

The Use of the Word “Ishq” in Religious Texts

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Abstract

Some Muslim thinkers have had disagreements over the use of the word “ishq” in religious texts since many years ago. The main claim made by those who prohibit the use of this word for the sacred associations such as God, the Prophet (s), and Imāms is that the meaning of this word is appropriate only to the material and carnal issues and so, it has not been used in religious texts and its concept has even been blamed in some traditions, but the philosophers and Sufis have promoted it in the form of poem and prose among Muslims inadvertently or in order to subvert the Muḥammadan Law. On the contrary, some researchers have relied on the literal meaning of the word “ishq” and some traditions to consider this term a constant added-nouns similar to ḥubb and buḥḍ, which are not blameworthy or praiseworthy per se and are rather praised or blamed due to their associations. Therefore, we observe in the religious texts that the term “ishq” has been used in both meanings and it has been actually used more in a praiseworthy manner. The study at hand aims at strengthening the latter viewpoint. To this end, this article is divided into four parts: expressing the root and literal meaning of the word “ishq”, narrating and explaining the traditions that approve the use of “ishq” about the religious associations, narrating the traditions that blame “ishq” and analyzing the incorrect understandings made about suchlike traditions, and investigating and providing the final analysis about the various viewpoints to the associations of the word “ishq”.

Keywords

Ūṣūl Kāfī, Shaykh Iḥṣā’ī, ‘Allāma Majlisī, Associations of the word “ishq”, Derivations of the word “ishq”.

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Introduction

One of the disputes among Muslim thinkers regards the concept of “‘ishq” and the permission to use this term about the sacred matters. Although this discussion has not been always and everywhere held with the same intensity and has been merely used by the critics of the mystic and Sufi schools as a pretext to label them as unfamiliar with Islam, it has received more attention in some theological and mystic books. Today, some religious scholars – especially some proponents of the Separation school– raise this discussion from time to time as a means to criticize the Sufis, mystics, and even philosophers.

On the contrary, the radical scholars of philosophical-mystical works and their proponents do not accept these criticisms at all and usually accuse the foregoing critics of being superficial, traditionalist, dogmatic, and doubtful about the theological mystics, and consider them as people who do not reflect upon their opponents’ works and rarely provide vivid and strong evidences.

Accordingly, a little reflection on the arguments put forth by the two sides of this dispute reveals that in most of them, the key point of the dispute has not been explicated correctly and so, the belligerents rely on baseless reasons and weak analyses in their efforts to reject the opponent’s viewpoint. However, those who adopt a self-defined stance and act justly do not accept any of these viewpoints and the rejection of the opponent’s theories merely based on these opinions, since it seems that both groups are correct from a certain perspective and are drowned in negligence and bias from another view.

We know that in the existing Qur’ān and narrated prayers, there is no mention of the word “‘ishq” and its derivations. This fact has led some religious scholars to believe that this term cannot be used at all about the spiritual matters and associations such as God and the Infallibles (a). In particular, God cannot be called with words such as lover or beloved because of the conditionality of the Names. In their opinion, the high-ranking companions of Ahl al-Bayt (a) and the Shī‘a scholars of the early centuries did not use the word “‘ishq” and its derivations; however, with the advent of Sufism and the spread of their ideas in the Shī‘a communities as well as the explication of some of their thoughts in the philosophical works, the previous sensitiveness to the use of this word faded among some Shī‘a groups and even some scholars who had tendencies toward Sufism. This way, they claim, the use of the word “‘ishq” in religious matters was established, especially in the works of the poets (Iḥsā’ī, 1999: 207).

All in all, the preventers or opponents of the use of the word “‘ishq” in spiritual issues can be divided into two groups. The general preventers

consider “ishq” associations limited to the material, animal, and cardinal matters and deem it to be out of the framework of spiritual issues. The second group is comprised of specific preventers who reject the use of this term only about the Divine Names and do not object to its use in other spiritual issues, such as loving the Prophet (s), Imāms, acts of prayer, etc.

On the other hand, most of the scholars – especially those who extensively deal with religious texts – consider this treatment of the word and concept of “ishq” as incorrect and a merely literal and useless discussion. They state that since “ishq” means extreme love, the concept of this term – but not the word itself – has been broadly used in the Qur’ān and prayers (especially the narrated prayers). They also assert that this term has been used in some few traditions by the Infallibles (a) about some praised issues such as the Divine love, Imāms’ love, and even the attribution of its derivations (i.e. lover and beloved) to God.

All in all, the proponents of the use of “ishq” in spiritual issues are two groups. The first group is comprised of general proponents who divide love into real and metaphorical love and deem permissible the use of the word “ishq” about all spiritual issues – even the Divine Names. Accordingly, they call God by names such as lover and beloved. The second group is comprised of specific proponents who accept the division of love into real and metaphorical, and rule for the permissibility of using it about the spiritual issues, but consider the Divine Names as conditional and deem calling God by the derivations of “ishq” against precautionary measures.

Now, the question is that with these various claims at hand, what we can ultimately say about the permissibility or impermissibility of the use of the word “ishq” about spiritual matters. In other words, the research question in this study is as following:

Can a definitive decree be issued about the permissibility or impermissibility of the use of the word “ishq” about religious associations?

