



The Male and Female Principles By Hisham Mahmoud

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

“O mankind! reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, and created its mate, and from them twain scattered countless men and women; reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual rights, and reverence the wombs (that bore you), for Allah ever watches over you.”

Welcome to the family of seekers, welcome to the family of yearners, welcome to the family of listeners. Many among us, including myself, brought to this retreat certain expectations, and to varying degrees have those expectations been fulfilled; many among us brought a long list of questions, and to varying degrees have those questions been answered. Perhaps there are those among us who brought to this retreat a dysfunctional marriage, and the case may be that we will return home to the same dysfunctionality that brought us here.

For most of us, this was the first time we had ever heard about the “Male and Female Principles,” and for many of us, our understanding of their reality in the unseen world, and of their manifestations in the seen world and in our selves, amounts overall to a general “misunderstanding.” Many of us have sat through some of the lectures utterly spellbound and confounded, and much like many of you, I am still trying to anchor my mind on any tiny island in this whirlwind of meaning that has left me shipwrecked.

So let us, in this blessed space, implore Time to permit us a moment of truth. I should like to ask the questions in my mind a few important questions. Perhaps by doing so, I may discover a truth about myself that I have been masking for some reason and for some time. What is the genealogy of my questions? When I trace them back to their origin, in what crevice of my curiosity will I find my questions incubating? Will I find that my questions are rooted in some subliminal philosophical paradigm, or mapped out in some cognitive frame alien to the chastity of my mind? Or will I find the memories of my questions recalling some bitter experience I had with the world? Or will I find the allegiance of my questions campaigning for some preconceived notion or foregone conclusion? Or will I find the appetite of my questions craving to fulfill certain desires or wishes? Or will I find the fealty of my questions faithful to the dogmas of one or another “-ism” that interprets my world and identifies me in

it? Or will I find sincerity? Will I find a gesture toward surrender? Will I find submission to the Will of God?

I swear to you that before Allah سبحانه وتعالى, every “-ism” is a prism of a mind in prison, and it is only those questions borne of submission that transform the heart and orient the spiritual compass of the wayfarer. So the man asked, “When is the Hour?” and the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم challenged the man to question the origin of his question, and so he asked, in turn: “And what have you prepared for it?”

As for expectations, we have all experienced coming to a situation expecting one thing, only to have Fate exchange it for another. For many among us, that may have been the case here, as well. But what were those disappointments that informed our expectations in the first place, and will we allow their unfulfillment to fester and return us to more disappointment? On the other hand, how many times have we grown spiritually from unfulfilled expectations! How many times have we felt the Hand of God upon us and the Eyes of God over us when our expectations went unfulfilled by some unexpected twist of fate, and then dropped to our knees thereat in utter gratitude! How many times did we render to the future what belongs there, and trust in God that the wisdom or meaning may come to us when we are more prepared to fully appreciate it!

And so intention insists upon itself in this hour of introspection, and I can only speak for myself, here. I came to Rosales this year with certain questions and expectations, and I am sure to leave this retreat with more questions than brought me here, and with words that are so cut off from one another that they can scarcely form a single coherent question. I don't even know what to ask or where to begin to be honest with you! I bask with sheer awe in the brilliant radiance of knowledge of the great masters before us, knowing that what took them years to absorb and perceive simply cannot be conveyed to us in a matter of days. And with that, permit me to share with you some of the gifts of my generous Lord, which He vouchsafed me amidst the turmoil of my own unanswered questions and unfulfilled expectations, in the spirit of His command وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ “And as for the blessing of your Lord, convey that.”

I am sure there were times during this retreat when you realized that this religion is nothing like anything you thought it to be, and that is a gift that Allah سبحانه وتعالى has bestowed upon every intent listener in this family of listeners. As for me, I remember how in a moment of unmitigated bliss while listening to Dr. `Umar, I felt a wave of stillness crash over me, and as tears blinded my eyes from his slides, I stopped writing, folded my notepad, and surrendered to the weight of his words. I felt as though a veil was being lifted off my heart, and it was as though I could behold the glory of God before me for the first time. I was for that moment able to glimpse through an aperture of meaning the reason behind my creation. In retrospect,

I believe I tasted a little of what it must feel like to actually convert to Islam. And no, I did not come here with the expectation to receive such an arresting answer to a question I never even thought to ask.

Another gift we take home with us, o family of listeners, is our inability to read the signs in the cosmos or the verses of the Book with the same pair of eyes we brought to this retreat. And no, I was not expecting that either. So to that point, I hope you will indulge me in what remains of this khutbah to explore with a fresh pair of eyes a verse or two from the Qur'an, in light of the theme of this year's retreat. Allah سبحانه وتعالى says in His majestic Book:

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

“We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within their souls until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth. Is it not sufficient that your Lord doth witness all things?” (41:53).

