

TRUE LOVE [*'ISHQ HAQĪQĪ*] AND
METAPHORICAL LOVE [*'ISHQ MAJĀZĪ*]

True love [*'ishq haqīqī*] refers to love for Allah ﷻ, while metaphorical love [*'ishq majāzī*] refers to love for creation when it exists for the sake of fulfilling one's base desires. In short, true love is love for Allah ﷻ, Lord of the universe, and metaphorical love is love for creation. A more detailed explanation of these two types of love is given below.

METAPHORICAL LOVE [*'ISHQ MAJĀZĪ*]

The First Principle

In metaphorical love, the physical and external beauty of a man or woman is known as *husn*. It is *husn* that generates passion in youth. There is no greater influence in the material world than *husn*; it causes even highly intelligent people to act irrationally.

The Second Principle

Once an image of physical beauty becomes imprinted in a person's heart, that person is rendered helpless. Shaytan presents this

image in such an attractive form that the person becomes absorbed with each glance.

يزيدك وجهه حسنا إذا ما زدتَه نظرا

*The beauty of his face increases in your eyes, the more
you behold it.*

The Third Principle

When smitten by *husn*, a person dies a spiritual death. Although he has eyes that see clearly, he views the faults of his beloved with admiration.

The Fourth Principle

Husn is ephemeral like the foam on the crest of an ocean wave. As a result, love that is based on physical form cannot be maintained for long.

*The vicissitudes of life are wealth, beauty, and youth,
We ourselves have seen this, and history, too, bears witness.*

Notwithstanding the ephemeral nature of *husn*, the lower self [*nafs*] is blinded by desire and fearlessly pursues its gratification regardless of the consequences.

The Fifth Principle

When unable to approach his beloved, a metaphorical lover [*‘ashiq majāzī*] contents himself with the sight of his beloved from afar. He consoles his heart thinking that seeing from afar suffices.

The Sixth Principle

If the *‘ashiq majāzī* gains the opportunity to be close to his beloved, then his *nafs* desires physical contact. Thus, the one who

apparently claims to have true love reveals his deceit in this manner.

The Seventh Principle

When love degrades *hushn* to fulfillment of lustful desires and selfishness, it loses its humanity. The truth is that no face is as attractive as it seems from a distance. No voice is as enchanting as it seems from afar. Is then the reality of physical attraction based on distance? If so, it would seem that it is better to keep a distance. Regardless, the metaphorical lover desires proximity to such an extent that he cannot be satisfied without physical consummation. Ask those who are drunk with lust and infatuation; even after consummation they remain unsatiated.

*My life is still hanging around the noose,
I swear, my love, even by gaining you, my thirst is not quenched.*

The Eighth Principle

Allah ﷻ, the Lord of the worlds, has placed an instinctive mutual attraction between men and women. However, He has also placed some restrictions and conditions for their relationships. If they live within these limits, they will be rewarded. If they exceed these limits, they will be punished. When purification of the soul [*tazkiyah al-nafs*] is not achieved, a man's mind is always preoccupied with thoughts of women. Similarly, women may be captivated by men. Even if the whole world praises the beauty of a certain woman, she herself can become infatuated with the physical beauty of one man. One of the greatest stories of love between a man and a woman is that of "Laila and Majnun." Due to its fame, *'ishq laila* [love for Laila] has become another term for *'ishq majāzī* [metaphorical love] as Majnun's love for Laila is symbolic of the love of worldly objects.

Majnun's real name was Qais. His story falls in the period of *Hadrat Hasan* ؓ. Qais was deeply taken by Laila. He once met *Hadrat Hasan* ؓ who said, "Qais, I have made peace with Amir Mu'awiyah ؓ. I have handed the reigns of leadership to those suited for it." Qais kept silent for a while. *Hadrat Hasan* ؓ asked him, "What are you thinking about?" He replied, "I was thinking that the governorship actually suits Laila." Upon hearing this *Hadrat Hasan* ؓ stated, "You are crazy [*Anta Majnun*]!" and from then on he became known as "Majnun."