In order to answer this question and bring order to the presently diverse opinions, the authors of this article will present their points in the four following steps:

- A) Expressing the root and literal meaning of the word “ishq” from the viewpoint of philologists
- B) Narrating and explaining the traditions that approve the use of “ishq” along with presenting the related references
- C) Narrating the traditions that blame “ishq” and analyzing the incorrect understanding made by some religious authors about suchlike traditions

D) Investigating and providing the final analysis of the various viewpoints about the associations of the word “‘ishq”.

Literal meaning of “‘ishq”

The researchers of the scientific words and terms believe that the word “‘ishq” is taken from a plant named ‘ashaqa. When this plant spirals around a tree trunk, it sucks its potency which causes the tree leaves to become yellow and to fall. It finally kills the tree, while it remains green and lively during the whole process. The process of “‘ishq” (love) exactly does the same to the lover and makes him/her feeble and weak, while the beloved is totally free from such harms (Tahānawī, 1996, vol. 2: 1181; Sajjādī, 1994, vol. 2: 1258). Some researchers have also asserted: “A certain type of lablāb is called ‘ashaqa in Arabic and ‘Ishqichān in Farsi” (Khalaf Tabrīzī, 1982, vol. 3: 1375).

Therefore, “‘ishq” can be considered as the extreme love or attachment to a certain thing or person, as Muḥaqqiq Ṭūsī writes toward the end of the eighth meaning of the this term in the book *Ishārāt*: “When affection goes extreme, it is called love” (Nasīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, 1996, vol. 3: 360). He then considers types and degrees for “‘ishq” similar to those considered for affection. Therefore, the reference to the literal meaning of “‘ishq” cannot be used to specify its associations. In other words, the literal meaning of the word “‘ishq” cannot be used to rule for the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of this word.

Now we might examine the issues about which this word has been used in the religious texts.

Traditions that approve the use of “‘ishq” about praiseworthy issues

We said that the main reason of the opponents of the use of “‘ishq” about spiritual issues is the absence of this term in religious texts. Although this claim is true about the Qur’ān and even the narrated prayers, it is not true about Islamic traditions in general, since this word has been used in some narrations of the Infallibles (a) about praiseworthy issues.

In this part of the article, the related traditions will be presented according to their importance based on their chain of transmission and the book in which they are narrated. Moreover, under each tradition, the viewpoints of some scholars – even if they benefit the preventers of the use of the term “‘ishq” about spiritual issues – will be provided.

The first tradition

In the section *Al-‘Ibāda* of the book *Uṣūl kāfī*, Shaykh Kulaynī has narrated the following tradition based on his chain of transmission which is traced back to Imām Ṣādiq (a):

“The best person is one who loves worshipping; he hugs it, shows affection to it by his heart, connects to it with his body and spends time with it, and disregards how he spends his life – easily or difficultly” (Kulaynī, 1987, vol. 2: 83).

This tradition is more important than other narrations in which the word “ishq” is used because of its chain of transmission, because for the Shī‘a scholars, the Four Books of Ḥadīth (Kāfī, Man lā yahḍarhu al-faqīh, Tahdhīb, and Istibṣār) are more valid than other Ḥadīth books, and among these four books, Kāfī is superior to the other three works. Some scholars even take an utterance narrated from the Imām of the Era (may God hasten his reappearance)¹ to consider it as a book free from forged narrations.

However, notwithstanding the extremist or fictional views to Kāfī, some researchers – based on certain evidences – have considered Kulaynī’s sources as first-hand and original Shī‘a sources, and believe that its traditions cannot be rejected easily and without definite reasons (Namāzī Shāhrūdī, 2004: 139-140).

Likewise, in the interpretation of Kulaynī’s introduction to *Kāfī*, Majlisī says about the acceptability rate of the traditions in that book: “The traditions of this book, at the first glance and in the absence of any opposing opinion, are valid per se and do not need the examination of the chain of transmission. However, if the content of a tradition in the book *Kāfī* contradicts another tradition(s), it is necessary to examine their chains of transmission, and the tradition that has the stronger chain of transmission will be considered as valid” (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 1: 22).

We believe that some points should be considered about the content of this noble tradition.

First, the associations of the word “ishq” are said to be the acts of worship in general rather than a specific one, because it is evident that “al” in the phrase “al-‘ibāda” is a generic article and expresses generality. Accordingly, this word can be used for every act of worship whenever

1. Some have narrated that after the collection of this book was over, the Imām of the Era (may God hasten his reappearance) wrote in the approval of the traditions of this book: “The book Kāfī is enough for our followers.” However, the majority of scholars have not accepted this narration and have regarded it as lacking an acceptable chain of transmission (q.v. Majlisī, 1984, vol. 1: 20; Nūrī, 1987, vol. 21: 470; ‘Askarī, 2009, vol. 3: 283). Out of these, the argument of Hājī Nūrī is stronger than those of others. He writes in *Mustadrak al-wasā’il*: “The sentence ‘The book Kāfī is enough for our followers’ which Mullā Khalīl Qazwīnī has narrated it from some notables of his own era has no compelling chain of transmission; even Muḥaddith Astarābādī – the great figure of the Traditionalists of his own era and one of those who believe in the definiteness of the issuance of the traditions in Kāfī – has stipulated the fictitiousness of this utterance” (Nūrī, 1987, vol. 21: 470).

needed. Examples include the love of prayer, the love of fasting, the love of supplication, the love of pilgrimage, etc. In other words, this tradition at least proves the stance of the above-mentioned specific proponents.

Second, the explanations that follow the tradition clearly express the meaning of the word “‘ishq”. The tradition says at first: “The best person is one who loves worshipping,” and then it explicates the consequences of the love of worshipping. The statement of Imām indicates that when a person falls in love with worshipping, this love shows up in his heart and limbs, and the dominance of this manifestation is so strong that leaves him with no thought or passion other than worshipping God. Consequently, he is considered among the best of people. In other words, if we consider degrees to the worshippers of God – and in fact there are such degrees in reality – the highest rank is for the lovers of worshipping, and no higher level can be imagined for the worshippers. Then, the meaning of “‘ishq” in this tradition is the “absolute affection” or – in other words – “extreme affection”, which is exactly what the proponents of the use of the word “‘ishq” for spiritual issues intend.

Accordingly, despite the inclusion of the foregoing tradition in the book *Kāfī*, ‘Allāma Majlisī in the book *Mir’āt* considers its chain of transmission to be weak based on the principles of Rijāl and the terms common among Hadīth transmitters – though without any explanation. He writes under that tradition: “The word ‘ishq means extreme affection and the phrase ‘shows affection to it’ in this tradition is the extreme affection to worshipping, as worshipping is the means to go near the Sublime God and the real Object of quest.”

Although he is one of the most outstanding critics of Sufism, he continues: “Some have wrongly imagined that the associations of love are wrong issues and the word “‘ishq” is a concept that regards showing affection to such matters; consequently, they have concluded that one might use this term about the Divine love and its associations such as prophets, God’s saints, and acts of worship. However, this tradition rejects their claim.”

Of course, Majlisī emphasizes that due to the conditionality of the Divine Names, it is most precautionary not to use the derivations of this term such “‘āshiq” (lover) and ma‘shūq (beloved) about God (id., 1984, vol. 8: 84).

The second tradition

It has been narrated in Biḥār al-anwār from Al-Kharāyij wa al-jarā’ih:

“Imām Bāqir (a) has narrated from his father Imām Sajjād (a) who said: Imām ‘Alī (a) passed through Karbala while his eyes was filled with tears, and said: Here is where the camels will

knee. And here is where their loads will be unloaded. And here is where their blood will be shed. How lucky is the soil on which the friends' blood is shed. Imām Bāqir (a) says: ‘Alī (a) was going with a group of people. One or two miles before Karbala, Imām moved ahead of people and circumambulated a place which was called muqadhaffān. He said: here two hundred prophets and two hundred of their grandchildren have been murdered and all of them have been martyrs. [Then he said about the martyrs of ‘Āshūrā day in Karbala:] Here is where the steeds are sat. Here is where the lovers fall on the ground: martyrs who have not been surpassed in ranks by anyone in the past, nor they will by anyone in the future” (id., 1983, vol. 41: 295).

The part of the tradition which acts as an evidence for our discussion is the word “ushshāq” (lovers) toward the end of the tradition, which is a derivation of the word “ishq”; however, there have been made various comments on the chain of transmission of this tradition, and we will analyze the important ones.

To begin with, the 41st volume of *Biḥār al-anwār* involves many sections and numerous traditions on the various miracles of the Commander of the Faithful Imām ‘Alī (a). For example, a section named “Mu‘jizāt Kalāmuhu min Akhbārihī bil-ghā’ibāt wa ‘ilmihi bil-lughāt wa bilāghatihi wa fiṣāḥatihi ṣalawātullāh ‘alayh” (the verbal miracles including his reports of the unseen, his knowledge of words, his eloquence, and his euphony, May the peace of Allāh be upon him) which involves 66 traditions (id.: 283-360). Out of these, 19 traditions (traditions number 18 to 36) have been narrated from *Al-Kharāyij wa al-jarā’ih*, the first of which is the abovementioned tradition. However, the editor of this section of *Biḥār al-anwār* (published in Beirut) has claimed that he has found none of these 19 traditions narrated from Quṭb Rāwandī’s *Al-Kharāyij wa al-jarā’ih* in its published form; the reason is that there are a lot of differences among the manuscripts and published forms of this book, and the narrations in the manuscripts are much more (id.: 295).

After reading this claim, the author of this article explored this tradition in its main source. This way, it got clear that the abovementioned tradition has been narrated in the second section – which involves the narrations on the miracles of the Commander of the Faithful (a) – of *Al-Kharāyij wa al-jarā’ih* under one of the verbal miracles of that noble Imām. The only missing things in this published version were three words from Majlisī’s narration: the phrase “wa yaqūlu” (and he says) at the beginning and “ushshāq” toward the end of the tradition (Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī, 1984, vol. 1: 183).

Some may argue based on this difference that because the word “‘ushshāq” is not seen in some versions, it might be better to take precautionary measures and narrate this tradition without this word and do not heed Majlisī’s version. However, the response is that there is no reason for such mistrust and there are numerous vocabulary differences between different versions of many traditions, even extremely famous narrations agreed upon by both the Shī‘a and the Sunnī – e.g. Thaḳalayn tradition. Moreover, Majlisī is a trustworthy Ḥadīth transmitter and has not been a proponent of Sufism, and so he cannot be accused of adding this word to the tradition himself. It seems that the word “‘ushshāq” has existed in the manuscripts of Quṭb Rāwandī’s book – which has been accessible to the author of *Biḥār al-anwār*, too.

Some claim that this tradition has also been narrated in the Ḥadīth collections *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (Ibn Qulwayh) and *Tahdhīb* (Ṭūsī, 1987: 72-73) without the word “‘ushshāq”, and this is another proof for the absence of this word in the original version of the tradition (Banī Hāshimī, 2006: 139-140). However, based on the exploration made by the authors of this article, the proposed traditions available in these two books have significant differences with our intended tradition and cannot be considered another version of it¹. Moreover, their chains of transmission are different. Also, the complete quotation of these narrations from *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* and *Tahdhīb* has been done separately and in the form of a distinct tradition in another part of *Biḥār* (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 98: 116). Therefore, these are two distinct traditions that have a close content, but are not the two versions of the same tradition, and this is very thought-provoking.

The third tradition

It is mentioned in the noble book *Rawḍa al-wā‘izīn wa baṣīra al-muti‘aẓīn* under the following prophetic tradition on the virtues of Salmān Fārsī:

“Paradise is more enthusiastic to Salmān than Salmān to paradise,
and paradise loves Salmān more than Salmān loves paradise”
(Fattāl Nayshābūrī, 1996, vol. 2: 282).

This tradition can be found quoted from the foregoing book with virtually analogous wording in *Biḥār al-anwār*; the only difference is that at the end of the narration, it gives in the word “lil-janna” (for paradise) which is of course more appropriate to the linguistic context (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 22:

1. It is noteworthy that in *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, the two successive traditions no. 11 and 12 from the 88th section are similar to the first and second parts of the foregoing tradition from *biḥār al-anwār*, respectively. In the book *Tahdhīb*, the text of tradition no. 7 of the 22nd section of the 6th volume is almost the same as the tradition no. 12 of *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, but has a somewhat different chain of transmission.

341). Similarly, Muḥaddith Nūrī has quoted and confirmed it in the 8th section of *Nafs al-rahmān fī faḍā’il Salmān* (Nūrī, 1992: 326). Of course, Muḥaqqiq Tūsī at the beginning of the *Beginning and Conclusion* treatise and Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī in *Jāmi’ al-asrār* have presented only the first sentence of the foregoing tradition – of course with a bit of change – and there is not mention of “a‘shaqa” (loves more) in their works (Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī, 1995: 28; Āmulī, 1989: 26).

The fourth tradition

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī at the end of the *kalima* 35 of the *Kalimāt Maknūna* and also at the end of the fourth article of *Qurrat al-‘uyūn* has narrated the following tradition as a divine tradition with a loose chain of transmission:

“Anyone who looks for me finds me, and anyone who finds me knows me, and anyone who knows me has affection toward me, and anyone who has affection toward me loves me, and I also love anyone who loves me, and anyone I love I will kill, and anyone I kill his ransom is on me, and anyone whose ransom is on me, I am his ransom” (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 2007: 84; id., 2008: 63).

The authors of this article have seen this tradition in many books and articles by the contemporary authors, but since all transmitters have referred their quotations to either *Kalimāt Maknūna* or *Qurrat al-‘uyūn*, they are not worth discussing here¹.

The fifth tradition

Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūfī, an outstanding Sunnī scholar, has narrated two prophetic traditions on love and its conclusion in his book *Al-Jāmi’ al-ṣaghīr* – which is a selection of *Jam’ al-jawāmi’*² – as follows:

“Anyone who falls in love and keeps himself pure and dies in the meantime has died as a martyr” (Manāwī, 1972, vol. 6: 179).

“Anyone who falls in love and hides his love and shows abstinence and dies in the meantime is a martyr” (ibid.).

The author of this article considers the two narrations as one tradition due

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1. For example, master Ḥasanzāda Āmulī in the point 717 of the book *1001 words* narrates this from *Qurrat al-‘uyūn* (Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, 1986: 568).
 2. Suyūfī first collected all traditions of *Ṣiḥāh sitta* and *Masānīd ‘ashra* of the Sunnī scholars as well as some other books in a collection called *Jam’ al-jawāmi’* based on the alphabetical order of the transmitters names. Then, he selected some traditions from that collection and called it *Jāmi’ al-ṣaghīr*. An interpretation book has been written about this book called *Fayḍ al-ghadīr* in which the traditions have been ordered based on alphabetical order. The author of this article narrates the fifth tradition of this book.

to their great similarity, although in addition to the existence of some differences in their wording, their chains of transmission are also different. In brief, the chain of transmission of the first narration goes back to ‘Ā’isha and the second one to Ibn ‘Abbās. The Sunnī scholars disagree on the accuracy degree of these two narrations. Some of them like Ibn Qayyim consider both narrations as fictitious and have deemed impossible their issuance by the Prophet (s), while a group such as Ibn Mu‘īn, Zarkishī, and Ibn Ḥazm have tried to strengthen the chains of transmission of these two narrations and have at least considered all the transmitters leading to Ibn ‘Abbās as trustworthy and the narration as sound (ibid.: 180).

However, with regard to the content, it is clear that in the first sentence of both traditions, the association of love is not mentioned. However, in the following phrases, death that happens during such a love is considered martyrdom, and this reveals the praiseworthiness of the association of love. Accordingly, some mystics and Sufis have used the content of this tradition in their works¹. Mullā Ṣadrā, too, has presented this tradition in the section *specific theology* of *Asfār* following the word “qīla” (it was said) (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 7: 174).

The sixth tradition

Muttaqī Hindī, one of the assiduous and virtuous Sunnī Ḥadīth transmitters, narrates the following narration as a divine tradition in *Kanz al-‘ummāl*²:

“The Almighty and Glorious God says: Whenever My remembrance obsesses my servant, I set his requests and happiness in My remembrance, and when I set his requests and happiness in My remembrance, he falls in love with me and I also fall in love with him, and when we fall together, I take the

1. One of the early mystic works in which this tradition can be seen is ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamidānī’s *Tamhīdāt*. Of course, the words used in his version of the narration are not congruent with any of the two narrations mentioned in this article. He narrates that tradition as this: “Anyone who falls in love and shows abstinence, then hides his love and dies in the meantime has died as a martyr” (Hamidānī, n.d.: 22; Sajjādī, 2000: 289).

2. Most of the traditions of this book are the same narrations mentioned in Suyūfī’s *Kanz al-‘ummāl* which are alphabetically ordered. Mutaqqī Hindī says in the introduction of this work: “In this book, in addition to the arrangement of the original books of Suyūfī, I have also added some traditions that were in other authoritative sources, but Suyūfī have not used them in his books” (Mutaqqī Hindī, 1985: vol. 1: 4).

The author of this article asserts that unfortunately, it is not clear that our intended tradition in the text of the foregoing book is narrated from the works of Suyūfī or others’ works, although due to its loose chain of transmission, it is likely that the foregoing tradition is narrated from a book not authored by Suyūfī, as this tradition was not found in *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaghīr* despite an extensive exploration.

veils among Myself and him away and prevail his soul with My love, in a way that he does not get into forgetfulness and negligence like others; the words of suchlike people are the words of prophets, [and] these are heroes indeed. When I want to punish the people or the earth, these are the people I remember and then I stop myself from afflicting the punishment” (Muttaqī Hindī, 1985, vol. 1: 433).

The foregoing verse, which has a loose chain of transmission, expresses the causes and effects of Divine love in the righteous servant, one whose soul is preoccupied with God and consequently, God has set all his requests and pleasures in remembrance of Him. In such a situation, the servant falls in love with God and God falls in love with the servant, and this mutual love has special outcomes for the lover servant: the removal of veils between the servant and the object of worship, the observation of the magnificence and beauty of God, the resemblance of the lover servant to God’s prophets and saints, and his freedom from forgetfulness when it becomes common among other people.

The seventh tradition

There are seen two traditions about “ishq” in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamidānī’s *Tamhīdāt*. One of them is the fifth tradition of this article which he has given in at the beginning of the 6th tamhīd, and the other one is the following prophetic tradition that he has mentioned in the middle of that tamhīd:

“When a servant becomes God’s favorite, God causes him to fall in love with Him and starts loving him Himself.

Then He says: O My servant! You show affection and love to me, and I also show affection and love to you, no matter if you want it or not” (Hamidānī, n.d.: 25; Sajjādī, 2000: 290).

The author of this article did not find this tradition in any of the narration collections. However, since most of the existing traditions in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s *Tamhīdāt* – including another tradition he has narrated on love – have been seen at least in the Sunnī narration collections, it is likely that the author of *Tamhīdāt* has seen this tradition in one of those narration collection, but that book is not available today.

The examination of the traditions that blame “ishq”

According to our exploration, the number of traditions that blame “ishq” is far less than the number of traditions that praise “ishq” and express its application to spiritual issues. However, the chain of transmission of the blaming traditions – which are three narrations in all – are more valid, and regardless of their narration or absence in the general books, they are all seen

in the Shī‘a narration collections. Now we present these three traditions based on their reputation in the books and the intensity that is put on them by the general preventers of the use of “‘ishq” about spiritual issues on them.

The first tradition

In part of the 108 or 109 sermon of Nahj al-balāgha¹ – which is a long sermon and involves various topics – we read about one of the attributes of the people who are deceived by the worldly life:

“When one loves a thing, it blinds him and sickens his heart. Then he sees but with a diseased eye, hears but with unhearing ears. Desires have cut asunder his wit, and the world has made his heart dead, while his mind is all longing for it. Consequently, he is a slave of it and of everyone who has any share in it. Wherever it turns, he turns towards it and wherever it proceeds, he proceeds towards it. He is not desisted by any desister from Allah, nor takes admonition from any preacher ...” (Nahj al-balāgha, 1947, vol. 1: 321; Nahj al-balāgha, 1993: 160).

