

THE CONCEPT OF FEMALE PRINCIPLE IN THE HAJJ RITUAL

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Going back to the source in the terminology of *tasawwuf* (theosophy), we find the female principle; the mother. In the Arabic language, *umm* means “mother” and *ummah* means “children” (*ewlâd*). The concepts of *umm*, *ummah*, and *ummî* derive from each other. Although it is used in the singular form, *ewlâd* is a plural word and means “unity in purity”. If people are one in purity, they are an *ummah*; however, if they have not become one in purity, it means they are not an *ummah* yet.

Umm is a significant concept in the ritual of *Hajj* (pilgrimage) and is related to the female principle, or mother, which will later become our starting point. *Ummah*, in this case, is a term attributed to Prophet Muhammad by his *Rabb*. Within the framework of this logic, if every single person sets off on a journey starting from one’s self, one’s unique way and searches for one’s own being in the desert, the unity of those that transform into human beings (*insân*) is called as *ummah*.

Prophet Muhammad was entitled as being *ummî*. In orthodox thought, it is understood as if he was illiterate and ignorant since, in the Arabic language, illiterate people are called as *ummî*. However, *tasawwuf* has its roots in etymology, and the concept of *umm* etymologically means “mother”. Muhammad was also entitled with the term *rahmah* (blessing) and was declared to be a “blessing to the worlds”. Motherhood is a “blessing to the worlds”; this is where the basis of the female principle lies in *tasawwuf*.

The fact that each prophet is an *ummah* is the fact that they were all born of a mother. For example, in the Old Testament, Abraham is said to be “an *ummah* (nation) on his own.” The concept of “being an *ummah* on one’s own” is stated in the Quran as well. We consider *ummah* to be a plural word as in *ewlâd*, however, there is this concept of “being an *ummah* on one’s own” and in *tasawwuf* it is understood as “being born of one’s self”. The term “mother” is not used as being born of a mother in flesh, it should rather be understood as “finding the female principle in one’s self and being born of it”.

A sufi once said: “How much had Muhammad suffered so that he could give birth to Muhammad from himself.” This could also be said for the other sufi people: being born of one’s self, attaining the purity in one’s self which is *umm* in its origin. This concept of *umm* is quite interesting as in Arabic it has other meanings such as “harmony” and “acting according to an aim”. Mother, harmony and acting according to a certain aim: all of these correspond to the concept of *umm*. Acting according to an “aim”, having a goal in a situation of being “lost and bewildered” in the middle of a desert, and the “harmony” within all these: this is what the *hajj* journey is all about.

Hajj is also related to the concept of *hijra* (migration). *Hajj*, *hijr*, *hijra*, *Hajar* (or *Hagar*) and *Hajar-al Aswad* are all related concepts. On the Kaaba, there is a stone known as *Hajar-al Aswad* and the concept of *Hajj* is based on Hajar. When Abraham goes to Egypt, the Pharaoh gives him some presents including slave girls one of whom is Hajar. Abraham marries her and Ishmael (*Ismail*) is born of this marriage.

Hajar is closely related to the word *umm* (mother). This significant issue is not well-known in Turkey but it can be traced within literature. Hajar's tomb is in the Kaaba. The Kaaba has the shape of a cube, yet it cannot be circumambulated in a full circle. There is an arch-like, a crescent-like area that causes an eccentric movement during the circumambulation (*tawaf*). This whirling (*sama*) and cycling is a pleasant scene to the eye, it may even remind you of the electrons spinning round the atoms. The area that is not stepped upon during this turn is known as "the location of Abraham" (*Maqam Ibrahim*). Hajar's tomb is in this place, she is buried there.

This crescent-like area is also known as *Hijr-al Ismail*; the *hijra* (migration) of Ismail, like Hajar, Ismail's mother. Going on the *hajj* journey means taking part in this *hijra*. The Arabs also call this crescent-like area "the skirt of the Kaaba" – like the skirt of a woman. It is interesting that in the Arabic language *hijr* also means "skirt". *Hijr* means "skirt" and *Hajar* means "stone". The whole ritual of *hajj* is a *hijra*, a migration carried out in remembrance of Hajar, in which you change your place, you step out of your self.

The whole *hajj* ritual derives from a woman called Hajar. This is the point where the female context of sufism can be solved. *Umm*, mother, *hajj* and *Hajar* are all female elements. *Hijra*, *hijr* and *Hajar* bring together the term *muhajir* (migrant); in other words, there are people who set off on this journey, who migrate. Muhammad came out of the Kaaba in Mecca and went to Medina. What does this mean? Coming out of the Kaaba means coming out of Hajar, being born of the mother and migrating afterwards. Where to? To the search of one's own being.

The fact that a human being sows a seed of consciousness in one's self with a certain goal or aim is called as "intention" – it is not yet uncovered or proven, it is not yet realized, but it is "in itself". This is a longing (*khasara*) for one's own being, a longing as a result of having fallen apart from one's own being. In the Quran, it is stated as "*Inna al-insana lafee khusr*" (*Indeed, mankind is in loss*, al-Asr: 1-2). I vow to the time of mankind – i.e. I point out to the time of mankind – that they are in loss (*khusran*).

The Arabic word *khusran* is used to express the miseries of people. However, etymologically, tasawwuf is once again keen on the root of this word: *khusran* derives from *khasara*. People are alienated to themselves in this world, wherever they live. They have become alienated to their innate nature, their essential being. This is a loss for them, and their longing for their own being is not taught, it is by their innate nature (*fitrah*), it is *a priori*. There is a longing in every human being to his own "being" because he is "one" with his own "being".

In Arabic, *adem* is "non-being", and *Âdem* (Adam) is "being" – it is not a male or a female, but just "being". When the state of Adam, the state of "pure being" exists, we can talk no



more about a male or female element in it. This is a journey from the attribute of being “human being” to “being”. At the very point of “non-being”, there is no more a human being, but just a “pure being” which can be called as “the house of non-being” or “the house of salvation”. In that case, one’s consciousness has been cleaned, his unconscious that he himself set free has become cleaned, in other words it has turned into “a pure and clear temple”. This is the temple for which it is said: “*Stand in its presence and perform your prayer (salah).*”*

* This excerpt is taken from a talk by Metin Bobarođlu on “The Hajj Ritual”, on June 22, 2001, and translated by Nurgül Demirdöven.