Once Majnun's father told him, "Because of you I have had to face considerable disgrace. The tales of your infatuation have spread far and wide. Come, I will take you to the Sacred Ka'bah. There, you can sincerely repent for your sins." When Majnun reached the Sacred Ka'bah, he clasped the shroud of the Ka'bah and supplicated:

إلهي تبت من كل المعاصي
و لكن حب ليلي لا أتوب

*O Allah, I repent of all my sins,
But I repent not of my love of Laila.*

When his father heard him say this, he looked angrily at him. Then Majnun recited another couplet:

رب لا تسيني حبها أبدا
و يرحم الله عبدا قال آمينا

*O Lord, never remove my love for her,
And have mercy upon that person who says amen for my
supplication.*

Once a person saw Majnun kissing the feet of a dog. He asked Majnun, "Why are you doing that?" Majnun replied, "This dog has just come from the street on which Laila lives. That is why I

am kissing its feet.” What else can such an obsessed and insane person be called except for “Majnun” [crazy]!

Majnun used to circle the street where Laila lived, reciting the following couplets:

أطوف على جدار ديار ليلي
أقبل ذا الجدار و ذا الجدارا
و ما حب الديار شغفن قلبي
و لكن حب من سكن الديارا

*I circle the walls of the house of Laila,
Sometimes I kiss this wall, sometimes I kiss that one,
It is not love for these walls that has infatuated my heart,
But the love of who lives within them.*

Once, the mayor of the city thought that he should actually see with his own eyes the girl whom Majnun’s love had made famous. When Laila was brought before him, he was astounded to see that she was just an ordinary girl without any extraordinary features, figure, or complexion. He said to her, “You are no prettier than any other girl.” She retorted, “Keep quiet. You are not Majnun.”

It is for this reason that the metaphorical lover claims that Laila should be beheld by the eyes of Majnun.

The Ninth Principle

If the metaphorical lover is to be executed for his love, then he desires that his beloved be present to witness the scene.

*For the crime of loving you, I am being killed,
And there is much hue and cry,
You too, come upon the roof, and watch this strange spectacle.*

The Tenth Principle

The metaphorical lover thinks that his eyes experience so much pleasure in looking at his beloved that his heart becomes envious. On the other hand, by thinking about his beloved, his heart experiences so much pleasure that his eyes become envious.

القلب يحسد عيني لذات النظر
و العين تحسد قلبي لذات الفكر

*The heart envies the eyes - the pleasure of its observation,
And the eyes envy the heart - the pleasure of its reflection.*

The Eleventh Principle

The metaphorical lover thinks that by merely seeing his beloved he is imbued with new vitality.

*Even though I have become old, weak, and feeble,
The moment I behold you, I am young again.*

The Twelfth Principle

The metaphorical lover finds every movement and action of his beloved attractive. Thus he believes her to correspond to his desires.

THE DECEPTION OF TRANSIENT BEAUTY

Those who are infatuated with the external appearance of a person are sorely deceived and worthy of pity.

*Be lured not by transitory beauty,
Like an exquisite snake it strikes.*

One aspect of human life is to fulfill the physical needs of the body. It is possible to satisfy these through marriage [*nikāh*]. Another aspect of human life is to fulfill one's base desires.

However, as there is never an end to such desires, it is impossible to fulfill them.

It is for this reason that in Islam, *nikāh* has been ordained as an act of worship [*ʿibādah*] and even looking at non-relatives [*ghair mahram*] of the opposite gender is unlawful [*haram*]. Through marriage one may fulfill his or her physical needs and should thereafter remain satisfied and content. It is related in a hadith that if a man's gaze happens to fall on a woman and her beauty attracts him, then he should go unto his wife. Whatever that woman possesses, his wife possesses as well.

As far as figure, features, and complexion are concerned, there are many different creations of Allah ﷻ. With so many rivaling each other in beauty and with so much diversity, how many (beautiful creations) can one person actually obtain? If a person's gaze is tainted and his heart is full of lust, then even if he continues fulfilling his desires, he will tire but his desires will not end. Desire is a thirst that is never quenched. For this malady, there is no other cure except the fear of Allah ﷻ.