The content of this tradition clearly shows that “‘ishq” has been intensely blamed and it might seem to some that because the word “shay” (thing) has a generic meaning in an indefinite linguistic context, it involves any association. In other words, it might initially come to some people’s mind that the tradition says: love of anything – either from material or spiritual issues – brings about the blindness of eyes, the illness in the heart, incorrect visions made by eyes, and incorrect things heard by the ears. However, the rest of the tradition discusses the “carnal desires” and the “world”, and indicates the associations of love in the utterance of Imām. Therefore, the ambiguity at the beginning of the tradition – of course for a person who has had that perception about the tradition – fades and the spiritual issues are removed out of the “shay” attribution domain. Moreover, the critics of the use of “‘ishq” usually emphasize that this word does not concern the praiseworthy matter rather than blaming each and every “‘ishq” with any association (even with the spiritual matters).

It should be noted that some research projects about the chain of transmission of Nahj al-balāgha sermons indicate that this sermon has not been mentioned in the Sunnī Ḥadīth collections².

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1. The number of this sermon of Nahj al-balāgha is 108 in Fayd al-Islām’s version and 109 in Ṣubḥi Ṣāliḥ’s version.
 2. Imtiyāz ‘Alī Khān ‘Arshī – one of the later Sunnī scholars in India – has written a book called *Istinād Nahj al-balāgha* in which he has presented the chains of transmission of sermons and sayings of *Nahj al-balāgha* he has found in the Sunnī narration collections. However, he is silent about some sermons, which means he has not found those sermons

The second tradition

In the section 95 of *Amālī*, Shaykh Ṣadūq has narrated a short tradition based on a chain of transmission from himself that goes back to Imām Ṣādiq (a), in which Imām answers Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar’s question about “‘ishq” and says:

“God will cause the hearts that are emptied from His remembrance to taste the friendship of another one” (Ṣadūq, 1997: 668).

To understand this tradition, it is necessary to note that Mufaḍḍal has asked about “‘ishq” (love), but Imām (a) provides the description of “‘ushshāq” (lovers) rather than the meaning of “‘ishq” or its associations. Therefore, we cannot come to a conclusion about the absolute concept of “‘ishq” or its associations based on this tradition.

It might be said that in Mufaḍḍal’s question, the “al” used in the term “al-‘ishq” is the definite generic article and denotes generality. Therefore, the absolute concept of “‘ishq” is asked about in Mufaḍḍal’s question, and consequently, the absolute concept of ‘ushshāq is intended in Imām’s answer.

We would say in response that the acceptance of such a possibility from the viewpoint of scholars is nothing more than an illusion, because usually in suchlike questions asked from the Prophet (s) and the infallible Imāms (a), what seems to be the most likely case is asking about a specific matter. Therefore, it is not impossible that in this tradition, the “al” which has preceded the word ‘ishq, regards mental bonds, i.e. Mufaḍḍal has asked about a certain type of love or specific associations of it, and Imām (a) has answered with regard to that specific type or case. In addition to the point that in some narrations – at least in this tradition from Kāfī – it was seen that the association of “‘ishq” with some spiritual matters such as worshipping is praised. At any rate, the best method in suchlike cases is the juxtaposition of traditions and the identification of meaning through it.

The aforementioned tradition clearly reveals by itself that some associations of “‘ishq” are extremely blameworthy, as they completely empty the human’s heart from the remembrance of and affection to God. However, it cannot be known merely through this tradition which blameworthy association is intended here, and it is necessary to refer to other

in the *Sunnī* books. In this book, ‘Arshī first presents the chain of transmission of sermon 103 and then goes to sermon 106, without writing anything about the sermon intended in this article – which is the sermon 105 of the *Nahj al-balāgha* version at his disposal (‘Arshī, 1972: 59).

statements of Ahl al-Bayt (a) such as “The love of this world is the root of all sins” (Kulaynī, 1987, vol. 2: 315).

The third tradition

As part of a lengthy tradition narrated from Imām ‘Alī (a) in *Biḥār al-anwār*, it is written:

“The end of love is aloofness” (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 75: 11)

It is noteworthy that the sentences before and after this narrated statement are about other things and do not help the reader a lot with understanding it. However, the linguistic context indicates that Imām’s (a) statement is to reproach love and reprimand lovers, unless a mystic interpretation is made about the tradition, which is implausible.

Summary of the traditions and the final analysis

As we saw, out of the narrations that approve the use of the term “‘ishq”, the first four traditions were narrated from the Shī‘a books and the second three ones were taken from the tradition collections acknowledged by Sunnī scholars because they were not found in the Shī‘a tradition collections. The reason for this inclusion of the traditions from both groups is that in issues such as praising or blaming philosophy, Sufism, poetry, etc. there is no disagreement among the Shī‘a and Sunnī denominations, and disagreements have always existed among the scholars of these two denominations about those issues. Therefore, the ignorance of the narrations of one denomination does not make sense. However, the tradition classification and the preference of specific narrations over the general ones should not be ignored, as paying attention to the Four Books is of special importance in the specific narrations.

