

CONCEPT OF MAITREE AND REHMAT IN SHIN BUDDHISM AND ISLAM**Dr Tabassum Sheikh***HOD & Associate Professor**G.M.Momin Women's College, Bhiwandi**Email:simpletab@rediffmail.com*

In Islam the word Rehmat means 'The Loving'. God's Rehmat is described as greater than that of the mother, the most loving and the most compassionate of all human qualities. This compassionate feeling for everyone alike is referred to as metta or maïtre or Karuna and Rehmat in Islam. This is from a passage in the Metta-sutta (teaching on love) in the Pali canon:

"Even as another watches over and protects her child, her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all living beings, radiating friendliness over the entire world, above below, and all around without limit. So let him cultivate a boundless good-will towards the entire world, unimpeded free from ill will or enmity. Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all his waking hours, let him establish this mindfulness of good will, which men call the highest state."

It is out of compassion, indeed, that the Buddha preached his Dhamma; his desire was to liberate people from suffering by enlightening them as to its cause, and showing them the means – the noble eightfold path – to eliminate that cause. It is clear, then, that even in early Buddhism compassion was not just a cardinal virtue, it went to the very heart of the Buddhist upaya, the 'expedient means' or 'saving strategy'. However, it is not hard to see that, in the later texts, those from which the Mahayana branch of Buddhism derive, the stress on compassion goes well beyond anything found in the early texts.

The logical problem is this: If as the Buddha preached, there is no ultimate reality pertaining to the individual soul (doctrine of no soul) from where does the compassion derive its substance. If the soul is but a conglomeration of empirical and psychic envelopes (skandhas), with no essential reality, can the compassion manifested by such a soul have a more substantial reality and these envelopes themselves? In other words, what is the ultimate source of the compassion of the Buddha?

When the person reaches the enlightened state, compassion flows forth from the very nature of Nirvana and Shunya. The question is how can compassion flow as a supra-personal or impersonal state, because compassion is to be considered as a personal feeling. It implies a personal will, an active compassion understanding the suffering of humanity. It is a personal will which is both transcendent and absolute. Only if it is transcendent it will save relative beings, and assume the dimension of relativity, otherwise it will have no relation to human beings.

This combination of absolute transcendence and personal compassion is expressed in the Islamic

compassion of divine Rehmat. It is also mentioned in the later Mahayana texts of the heavenly Buddhas where Gautama is described as perfect embodiment of compassion transcending his own empirical individuality, seen to be the light of the reality of Dharma, the supreme principle. This relationship between the particular and the universal is expressed in Buddhism by means of mythology of cosmic Buddhas existing in unimaginably distant aeons prior to the earthly appearance of the Gautama. Mahayana texts therefore present a picture of a personal God with diverse traits—the Adi-Buddha, Vairochana, Amitabha etc.—without whose grace and mercy, one cannot attain salvation into the celestial domains known as the 'Pure Land', let alone that state of Nirvana wherein the various Buddhas themselves are all transcended.

Mahayana Buddhism comes close to the Islamic conception of divinity as regards the root of the quality of compassion. Both traditions make explicit a metaphysically irrefutable principle of which Buddha was silent. Compassion cannot flow from its purely human manifestation, it derives all its powers and efficacy from its supra-human, absolute or divine source. This source is transcendent, but in so far it radiates towards all creatures, it assumes a personal dimension as it consists of an active conscious and loving will to save all creatures and to speak of such a will is to speak of an transcendental entity directing that will. In one respect this can be seen as a personal dimension of the absolute, bestowing upon the pure, ineffable and inconceivable. This personal dimension does not diminish the intrinsic absoluteness of the Absolute. In Islamic terms, the pure Absolute is the Essence (al-dhat), transcending the Names and Qualities in relationship with the world, transcending those personal dimensions of God which presuppose and manifest these Names and Qualities.

The Islamic synthesis of the dual conception of God as personal and supra personal is an analogy to the Mahayana Buddhism between the two dimensions of the Absolute. For the personal and supra personal dimensions of Allah, comprising all the qualities designated all divine names, are in perfect harmony and synchronicity. This Islamic synthesis can help to show what has been called Mahayana 'theism' does not violate early Buddhism's insistence on the impersonal nature of the Absolute, the transcendence of the Dharma/Nirvana/Shunya vis-à-vis all conceivable qualities, personal or otherwise.