A man who was enslaved by his desires performed a pledge of self-rectification [*bay'ah*] at the hands of *Mawlānā* Ashraf Ali Thanwi (rah). He wrote to his *shaykh* that he did not have the power to look away from women. He replied, "Strength is the name of that willpower which one can choose to use or not to use. If a person has the strength to perform an act but does not have the strength to abstain from it, then this is known as a sickness and not a power. Therefore, what you have is the *sickness* of looking at other women, and this must be cured." The man wrote again, "*Hadrat*, now I only look once, because the first glance is pardoned." His *shaykh* replied, "The first glance is pardoned if it occurs involuntarily. Otherwise, to look even once with intent is not permissible." The man wrote for the third time, "*Hadrat*, the creation of Allah ﷻ is a reflection of His attributes. Hence, I

gaze upon the beautiful admiring them as reflections of Allah's ﷻ beauty." To this his *shaykh* replied, "Yes, the faces of the beautiful are indeed reflections, but they are fiery reflections that can incinerate. Remember, looking at such faces renders one worthy of the fire of Hell." The man wrote back finally saying that he had made sincere repentance [*tawbah*].

Once a man went to the *khānaqah* [sanctuary] of his *shaykh* for self-reformation [*islāh*] and resided there for a while. He was often busy in the duties of the kitchen. Sometimes a woman would come to clean the area and the man would gaze at her covetously. The woman noticed the attention she was getting and being chaste, she went to the *shaykh* and complained of his lustful glances. The *shaykh* grew perturbed and began to think of a means for this student's reform. In the meantime, the cleaning woman became ill with diarrhea. When the *shaykh* came to know of her condition, he sent a message for her to use a specific toilet so all her excrement would remain in one area. She did as he instructed. After a few days her condition improved, but she was still very weak and looked emaciated. When she returned to the kitchen to clean, the man looked away since she no longer appeared attractive to him. The woman informed the *shaykh* of his changed behavior. He called the man and, pointing to the specified bathroom, said, "Go look. Over there is your beloved." When the man went in to see, he found a pile of feces and excrement. Surprised, he asked how this pile of filth could be his beloved. His *shaykh* said, "At first when the cleaning woman would pass by, you would gaze at her covetously. When she became sick, it was this same filth that came out of her body. Then, when you saw her after her illness, you looked away. So it seems that your beloved was this heap of filth which had parted from her." The seeker [*murīd*] sought forgiveness and made sincere repentance [*tawbah*].

THE RESULT OF METAPHORICAL LOVE [ʿISHQ MAJĀZĪ]

*He who reveres the appearance of this world,
Will always have regret and sorrow.*

The ultimate consequence of metaphorical love [*ʿishq majāzī*] is the separation of the lover and the beloved and thus, disgrace in this world and the Hereafter. Whoever is in love with creation will have to separate or be separated from his beloved one day. And, whoever loves Allah ﷻ will be united with Him one day. As related in a hadith:

حب من شئت فإنك مفارقه

Love whomever you wish, but one day you will be separated.

Besides regret and remorse, one gains nothing in metaphorical love.

At the time of death, the true reality of life becomes manifest before everyone. All infatuations end. All illusions fade. This is the final end of metaphorical love. Whoever wishes to lead a successful life must abstain from it. Turning away from metaphorical beauty, some have changed their direction toward the true beauty of Allah ﷻ. The following are two such incidents.



In his youth, *Hadrat* Abdullah bin Mubarak ؓ was infatuated with a beautiful girl. One day she told him to wait outside of her house at night and that she would come out to meet him. He stayed awake, shivering in the long, cold winter night waiting for her. The girl did not come out to meet him as she had promised. When the call to prayer [*adhān*] was called in the morning, he felt humiliated. He thought to himself that he spent the entire night

awake for the sake of a pretty girl, but did not experience anything except remorse and sadness. He lamented, “If only I had spent the whole night awake in the worship and remembrance of Allah ﷻ, then certainly I would have received some portion of His mercy and blessings.” He then made sincere repentance [*tawbah*]. He later obtained a religious education, passed through the stages of purification of the self and the heart [*taẓkiyah*], and became a leading scholar in the field of hadith.