Accordingly, the first seven traditions, notwithstanding the weak chain of transmission of some of them, express the use of the term “‘ishq” about spiritual issues. Needless to any other explanation, this brings under question the viewpoint of general preventers and satisfies the needs of the specific proponents in their claim.

Despite the existence of these narrations, there have been some people during all these centuries who have opposed the use of this word about the spiritual issues because it has not appeared in the Qur’ān and has had few appearances in the Islamic traditions. Some of them have said: Because in the religious texts merely the word “ḥubb” (affection) and its derivations such as “ḥabīb” (beloved) are used about the praiseworthy associations rather than terms such as ‘ishq, ‘āshiq, and ma‘shūq, we should only use this concept.

Therefore, considering all narrations in which the word “ishq” is used (10 narrations in general) and the viewpoints of some scholars, I might suggest two points to remove the foregoing problems.

The first point

Although the use of this word and its derivations is extremely limited in the Shī‘a and Sunnī religious texts, this scarcity is not a reason to praise or blame this term, because this word and its derivations are not so frequent in the Arabic language and even in its romantic poems. Therefore, merely because of the absence of this word in the Qur’ān and its scarcity in the traditions we might not say that the word “ishq” is by itself praiseworthy or blameworthy. Rather, we should note the topics about which those few cases have been. Within the first group traditions, we observed that the associations of the word “ishq” have been prayer in the first tradition, Imām Ḥusayn (a) in the second tradition, God in the third tradition, etc. On the other hand, a reflection in the second group traditions shows that they attribute “ishq” to blameworthy issues. Therefore, we can conclude that “ishq” is a constant added-noun which is not good or bad by itself but comes to be considered as good or bad because of its association. As some scholars assert:

“ishq” is not like “‘adl” [justice] or “ẓulm” [injustice] to be considered as praiseworthy or blameworthy per se and based on its concept. Rather, it is like the words such as “ḥubb” (affection) and “bughḍ” (hatred) that are considered as praiseworthy or blameworthy due to their associations. For example, if the associations of affection or love are God’s saints or acts of worship, that affection or love is praiseworthy, and if their associations are whims of soul and sins, they will be considered as blameworthy (Karbālā’ī, n.d., vol. 2: 437).

The second point

Some notables such as the first Majlisī have noted that the reason some scholars oppose the word “ishq” is their misunderstanding about this concept as well as the lack of capability, as “ishq” is nothing but extreme affection. Now, the question is that why some scholars praise affection but blame “ishq” (which is of the same nature). Accordingly, he interprets the phrase “Al-tāmmīna fī maḥabat Allāh” (those who are perfect in [their] love of God) in Ziyārat Jāmi‘a as lovers of God. However, Shaykh Iḥsā’ī, after narrating the statements of the first Majlisī, criticizes him and asserts that such statements are in line with Sufī’s thoughts. He then presents an assertion from Galen who asserts that love is a psychic act which resides in

brain, heart, and liver and causes distortion and imbalance in its residing locations (Iḥsā'ī, 1999: 206).

Iḥsā'ī then refers to an assertion from Ghazālī as one of the leaders of Sufism based on which, “ḥubb” is a psychic desire that is called “‘ishq” when it becomes extreme. He then claims that in the Shī‘a Ḥadīth collections, there is seen no tradition on the use of “‘ishq” about Sublime God, and the few existing narrations are originally from Sunnī sources delivered to Shī‘a books through Sufism (Ibid.: 207).

Shaykh’s statement intends to introduce “‘ishq” as a topic which is merely about carnal matters. However, it should be said that first, Galen’s assertion is merely a medicinal stance expressed using physicians’ jargon and is not so related to the philosophical and theological discussions. Second, “nafs” is expressed using numerous terms, as Iḥsā'ī himself has pointed out in other places. Therefore, how can one know that Ghazālī’s intention of nafs is exactly what Iḥsā'ī intends about rūḥ when he distinguishes nafs from rūḥ¹? Moreover, how can Ghazālī’s statement contribute (intellectually or narratively) to this discussion?

The author of this article says that this type of argumentation and that type of narration rejection are different from Iḥsā'ī’s scientific statements in other places, as he always tries in his scientific books and treatises to build his claims in any possible way – even through multiple interpretations – based on qur’ānic verses and Islamic traditions or clear intellectual reasons. However, here he presents his claim only based on two quotations from Galen and Ghazālī. What is stranger is that when transmitting a narration, he does not pay much attention to its chain of the transmission despite his mastery of related sciences such as Rijāl, and tries his best to understand the tradition and find its semantic relationship to qur’ānic verses and other famous traditions. However, here he rejects the traditions about “‘ishq” without any justified reason. It seems that Iḥsā'ī’s treatment of this word has no reason other than his excessive tendency to oppose Sufists and to disarm them.