Allah سبحانه وتعالى establishes in this verse a correspondence between the cosmos and the human being, whose words are spelled out in the language of signs and symbols. The male and female principles are reflected along the horizons and in the souls, and furthermore in masculinity and femininity, then furthest in manhood and womanhood, all as receptacles of both principles, but none of which represent them absolutely. Behold in the man and woman, the microcosm as the receptacle of the macrocosm, all indicating الحق, the Truth, glorified in His transcendence.

This verse manifests its light elsewhere, in Surat al-Shams, which describes some of the great signs beyond the horizons and deep in our souls with these words: وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا By the sun and his glorious splendour (male principle), وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا by the moon, as she follows him (female principle). I should like to pause here to mention that شمس “sun” is linguistically feminine, while قمر “moon” is masculine. However, both Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall switch the genders and rendered the sun as masculine and the moon as feminine to reflect the cosmological reality of the male and female principles inherent in each. The verses continue: وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا By the day, as it reveals him (male principle), وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا by the night, as it conceals him (female principle); وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا by the firmament, and that which erected it (male principle); وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا by the earth, and that which expanded it (female principle). وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا By the soul, and that which brings it to equilibrium (the marriage of both principles in perfect harmony), فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا then inspires it as to its iniquities and its defenses. قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ وَوَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا and whoever defiles it fails.”

The first two signs mentioned in this surah are the sun and the moon, the former being a manifestation of the male principle, and the latter the female principle. The male principle is activity, affect, and influence, the female principle is receptivity, passivity, and submission. The sun is warm light, the moon is cool light. The sun generates light, the moon reflects light. Apart, they are wanting; together, they are in perfect harmony and equilibrium, courting one another as platonic partners until permission is granted for them to consummate their love. One of the signs before the end of time is that the sun and moon will coalesce as one **وَجَمَعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرَ** “When the sun and moon converge.”

Now, brace yourselves. Our beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم once proclaimed **أنا والساعة كهاتين** “I and the Hour are like these two.” Allah سبحانه وتعالى described the Prophet, himself صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم as “light” in the verse **فَدَجَاءَكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُّبِينٌ** “There has come to you, from Allah, a light, and a clear scripture,” and that light was perfect because the sun and the moon conjoined in him, yes, the sun and the moon conjoined in him! Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه said about his blessed countenance **كَأَنَّ الشَّمْسَ تَجْرِي فِي وَجْهِهِ** “It was as though the sun flowed through his face!” And Hind Abu Halah رضي الله عنه said **كَانَ فَخْمًا مَفْخَمًا يَتَأَلَّأُ وَجْهَهُ تَأَلُّؤُ الْقَمَرِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ** “He was majestic and magnificent! His face shone with the radiance of the moon on the night of its fullness.” Allah سبحانه وتعالى described the sun as a blazing “beacon” **سِرَاجًا وَهَاجًا** and the moon as a “glowing” satellite **قَمَرًا مُنِيرًا** but both descriptions had to be juxtaposed in order to capture in words the essence of his majestic light **وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا** “...a caller to Allah by His permission and a *glowing beacon*.” Here, the male and female principles inherent in the sun and the moon culminate in **الإنسان الكامل** the perfect human, the exemplar for equilibrium in all of his stately states and statements, the perfect communion between the male and female principles in human form.

Naturally, this brings us to the marriage of the male and female principles in ourselves, again, neither of which is absolute in us, for these principles are relational and manifest differently as necessary in the arenas of circumstance. To wit, the Throne is male principle, the Pedestal is female principle, but the Pedestal is male principle with respect to man, and man is female principle, for he is under its command. Similarly, the sun is male principle, the moon is female principle, but the moon is male principle with respect to water, which is female principle, for the moon pulls water unto himself in the high and low tides, and water yields. And it is this female principle that is dominant in water that enables us to wash before prayers, while the male principle, when it dominates therein, forms hurricanes, floods, tidal waves, glaciers, and icebergs.

Likewise, the male principle is dominant in the sound man, without being absolute, while the female principle is dominant in the sound woman. I want to consider just one example in this

regard, one among a plethora in the Book of Allah سبحانه وتعالى and in the Sunnah of His Messenger صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم. Allah سبحانه وتعالى says الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ “Men are the caretakers of women.” In this verse, the dynamic between the male and female principles is proclaimed, and it reflects in our sacred law inasmuch as the activity of sound men and the receptivity of sound women are legislated.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that the word رَجُلٌ “man” is related etymologically to رِجْلٌ “leg”; the word قَوَّامٌ “caretaker” derives from قَامَ “it stood”; and the word نِسَاءٌ “women” is related etymologically to نِيسَا “the great saphenous vein,” which runs throughout the entire leg, from the hip to the heel, and is the largest blood vessel in the body—the same vein that is extracted from the leg for use in bypass heart surgery. In light of this, one can glean from the verse that man is the caretaker of woman, but he cannot succeed in his responsibility toward her without her full participation in the process, for what leg can stand or walk or run or race without the great saphenous vein that pumps the blood in the leg back to the heart (of the matter)! In a sense, the male principle could be said to stir the leg to action while the rest of the body borrows from the female principle its posture of passive acceptance.

This reflection is further enhanced in the sacred law, which is there to establish “equilibrium” as the emblem of justice betwixt the twain, obligating men to toil in this world to take care of their women, and obligating women to accept said toiling on their behalf, while accommodating for exceptions. This standard transcends our *ideals* of equality and our *values* of egalitarianism; rather, it sanctifies the principle of equilibrium as perfectly patterned in the cosmos. Rumi once asked, “How do you have any room for pettiness, while you are the universe in ecstatic motion!”

The sun and moon are not equal, but they do quite a miraculous job at complementing one another, do they not? Herein lies a metaphor of perfect balance and harmony between the sexes; a *yin-yang* of mutual obligations and rights, while retaining gendered roles as essential, not accidental; a union of the right and left hands together; a harmony that, once established, manifests in the greatest expression of love in the wondrous mystery of marriage, as a reflection of oneness, such that the pain in the blessed head of the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم throbbed simultaneously with the same intensity in the head of his beloved wife, Lady `A'ishah رضي الله عنها on the grievous day he passed from this world, for their union was perfect, and they embraced in their perfection, and, thus, stood on their last day together, as one before the One.

Admittedly, many of my questions go still unanswered, many of my expectations still unfulfilled, but this retreat has taught me something far greater, as a man in whom the male principle precedes the female, and that is to heed the song of the female principle, and then

receive, listen, and submit, as one among this beautiful family of listeners, perhaps I may come to perceive the world with a different understanding, contemplate the Book of God in a different light, enter upon my Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم through a different door of intimacy, face the world with a different purpose, ask my questions with a different curiosity, or discover something different about myself as a bearer of Allah's most beautiful names manifested in me, in every moment and with every breath. Perchance then my heart might taste the delight of faith, as I raise my hands in prayer and bring the inward workings of His competing names within me into a stupor of stillness, as I declare اللهُ أكبر Allah is greatest.

Las dos primeras señales mencionadas en esta surah son el sol y la luna, siendo el primero una manifestación del principio masculino, y la ultima el principio femenino. El principio masculino es actividad, afectividad, e influencia, el principio femenino es receptividad, pasividad, y sumision. El sol es luz cálida, y la luna es luz fresca. El sol genera luz, y la luna refleja luz. Una de las señales antes del fin de los tiempos es que el sol y la luna se juntarán como si fueran uno وَجُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ “Cuando el sol y la luna se junten.” Nuestro querido Profeta (que las bendiciones y la paz de Dios sean con el) una vez proclamó أَنَا وَالسَّاعَةَ كَهَاتَيْنِ “Yo y la Hora final somos como estos dos.” Dios describió al Profeta (que las bendiciones y la paz de Dios sean con el) como luz en el verso قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ “Os ha venido de Dios una luz y una escritura clara,” y esa luz fue perfeccionada porque el sol y la luna fueron incorporadas en el. Abu Hurayrah dijo sobre su rostro, “Era como si el sol fluyera por toda su cara.” Y Hind Abu Halah dijo, “El era majestuoso y magnifico! Su cara brillaba con el resplandor de la luna en la noche de la luna llena.” Dios describió al sol como un ardiente faro سِرَاجًا وَهَاجًا y a la luna como un satélite luminoso وَقَمْرًا مَنِيرًا y las dos descripciones fueron juntadas en el verso en donde Dios describe a su amado Profeta (que las bendiciones y la paz de Dios sean con el) وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ como “El que llama a Dios y un faro luminoso.” Aqui los principios masculinos y femeninos culminan en الإنسان الكامل el humano perfecto, el ejemplo unico del equilibrio en todos sus estados señoriales y declaraciones, la comunión perfecta entre los principios masculinos y femeninos en forma humana.

The pulpit of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم is the most jealous place on earth, and especially so in the presence of his inheritors, our esteemed scholars and teachers, for he said العلماء ورثة الأنبياء “Scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.” And had it not been for the fact that I was commanded to stand before you today, I would have been sitting among you. Anything accurately stated was from Allah سبحانه وتعالى ultimately, and all errors were borne of my own misunderstanding, and I seek refuge in Allah سبحانه وتعالى from misrepresenting His religion via my ignorance, and the forgiveness of my teachers if I have misrepresented their teachings.