Once, in a Muslim kingdom, a man was in love with the local princess. He was handsome and worked in the ruler’s palace. Somehow he managed to relay his message of love to the princess. Having already heard praises of his beauty, she fell in love with him as well. Through a liaison, they would exchange messages, sharing their feelings of mutual affection. However, they could not find any way to meet inside the palace. Eventually, the princess thought of a plan. She sent a message to her beloved telling him that her father greatly respected pious people. She suggested that if her beloved were to leave his job, live on the outskirts of town, and engage himself in piety and worship for some time until he gained popularity, then she would be able to go out and meet him without restraints. He did as she suggested and settled near the edge of the town. He then adopted the *sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ as his way of life and became occupied in remembrance [*dhikr*] and contemplation [*fikr*] of Allah ﷻ day and night. After a while, his piety became well-known among the people. The princess had been waiting for this opportunity. She asked her father his permission to go see this “holy man,” making the excuse that she wanted to request his supplication [*du’a*]. Arriving at his dwelling, she left the entire entourage outside and

went in alone. When her old admirer saw her, he said, “Sister, please go outside. How did you enter without permission?”

The princess reminded him that she was the same one whose beauty had enchanted him and who he had desperately ached to meet. She had come to see him so that they could finally meet and have this golden opportunity to be alone together. He turned his head away from her and said, “Sister, that time has gone. I had chosen this life of piety in the hope of meeting you. But now my heart abounds with the love of the True King. I desire not to even look in your direction.”

TRUE LOVE [ʿISHQ HAQĪQĪ]

Once, *Hadrat Maulānā* Inam-ul-Hasan (rah), the leader of the *Tablighī Jamāʿah*, was going toward his quarters after giving a lecture. Some of his admirers were following behind him. When *Hadrat* turned and looked back, he saw that a man was crying as he was following him. After a few steps, he looked back again and saw the man following him in the same state. After a few more steps, he turned around again and saw that the man was still crying. *Hadrat* asked him consolingly, “Brother, why are you crying? Is there any way in which I can help you?” The man replied, “*Hadrat*, I am crying because of my love for you.” *Hadrat* told him, “O servant of Allah ﷺ, attach your love to the All-Living and Ever-Lasting, the One who never dies. What is the point in having love for an ephemeral being like myself? In due time, I will die. Brother, have love for that being who values each lover. How many admirers like you do I have? How can I show appreciation for all of you? Love that being who will appreciate your love in this world as well as in the next. Tomorrow, I will die, and then who will you love?”

*Direct your love to the All-Living and Ever-Lasting,
Who exists forever and ever,
For you, Allah is the quencher of the thirst of your soul.*

Understand that any love a person has for creation that is for the pleasure and content of Allah ﷻ is counted as love for Allah ﷻ. Thus, the love one has for his *shaykh* is purely due to the love one has for Allah ﷻ.

To have love for Allah ﷻ and to obey His every command is known as true love [*'ishq haqiqi*]. Through true love, success in this world as well as in the Hereafter is obtained. For those who are fortunate enough to receive even a single drop of true love, the value of this world completely diminishes in their eyes. Their eyes see through the attractions and allure of superficial appearances, and they consider them nothing but deception.

Once *Hadrat* Malik bin Dinar (rah) was going somewhere when he saw a pretty bondwoman wearing attractive clothing and walking haughtily. It occurred to him that this girl needed some advice. He approached her and asked, "O bondwoman, does your master wish to sell you?" She asked him why he wanted to know. He replied that he wished to purchase her. She thought that her stunning beauty and charm had made even this old man desire her. Amused, she told her servants that they should take this old man with them, to tell their master what he had said. So *Hadrat* Malik went with them. When they reached her master's home, the bondwoman laughingly boasted that even this old man had fallen in love with her after seeing her. Her master asked, "O old man, do you wish to purchase this bondwoman?" *Hadrat* Malik replied, "Yes." The master then asked, "How much would you pay for her?" Malik bin Dinar (rah) replied, "Two dry dates." The master was shocked when he heard this reply and responded, "Why such a paltry price?" The *shaykh* replied, "Because she has many faults. First, her beauty is temporary and one day will