The question is what is the connection between the metaphysics of unity in Islam and Buddhism where there appears to be no duality no otherness, where samsara and Nirvana are ultimately identical and the quality of compassion presupposes both an agent and a recipient of compassion. Is there a contradiction between the absolute transcendence of Reality and the compassionate manifestation of Reality? In terms of Islamic metaphysics the oneness of Reality strictly implies compassion. Oneness of God does not imply exclusive but also inclusive—it is both Ahad and Wahid, it is both transcendent and immanent. As al-Wahid, all-inclusive oneness, God encompasses all things, He is al-wasi, the Infinitely Capacious and al-Muhit, the All-Encompassing. From this all embracing dimension of divine reality that compassion springs. Along with such metaphysical attributes like Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient attributes, He also flows His Rehmat. His rehmat encompasses all things.

On the human plane, compassion as Rehmat is evidently a virtue which one must acquire and cultivate; it

must therefore be present in God, failing which our human quality of compassion would lack any divine principle; compassion would then be a human effect without a divine cause. This is made clear in the prophetic saying on the rahmat of the mother for her child: human compassion is akin to the compassion of God for all His creatures, only that divine compassion is absolute and infinite and human compassion is relative and finite. The difference is ontological intensity and subject to gradation.

Al-Ghazali has resolved the contradiction between divine compassion and divine unity. If compassion be understood as a mode of love, then one can reformulate the question and ask whether it is possible to ascribe love to God: Can God be susceptible to wards his creatures as desirable when He himself possesses everything in perfection of all that He desires. Can the Absolute desire the relative? Can we take this question from the theological or metaphysical point of view. He brings forth the concept of ma'rifa. Language and agent plays a major role in the understanding of this. The word love (mohabbat) can be applied to both. Human love is defined as an inclination of the soul towards that which is in harmony with it, beauty both outward and inward, seeking from another soul the consummation of love. Through this love it attains completeness, a mode of perfection which cannot be attained within itself. Such love cannot be ascribed to God in whom all perfections are infinitely and absolutely realized. From metaphysical point of view one can say that the love of God is real, His love is not for any other being but only for Himself. It is for His own essence, His qualities and His acts., when the Quran asserts 'He loves them' this means that God does indeed love them (all human souls), but in reality He loves nothing other than Himself, in the sense that He is the totality (of being), and there is nothing in being apart from Him.

Al-Ghazali demonstrates that God is the entirety of being by reference to the holy utterance (hadith qudsi), in which God speaks in the first person, on the tongue of the Prophet: 'my slave draws near to me through nothing I love more than that which I which I have made obligatory for him. My slave never ceases to draw near me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks.'

It is the saint, the wali Allah (literally: friend of God), who comes to understand the reality that God alone is—that there is no reality by the divine reality— and this understanding comes through affacement, fana, in the reality, and this, in turn is the function of God's love: 'My slave never ceases to draw near... until I love him.' It is from this divine love that the saint comes to see that God loves all creatures, and that the reality of this love this love is constituted by God's infinite love of Himself. This love is expressed not just by the term mahabbat but also by Rahmat, which encompasses all things.

Rahmat as Creator

Turning now to another aspect of compassion, that of its creative power, we see again that what is left implicit in early Buddhism is rendered altogether explicit both in Islam and in such Mahayana traditions as Jodo Shin. In both traditions, the Creator is nothing other than the 'All Compassionate', or the 'All Loving'; but whereas this conception is enshrined in the very heart of the Qur'an, it emerges in Buddhism only in certain Mahayana traditions.

The Muslim consecrates every important action with the utterance of the basmala, the phrase : Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim. This formula also initiates each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an (except one). It is altogether appropriate that all ritual and significant action be initiated with a recollection of the compassionate source of creation. In terms of the two divine Names deriving from the root Rahmat, the first , al-Rahman is normally used to refer to the creative power of Rahmat, and the second, al-Rahim, to its salvific power. Combining these two properties of loving compassion, the creative and redemptive, one sees that ultimately nothing can escape or be separated from God's all-embracing Rahmat.

This is why calling upon al-Rahman is tantamount to calling upon God: Call upon Allah or call upon al-Rahman. If al-Rahman is so completely identified with the very substance of God, then it follows that the Rahmat which so quintessentially defines the divine the divine nature is not simply 'mercy' or 'compassion' but is rather the infinite love and perfect beatitude off ultimate reality, which overflows into creation in the myriad forms assumed by mercy, compassion and love.

Rahmat is thus to be understood primarily in terms of a love which gives of itself :what it gives is what it is,transcendent beatitude ,which creates out of love,and,upon contact with its creation ,assumes the nature of loving compassion and mercy,these being the dominant motifs of the relationship between God and the world. The prophet describes this in terms of the striking expression of Rahmat on earth-that expressed by a mother who after searching frantically for her baby,,clutches it to her breast and feeds it.

