

extract from a commentary I am working on, which I appended here with some modification, I hope the following lines offer a historical perspective for the consideration of this issue. Moreover, I hope that I am not repeating what has already been said. In any case please accept my apologies for the length of this reply.

Bahá'u'lláh reveals in verse 107 of the Book of Aqdas:

"ennaa nastah-yi an nazkora hokma'l ghelmaane et-taqo'r-rahmana yaa mala'el emkaane wa laa tartakiboo maa nohitom 'anho fil-lohe wa laa takoonoo fi haimaa ash-shahavaate minal haa'emina"

This is translated by the Universal House of Justice as:

"We shrink, for very shame, from treating the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desire." Verse 107 of the Book of Aqdas

The Arabic term "Ghelmaan" is the plural form of the term "Ghulaam" which according to the Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic is defined as: boy; youth, lad; slave; servant; waiter. "Ghulaamiya" and "Ghuluma": youth, youthfulness.

The Haim Persian English Dictionary defines the Persian implications of the Arabic term "Ghulaam" as: Slave, Page; lad, Servant, while defining the term "Ghelmaan" as Handsome lads dwelling in Paradise. This particular meaning associated with the term Ghelmaan comes from the following verse of the Qur'an wherein this term is used:

"They shall there exchange one with another a (loving) cup free of frivolity free of all taint of ill. Round about them will serve (devoted) to them youths (handsome) [The Arabic term similar to the Book of Aqdas is used: "Ghelmaan". KH] as Pearls well-guarded." Qur'an 52:23-24

NOTE: It is important to point out that the term "Ghelmaan" used in this Passage of the Qur'an has nothing to do with "slave boys" and its meaning is specifically "youths" or "boys".

There are other Arabic-Persian compound terms such as: "Ghulaam-bacheh": Young slave, Page. "Ghulaam bareh" or "Ghulaam pareh": Sodomite (i.e. one who practices sodomy); Also "Ghulaam zadeh": Slave's child; My child or son. "Ghulaam siah": Negro slave.

I hope that the definitions I have offered above offer the differences in usage of the term Ghulaam and Ghelman in relation to such variables as language and context. Let us move on. We will come back to this discussion later on.

In a separate Tablet revealed on the 17 of Jamadi-2 of the year 1291 AH (1875 AD), around the same time frame as the revelation of the Book of Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh reveals:

"Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O

concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond them this ever-proclaiming, true and trustworthy Tongue." (Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic, cit. Ganjineh Hodud wa Ahkaam pp. 338-339 Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran)

In order to gain an appreciation of why Bahá'u'lláh addresses this issue in the Book of Aqdas as the "subject of boys" and in other Tablets as "sodomy" one must, in my humble opinion, examine the human practices in the realm of sexual behavior throughout the written history. While no detail information on this issue can be found from antiquity nevertheless, one can indirectly get a sense of the prevalent social norms by studying the literature, Scriptures, etc... and develop a reasonable context for considering verse 107 of the Book of Aqdas.

Among Greeks sexual relationship between a wise man and his young patron was a socially acceptable norm. Such relationships have been eulogized in some books of poetry and history. An expanded discussion of this dealing with the acceptability of such an act within the Greek society or its class-dependence are clearly outside of the scope of this article.

It is believed that the Greeks' preoccupation with sodomy in male-male sexual intercourse had an effect on other cultures as well. Of course this is not to imply that other cultures were less innovative, in sexual matters, than Greeks. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica:

"The Greek's congeniality for homosexuality is said to have influenced such neighbors as Persians and to have been transmitted along with other Greek traditions into the Roman Empire." (Vol. 16 p. 604)

A close look at the Zoroastrian theological treaties of around this time period and the imagery they adopted in their presentation clearly hints at the existence of sodomy among the Persians. By sodomy male-male sexual relationship is intended here. Perhaps females were too unimportant a class for histories and Scriptures to have commented on female-female modes of sexual norms.

Regarding his Ascension and Vision of Hell, Arta-Viraaf, the Great Dastur (Zoroasterian High Priest) of the time of Ardashir the first of the Sassanid Kings of Persia (226 A.D.) said:

"I saw the soul of a man where a snake had entered his end and exited >from his mouth. I asked Suroosh [i.e. the Zoroasterian synonym for Arch-angel Gabriel in the Semitic Theologies. KH] about the nature of his sin. Suroosh replied: 'He committed sodomy in his life.'" (Arta Viraaf-Namih: Farkard 19, translation by

myself.)

The vision of the High-priest of the Sassanid Era appears to basically hint at two points:

Sodomy existed among the Zoroastrian population of the Sassanid Empire. Else, there would have been no need for Arta Viraaf to portray such a horrible picture of this event in the Vision of his Ascension. The vision appears to generally portray a message in the context of an imagery which people were able to relate to and a thought which they would abhor.

Implications of unacceptability of such act within the realm of Zoroasterian dogma is apparent. