

ANATOLIA, ASHURA AND SOHBET

Metin Bobarođlu

The efforts that I have put into studying the wisdom of Anatolia are not restricted to a geographical region; these are studies which I usually refer to as the *Wisdom of Anatolia* or the *Ancient Wisdom* to stress the importance of it on the intersection point of Anatolian lands. I prefer to focus on portraying the great culture and the vastness this culture entails, because the wisdom I am talking about is not something that can exist entirely within a limited geographical area.

Anatolia is called as the cradle of culture. According to ancient records, Anatolia, with its ruins and remnants from the early periods, is the most ancient of geographical areas in the world. If we were to include the Sumerians and go beyond the borders of Anatolia by expanding over Mesopotamia, Basra and the Mediterranean regions, we can see that the roots of culture began in this area and spread from here throughout the world. Following this spread of culture, there was again a period that could be referred to as the period of aggregation. This was a point I portrayed in my studies; while the cultures gathered once again in their lands of origin, the cultures in other parts of the world were being eliminated. If we take a look at the history of battles, migration and other anthropological events, on the whole we can clearly see that there is a form of disintegration. They destroyed others with their power; throughout history this is what is generally called a synthesis. Meanwhile, Anatolia became a land of great interest. There was a kind of harmony in the Anatolian lands; they were neither attempting to destroy one another nor to unite. There was never a period in these lands when a greater civilization tried to destroy or eliminate others. This is something that is very interesting and quite obvious.

The general pattern is that the cultures from the past were eliminated to make way for the culture of the future; a greater universal civilization would then form in which everyone would join. This is what we call progressive civilization. However, completely the opposite occurred in the Anatolian region and this is probably an experience that we should include in our lives today. Instead of a progressive culture which tries to eliminate others, we need a culture that integrates into a multicultural society, recognizing others as equal.

Anatolia has no need for fancy jargon or imported phrases or words. Anatolia has a concept of its own, which is *ashura*. *Ashura* is a dessert made from fruit picked while it is growing; the fruit is picked when it is ripe and they are all brought together; no one fruit destroys the characteristics of the others; the character of the figs, chickpeas, beans, hazelnuts and walnuts are all combined, but the flavors of each one is distinct; there is a bond among all. While this bonding was occurring, the Anatolians never tried to destroy other cultures; they



combined civilizations that had developed an understanding between each other. Anatolia has been home to many different cultures; in fact, we are actually talking of maybe 42 distinct cultures within one land. Many languages have been spoken and various people with various differences have gathered here over time. There are many symbols that can be associated with Anatolia; mosaic is just one of these; but my insistence on the word *ashura* is not merely because it is Anatolian. In the mosaic culture there is immobility; the mosaics are cemented in place, but here there is dynamism in taste and an exchange in taste. If we are to bring this culture over into its own discourse, then this would be called *sohbet* (*suhbah*) and is very different from other forms of speaking.

Today when we say “let’s have a chat”, this is an everyday conversation. There are common ways of speech in every language as well as more formal ways of talking. That is, if you are giving a conference you are providing others with knowledge; if you are making a speech you are also informing people. In any kind of conversation or any form of information there are ways that words are used or there is jargon and academic formats; and it is also possible to use everyday speech. The Anatolian meaning of *sohbet* is something quite different; it has another meaning. There is a sense of sharing tastes, this is what I refer to as *ashura*.

Sohbet is a word that entails the true meaning of *muhabbet* (*muhabbah*), or love. *Hub* means love in Arabic. Thus, in *sohbet* you share both knowledge and *muhabbet*, or love at the same time. So those who are involved in *sohbet* are called *sahabe*, *eshab*. The Prophet’s close companions were called the *Sahabe-i Kiram*, meaning those gifted with *sohbet*; He served these people with the gift of *Haqq*. And the people gifted with *sohbet* are *musahib* with each other. These are the people who internalize the same *sohbet* and share their tastes with one another, thus *ashura* can also be seen as an assembly of wisdom. It is the setting for *sohbet* – it is a part of culture, while at the same time it is a part of civilization, or of universality. Civilization is universality arising from culture, so there is a distinction between the two, that is, there is a distinction as well as a unity. If we look deeper into the concept of *ashura*, we discover that it is harmony; the actual point is not just sitting around in a group. Rather, it is the harmonious relationship that people have with one another, a concept that is important for sharing. *Sohbet* is a revivifying experience that evokes the abilities in people, triggers them, reveals their capacities and gives them the chance to be aware of themselves and then to develop themselves. If there was no *sohbet* people would have to rely merely on books to attain self-knowledge through their own logic or mind.