What remain are the viewpoints of the specific preventers and general proponents. We said that what differentiates these two groups from other scholars whose thoughts are in line with each of them is the Divine Names issue. The specific preventers believe that calling God by names such as lover and beloved is not permissible, while the general proponents deem the use of this word and its derivations permissible even when they are attributed to God. Now the question is that if the foregoing traditions can be used to judge between the two groups.

1. Both words are translated into soul in English

At first glance, it seems that the content of the second, fourth, sixth, and seventh narrations – of the first group of traditions – proves the permissibility of using the word “ishq” about praiseworthy issues and the attribution of the names such as “āshiq” and “ma‘shūq” to God. However, this is not so simple, because there is a point here that has gone unnoticed by many scholars and has been noticed only by some contemporary scholars.

The use of the word “ishq” and its derivations about God can be essentially imagined in two ways, and the works of past scholars reveal the existence of two viewpoints in this regard, although such a distinction might not be directly observable in their works. Sometimes when we propose scientific discussions such as proving the existence of the Creator, expressing the attributes and actions of that sacred Being, or the explication of some qur’ānic verses and Islamic traditions, we need to make some names for God which are not mentioned in the religious texts. For instance, philosophers and even theologians – based on their own specific terminology – use the term Necessary Being about God to express their intentions in their scientific discussions. However, it is extremely implausible that they use this term or other similar ones in their prayers and supplications; rather, when talking to God, these same people call him with the same names that exist in the Qur’ān and sunna.

Therefore, there are two types of use:

- Talking about God and describing him in scientific discussions
- Talking to God in prayers and supplications

We would like to note that it seems that the background of such a distinction can be seen in some statements of the author of *Majma‘ al-Bayān*, because in some sections of that commentary, Ṭabrisī distinguishes describing and talking about God from attributing a name to God and addressing Him with that name (Ṭabrisī, 1993, vol. 1:1 124, vol. 5: 317).

For example, in the interpretation of the verse “We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories” (Qur’ān 12:3), he asks this question that if we can give the name Storyteller to God because of this qur’ānic verse. He then immediately notes that the answer to this question is negative, because in the common usage of people, the words storyteller and bard are attributed to people who try to entertain people and possibly to gain financial gains through this undertaking. In the same vein, we cannot call God as Teacher, although He has described Himself in the Qur’ān as “It is He Who has taught

the Qur'an" (Qur'ān 55:2). At any rate, describing something is one thing and naming it is another thing (Ṭabrisī, 1993, vol. 5: 317)¹.

Master Ḥasanzāda Āmulī – one of the proponents of the use of the term “‘ishq” and its derivations – explains the foregoing statement as follows:

The reason for Ṭabrisī's statement “God is not called mu‘allim (teacher) and muftī (Jurisconsult) despite the fact that he describes Himself as ‘allam and yaftā” might be that when we explain someone – for example – as good is different from calling him with a good name, because the word “Ka’anna” is a kind of conditioning, but describing and praising are not. For example, you have the right to the child of somebody who is ḥasan (handsome), but you cannot say that his name is Ḥasan. So think! (Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, 1997: 21).

If the specific preventers' intention of the prevention of the use of the word “‘ishq” and its derivation is its use for “talking to God”, it would be correct as it is a way to be polite toward God. However, if they mean the absolute sense of use, even about “talking about God”, it is certainly unacceptable, because they have given in no intellectual or narrative reason, and they cannot rely simply on one tradition about the conditionality of the Names to suggest such a wide-ranging rule. Moreover, in some foregoing traditions, the terms lover and beloved have been used about God, and considering the concept of love (i.e. extreme affection), its synonyms can be seen in the qur'ānic verses and Islamic traditions.

On the other hand, if the general proponents' intention of permitting to call God with the word “‘ishq” and its derivations merely regards “talking about God”, it is clearly correct and the practice of the majority of Shī‘a scholars verifies this. However, if their intention is the absolute naming of God – even at the “talking to God” domain – their stance would be against showing politeness to God and in the opinion of some scholars such as Majlisī, such an undertaking is against precautionary measures.

Conclusion

It is verified in this article that in the Shī‘a and Sunnī books, the word “‘ishq” and its derivations have been used at least 10 times. In seven cases, this word has been used about praiseworthy issues such as the acts of prayer, Imām Ḥusayn (a), and the Sublime God, while in other cases, the associations of “‘ishq” are blameworthy issues. Therefore, religious leaders and philologists alike consider “‘ishq” as a constant added-noun whose

1. It is strange that this point has been left out of *Majma' al-bayān*, either intentionally or unintentionally (Mutarjimān, 1981, vol. 12: 158).

goodness and badness gets clear because of its association and is not praiseworthy or blameworthy by itself.

The end result is that it is acceptable to use this term and its derivations with spiritual and divine issues. Even in calling God with names such as Lover and Beloved in scientific and descriptive discussions, there cannot be found any explicit prevention in the qur’ānic verses or the Islamic traditions, nor are there any convincing intellectual counterarguments set forth by the preventers. However, at the time of prayer and supplication as well as the time of addressing God, the necessity of showing politeness toward God requires calling Him by the names that exist in the qur’ānic verses and famous narrations. It is even better that our very supplication is taken from religious texts and narrated prayers.

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