This is a very nice thing. It does not encourage a person to commit a sin, to commit a crime, on the contrary it means that people can accept each other; in other words, we should not only think in terms of ourselves but also in terms of the other people. Mawlana said: “The one who seeks a perfect friend is alone in the end.” Then, accepting the other’s imperfection is a merit. This is very important. This means that a dervish does not see any fault or imperfection.

A story:

A Bektashi baba, a Mevlevi dede and an imam effendi have come together in the courtyard of a mosque. They are talking to each other, all of them dressed in their own religious clothes. The imam effendi says with a sense of humour: “*My dear friend, why are your sleeves so wide?*” He asks the Mevlevi dede why his sleeves are so wide. They are very wide,



not like the sleeves of an ordinary shirt. And the Mevlevi dede puts his hands into his sleeves; he hides his hands in his sleeves and says: *“If we see a fault, we cover it up; these sleeves are the signs, the symbols of it.”* The imam effendi says: *“Oh, very nice, mashallah”* and turns to the Bektashi baba, but the sleeves in the Bektashi tradition are very tight and there are also several buttons on them, they are extremely tight. The imam effendi asks the Bektashi baba: *“My dear friend, why are your sleeves so tight then?”* And the Bektashi baba answers: *“We never see any faults, so what should we cover up?”*

The ties, bridges are not left out, but they are destroyed. There are no discarded but destroyed bridges. We have to repair these bridges. This is what I have learnt from this journey.

We can see that people who do their job with joy, who get delight in what they do, who don't do it for the sake of money or fame but just for the sake of joy carry out divine service at the same time.

When we say poetical philosophy, it is a piece of work; it means you are building a temple. Poem is a temple and the discourse of ancient wisdom is a philosophical discourse. Ancient scholars don't use prose to say something. Prose doesn't have the rhythm, the harmony, the constructive power of inner structure. Prose is like the stones paved on the roads. Poem is definitely the temple on top of it; it is not merely a house, it is a divine house. In other words, it is an artistic structure. A symphony is a temple, a poem is a temple, I mean it is artistic, this is very important. Then it is impossible to translate it, so we need to rebuild it. We cannot translate it, but we can only give the meaning of it, as we do for the Quran. The Quran and all the other apocalyptic literature are poetical, their structures are poetical. As it cannot be translated, we call it the meaning of the Quran.

Being *Hizir (Khidr)* is the common attribute of all saints. When we say *Hizir* we seem to be talking of a separate person called *Hizir* but those who feel the joy of this tradition must have understood from our previous talks that every saint is a friend of *Hizir*.*

* These excerpts are taken from *Ashura*, a TV programme by Metin Bobaroğlu and Ayşe Acar on Anatolia, and translated by Nurgül Demirdöven and Arzu Cengil.