Among interdisciplinary studies, thinking on the one who thinks and knowing the one who knows is the task of philosophy. All the other branches of science deal with the knowledge of objects, and the object and subject are always in opposition. But we are talking about knowing the subject, knowing yourself, as it is written on the entrance of the Delphi Temple; knowing yourself as told by Socrates; knowing yourself as told by the Prophet: “One who knows himself knows his *Rabb*”; knowing yourself as told by all the sufis; knowing yourself as told in the religions of the Far East, in the teachings of Sanskrit, as told by Lao Tse. “Know yourself.” What does knowing yourself actually mean? Knowing the thing, knowing the universe is completely different from knowing yourself. So how can a person make his Self a



subject to himself? What do we mean when we say ‘myself’? What this means is that man is both something and someone. When we look at the creation of the universe, objects are merely something, their identities are hidden. Sufis and other people who carry on the wisdom and teachings of the Anatolian culture say: *“Allah is the being that encompasses all. He is the owner of all being and doubtlessly cannot be reduced to being. The world is His mirror, His reflection. His attributes are manifest in the world and His essence is manifest in man.”* The discourse of Anatolia and the story of *ashura* are both based on knowing yourself.

The word *Yunan* (Ion), like the name Yunus (Jonah), means human. A human being knows himself; if a person does not know himself then he is not a human being. There is an Anatolian phrase: He who does not know himself cannot know the others. This is also the case in philosophy. In the Anatolian region there were gnostics and pagans, that is, people whom we recognize Islamically because they are mentioned in the Quran. There is something quite clear from the experiences of the pagans and that is mysticism. So, from this aspect, the basis of Anatolian teachings does not consist of the process of religion alone; it also contains the process of philosophical teachings and examples of mysticism. Here, culture is very important; culture is the way of life, the objects of life, various ways of living, the culture of food and drink, the culture of relationships, and the culture of communication.

The spirituality that has turned into a culture is built within itself; if it has not turned into a culture, then it would remain merely as a mental teaching. Since Anatolia has turned it into a living culture –and this integrated culture still lives in Anatolia– it is not possible to understand or know this culture merely by looking at it from outside. I believe that the discourse behind the civilizations of Anatolia is covered with ashes; deep down, the embers still remain and if we were to remove the ashes from the surface the flames would erupt. We are used to some jargons in our religious and philosophical discourse and we want to hear them. If we cannot hear them, we wonder if we are being led into something completely different. We have forgotten to think freely, we have forgotten the fact that man’s search for himself is a journey, a recirculation in itself; that a person who seeks for himself has to be adventurous and has to take risks. However, these are actually embedded in the Anatolian culture both as a method and a way of living.

The followers of this culture, those on the journey of this path, those who have undergone a sincere search for themselves, will know that there are certain levels of intellect and levels of the Self, all in a specific order. In these levels man finds himself as different subjects and what he finds is his conscience. Only the one who has found himself has conscience. And from among the ones with conscience, in accordance with the level and sensitivity of their conscience, there arise words; but these are not just words; they come out in a state, they are called words with fire, effective words, or *sohbet*. *Sohbet* has a burning quality which is capable of transforming someone. It has energy and it is something that can be physically expressed, expressed with waves of energy from the brain, or with radiation from man. There is scientific evidence that anything which reaches 37 degrees Centigrade produces



some kind of wave. What is shared between the people in a *sohbet* are not just words, there is also a certain state; this is the difference between a *sohbet* and a conference. We may provide knowledge at conferences and present expressions in a logical manner according to scientific literature; the mind may learn it, but what will a person do with this knowledge? He has to do something with it. If we consider the word *sohbet*, this is a word that is used to conquer the inner universe of man; it cannot be explained merely with logic. If at the same time these words are accompanied with their experiences, then the invisible world descends into the visible world.

The energy attained from *sohbet* has an effect which in ancient times was called *logos*, but at present times *logos* has been absorbed into logic, and thus nowadays *logos* is a form of scientific methodology. *Logos* can be found in the beginning of the Gospel of John as “*In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.*” It is a kind of word that can transform, trigger and ignite the soul; it can cause transformation, which is a very important concept. This word, *logos*, is capable of a transformation in the levels of the self. This is not merely a teaching that points to an object or a fact. What causes the transformation is not the knowledge but a meaning that man cannot explain to himself but paradoxically can feel in his heart, in his soul. If we try to think about it in a systematic manner it cannot be called *sohbet*. *Sohbet* is something that enchants us, something in which we are lost; in which the final goal is ecstasy.*

* These excerpts are compiled from the *sohbet* programme *Ashura* by Nurgül Demirdöven.