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Original Text: "الثقة" – Nahar 25/5/2002

Trust

A spirit of individualism dominates the dispositions of the Arabs to such a degree that there is no value is given to social solidarity. For this reason we find the stark contradiction that, despite his progress and material advancement, the Arab of today has not exited from the tribal frame of mind. He lives in a system in which one tribe is pitted against another. Recall that even when the tribes struck alliances between one other in the desert of yore, this did not produce any fundamental integration between them. And even in cases in which such a pact may have resulted in an approximation, the Bedouin remained a hostage of his extended kin. Within the kin he was a prisoner of his house, and within this family he was held as a prisoner of the branch and its subdivision.

The extended family is predicated on tribal solidarity which however does not strip anybody from his or her individualism and egoism. The Arabic word for living quarter (al-hay) refers to an assembly of tents which do not, by necessity, establish a sincere affinity between the residents of this and that tent. If you are invited by the people of a tent, you do not automatically become a friend. They dispense on you a favor that you relied on them but the pride remains theirs. The desert therefore is not predicated on the group. Individuals may fall silent when they gather around the Shaykh of the tribe. It is this silence which is the telling sign that all of them remain enclosed on themselves and doubtful of the others.

Might this fear be a product of the harshness of Bedouin life? Or from the fact that God remained unknown in the [pre-Islamic] age of ignorance? Perhaps the spirit of tribalism persisted after the advent of Islam. City quarters were built in Kufa in which each tribe withdrew into a quarter. The flag of the ancestors appeared after Islam, and everyone took pride in his lineage, and those who invented pedigree for the Arabs came with a lineage which befitted their ambitions and vanity.

The Arabs were governed by this superciliousness, the essence of which was that each party considered itself superior to the others. This is what explains

the spread of the genre of deprecatory poetry (*hija'*) which I do not believe any other literary tradition embraces in quite the way our literature does. The potency of this kind of poetry lies in greater implication that the Arab is fortified by what he considers great in his people and himself. This is why we have amongst us this preoccupation with lineage and pedigree (*hasab* and *nasab*) which is but a token of (false, vacuous) mundane glory.

It seems that knowledge, once attained, does little to refine this sort of mentality. So you may substitute the tent with the castle, full with all amenities of luxury and sophistication, and yet you remain as if you lived in one of the Arab alleys of Mount Lebanon. Instead of mounting a camel you now enter a car, and the street always remains yours and not that of the other drivers.

When man vanishes in what sociology designates as a "patriarchal," extended family, it appears to him that he has gained space yet this family cements his individuality, and he does not dissolve in it except by ways of appearance, for the important thing is for the family to strengthen him.

Certainly: Man does not live bereft of any communion with anybody. Yet true communion cannot occur without friendship and love. And both of these connote a departure from the ego enclosed on itself to the ego of mutual sharing. My entire being is fortified through the friend, through his guidance and his tenderness, just as he is strengthened by me. You also will exit from your [limited] self in terms your scope of understanding so that the joint community of the understanding is created. And the true friend will ask you and you will ask him, and he will animate and unsettle you and you will animate and unsettle him in so far as you both want this company to be based on truth and rooted in reverence. At that point, what arises is a community not based on communalist passion [*'asabiyya*] but on the choice of love. The shell of your self is broken so that the free and growing "we" can spring forth. All this is unavailable within the tribe.

Each agreement and concordance involves a mutual accounting and interrogation. And an interrogation of the self consists in you allowing the other to limit and define you. In truth, it implies that you strip yourself naked before him, and this requires courage. For you to consider the other to be coming to kill you means that you are assuming the role of a Bedouin Arab preparing for battle before the other Bedouin comes to kill you. And if you brought your Bedouin identity to Lebanon or the Arab World even though you

may wear Western garb and drive a car you have armored out of a fear which shelters you from challenges and does not compel you to an honest word.

It is from this desert Angst that Arab eloquence sprouted forth. "Eloquence can be enchantment" (goes the famous proverb from the Hadith). A language of sublime beauty such as Greek was nurtured in the shadow of cities waging war with each other. Arabic poetry was a necessity for the tribes. If for some reason they were unable to engage in battle, they found resort to the searing word, and to the imaginary notion that, in doing so, they had prevailed. Today, we find the Arabs still issuing declarations which, they believe, will come true if read. They do so out of their non-existent sincere sentiment for truth, or their lack of understanding that life is not about statements and not (verbal) enchantment but about being. And being, in the true sense of the word, requires a good deal of ascetic devoutness, and a surmounting of pleasures, including the enjoyment of money. Mere existence is a lesson for being, and the latter requires long hours of staying up and an investment in the future; yet they immerse themselves in illusion because they are the sons of the desert.

The future is not formed from roots alone, nor by the return to roots, but rather it is a barging into the unknown. To orient oneself towards the future means that truths come from what lies ahead and not just from the past. You do not remain a prisoner of your tent in which you welcome the shade, but rather you travel under the scorching sun and construct under it a building of bricks and ideas instead of using an old stone as a peg for the tent.

Perhaps the reason for all this ossification and withdrawal is that the Arab has adopted and internalized the old Roman saying: "Man is a wolf to man." He accuses and suspects the other before having dealt with him, believing that he knows the position of the other, assuming that he is a bedouin Arab like him, whereas the divine word is: "You shall love each other." This implies that one is not to inquire whether the other deserves to be loved. Rather, one loves without any condition placed on love or the other.

Out of his faith that the other does not constrain him but expands him and is capable of having mercy on him because the other too is a being made in the image of the God who is complete in his integrity and goodness. As he trusts in his Lord so too he trusts in the other and does not anticipate any recompense from him.

My readers always ask me: "Who did you have in mind when you wrote this or that," or, "what was the situation which inspired you to write this article," or, "who was it who shocked or injured you?" And many a times they will not believe me when I say: "This is an idea which is applicable to the human reality as a whole, and it may correspond to the state of several individuals." Once one of the believers asked me at the end of a mass: "Why did you cite me today in your sermon today?" And I responded that "I did not see your face when I was speaking. My evidence that I did not impugn or target you is that another person posed the self-same question to me just two minutes ago. All this proves is that the sermon reached your heart and his heart, and this is good." This indicates that these two men were in a state of antagonism, in an inherited ignorance, and that they did not strip before the Truth which descended on them from the Word of God.

If you meet a person, trust in him at first. After your first association, or limited interaction with him, you will know whether he deserved this trust. Certainly our scripture says that trust must be placed in the Lord, and that we ought to bring it to the Guide of all blessings, and that faith itself is trust. Yet man is God's expense and his seat of manifestation, and therefore, you must trust man, place hope in him and bond with him. And the covenant is a form of friendship and concord. At the root of matters of the heart lies a mutual agreement, acquaintance and contract. And a contract or covenant requires an initiative. So open your heart, or your hand, and they will enter into a contract with you. And if a human being speaks to you with candor from the start, then it is better that he deceive you (openly) from the start rather than leaving you in the dark and in doubt (of his intentions). But if he sees you doubting him even as his intentions are pure, he will succumb to disappointment and perhaps suffer from great distress.

Perhaps you are endowed with long experience which allows you to see through whoever approaches you in an a matter of minutes. Yet, in the end, "God is the examiner of hearts and judges all with justice." As for us, we must test and learn from experience. Should you judgment be amiss, your interests will suffer. But if you injured another soul, the wound may be deep. And know that trust generates trust. And the fear born from mistrust may lead to the loss of a precious opportunity of the meeting of two souls. How many souls were saved by trust. And remember – if you do not know it – John the evangelists saying: "Love banishes fear into exile." And our frailness, or part of our frailness, stems from this deliberate separation out of antipathy.

It is, in fact, impossible for you to live without warmth, without intimacy and a sense of kinship, without that kinship and proximity to the other which makes you through love. Make friends for yourself who will be a family of your heart. "Oh servant, everything is of the heart." (al-Nufari). Only with it can you free yourself from the straightjacket of the tribes and this primal fear which strips you of all life and vitality. Trust, trust until you dissolve out of love. Thus, the mirage and delusion shall come to an end.