The Quranic chapter on al-Rahman (Sura number 55) brings out the creativity of God.This chapter evokes the reality of God's quintessential quality of God.The blessings of Paradise are described here in the most majestic and attractive terms; but so too are the glories, beauties and harmonies of God's entire cosmos,including all the wonders of virgin nature,these verses being musically punctuated by the refrain:so which of the favours of your Lord can you deny ?This Rahmat describes the deepest nature of the divine;;the Rahmat which is beautifully inscribed and underlying the entire chapter.this Rahmat creates all things ;it reveals itself throughout the Quran and through all the signs (ayat) of nature.One comes to see that God has created not only by Rahmat,and from Rahmat but also for Rahmat except those upon whom God has mercy :for this did He create them (11:119) and within Rahmat: My rahmat encompasses all things (7:156).

The ontological and salvific,that is the creative and redemptive cannot be separated from God's all embracing Rahmat,which is the divine matrix containing the cosmos .The word matrix is related to the root 'mother'.The word for womb ,rahim is derived from the word Rahmat which nourishes the entire universe at every instant as the mother's womb nourishes the growing embryo growing within it.One of the terms denoting the Buddha is Tathagatagarbha,which literally means the 'womb'(garbha)of the Tathagata,the 'one thus gone'.This womb or matrix not only contains all things,it is also contained within the soul,being one with the immanent Buddha-nature(Buddhadhatu) which each individual must strive to realize.

The understanding of Rehmat should not be taken as mercy;rather it is the infinite love and over flowing beatitude of ultimate reality,and only one of the manifestations is mercy.The same perspective flows in Jodo

Shin Buddhism: ‘The inner truth is: From the Eternal Love do all things have their birth.’The earlier Buddhists scriptures emphasized on the cycle of births and deaths.In Mahayana Buddhism ,however one can find expressions of love and compassion which are identified with the creative power of the Absolute. The Supreme spirit from whom all spiritual revelations grow is the Amida, to whom all personalities are related.Amida is simultaneously the Infinite Light (Amitabha) and the Eternal Life(Amitayus).He is at once the Great Wisdom (Mahaprajna:daichi)-the Infinite Light –and the Great Compassion (Mahakaruna:daihi)-the Eternal Life.The Great Compassion is creator while the Great Wisdom contemplates.

This love can be compared with the compassionate love which is spiritually required and logically implied by the metaphysics of tawhid: “In love ...the sense of difference is obliterated and the human heart fulfils its inherent purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the spirit-world.”

In this compassionate love which has overflowed from infinite creativity revealing the oneness.Al-Ghazali mentions the absolute love of God creates in human beings a disposition to come in close proximity to Him.Thus he searches for ways and means to come closer to God and makes efforts through different pathways to remove these veils which separates him from God.He sees God by means of God Himself.All this is the act and grace of God towards His creatures.This enlightening grace of God towards His creatures is constitutive of His love for them,a love which in reality is nothing other than His love for Himself.

The truth of Many-Being-One can be read as a spiritual expression of tawhid, and mirrors many such expressions in Islamic mysticism,indeed, the literal meaning of tawhid being precisely adynamic integration,not just a static oneness.It is derived from the form of the verb,wahhada,meaning ‘to make one’This oneness can be understood in the expression of Milarepa the great poet-saint of Tibet when he addresses the intrinsic nature of Void.The Void is intrinsically blissful,or it is not the Void.Nirvana and Void (Shunya) are identical in essence,the term Nirvana stressing the blissful nature of the state wherein one is conscious of the Absolute,and the term ‘Void’ stressing the objective nature of the Absolute,transcending all things are ‘full’-full that is ,of false being.

Knowing and experiencing the beatitude of the Void thus cannot but engender in the soul a state of being reflecting this beatitude,and a wish to share this beatitude with all beings : such a wish being the very essence of compassion,which is not simply a capacity to feel the suffering of others as one’s own-which articulates one level of ethical tawhid-but also,at a higher level of tawhid, a capacity to bring that suffering to an end through making accessible the mercy and felicity ever-flowing from ultimate Reality.This is the message which Milarepa puts forth which appeals both to a Muslim and a Buddhist :

If in meditation you still tend to
Strive,
Try to arouse for all a great
Compassion,

Be identified with the All-Merciful.

Conclusion:

The similarities between both the traditions namely Islam and Jodo Shin are remarkable but that does not mean that the Shin tradition can be taken to be the representative of the entire Buddhist faith. Nor should one take the Islamic conception of a compassionate creator and Buddhist silence on the question of such a creator as a reciprocal rejection. At least one Buddhist School affirms the idea of a compassionate creator shows that there is no absolute incompatibility between both the traditions as regards this principle.

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