vanish. Second, soon she will age and her face will develop wrinkles such that no one will want to look at her. If she does not bathe for a few days a stench will emanate from her body, lice will fill her hair, a foul smell will come from her mouth, and her teeth will rot. If she does not comb her hair, she will look horrible. Finally, she is so unfaithful that today she is with you, and when you die, she will go to someone else.” The slave’s master said, “All that you say is true, but how do you come up with a price of two dry dates?” Malik bin Dinar (rah) replied, “I can obtain a slave whose beauty and charm is everlasting. When she smiles, rays of light emanate from her teeth. Her clothes are such that seventy thousand different colors shine forth from them. If she were to reveal the hem of her clothing from Heaven into the sky, the sun itself would seem dim in comparison. If she would talk to the dead, they would come to life. So faithful is she that I can see the waves of love arising in her heart myself. If she spits into bitter water, it would sweeten. I will receive this ‘bond-woman’ because of standing awake in the last portion of the night and offering two cycles [*rak’ab*] of the night vigil [*tabajjud*].” The master’s eyes became full of tears and he said, “O *Shaykh*, you have transformed me.” He then made sincere *tawbah*, and led a life of piety thereafter.

*To dust the graves will turn,
The bodies of the beautiful.*

A *shaykh* used to mention in his gatherings that he had attained love for Allah ﷻ through a woman. After hearing this, a man grew curious and decided to approach him. He asked, “O *Shaykh*, what is the story behind the woman you mentioned?” He then related the following story:

“Once I was sitting in my office working when a woman came and asked for a ruling [*fatwa*] as to whether a man who has one wife can marry again. I replied, ‘Since a man is allowed up to four wives according to religious law [*shari’ah*], how could I issue a ruling otherwise?’ She said, ‘This may be the ruling for other men, but as for my husband please write a ruling that he is not allowed to marry anyone else!’ I declined to do so. However, she continued insisting and I kept refusing. Eventually, she sighed in exasperation and said, ‘O *Shaykh*, the *shari’ah* must be followed. Otherwise, I would raise my veil [*niqab*], and you would see my beauty and charm. Then you would be compelled to write that any man whose wife is this beautiful should not be allowed to marry again!’ Nonetheless, I still refused. She left, but she had ignited a burning love for Allah ﷻ inside me. If one woman can have so much pride in her beauty, then what about the beauty of Allah ﷻ? Would Allah ﷻ want that in His presence a man gaze with love at anyone else?’”

AN IMPORTANT NOTE

To love those among creation that Allah ﷻ has commanded to love is in truth a completion of love for Allah ﷻ. A hadith states that the Prophet ﷺ used to supplicate:

اللهم إني أسألك حبك و حب من يحبك

O Allah, I ask of You Your love and the love for those who love You.

Therefore, to love the Prophet ﷺ is in reality to love Allah ﷻ. Similarly, love for the noble Companions [*Sahābah*] ﷺ, the family of the Prophet ﷺ, and the friends [*awliyā*] of Allah ﷻ also falls in this category. In addition, love for one’s *shaykh* is also due to love for Allah ﷻ. There are certain limits to these loves of

creation and to exceed these limits, or to fall short of them, is considered a sin. In essence, to have love for the Prophet ﷺ is a condition of one's faith [*imān*]. While, to love one's *shaykh*, parents, children, and spouse is the completion and perfection of one's love for Allah ﷻ. Thus, true love [*ʿishq haqīqī*] is to love both Allah ﷻ and those among His creation that He has commanded us to love.

TRUE LOVE [ʿISHQ HAQĪQĪ] AND METAPHORICAL LOVE [ʿISHQ MAJĀZĪ] COMPARED

- ❖ True love is permissible and is an act of worship [*ʿibādah*]; whereas metaphorical love is impermissible and sinful.
- ❖ True love secures one's religion as well as worldly-life; whereas metaphorical love destroys them.
- ❖ True love will one day result in meeting the Beloved ﷺ; whereas metaphorical love will one day result in separation from the beloved.
- ❖ True love illuminates the heart; whereas metaphorical love darkens it.
- ❖ True love breathes life into the heart; whereas metaphorical love brings it death.
- ❖ True love brings one respect and honor; whereas metaphorical love leads one to disgrace.
- ❖ True love's fervor is everlasting; whereas metaphorical love's zeal is temporary.
- ❖ In true love the lovers' final abode is Heaven [*jannah*]; whereas in metaphorical love the lovers' final abode is Hell [*jahannam*].
- ❖ True love's road is one on which all difficulties are endured easily; whereas in metaphorical love every difficulty is a punishment.

- ❖ In true love the lovers' faces glow with the freshness of spring; whereas in metaphorical love the lovers' faces cast the dreariness of winter.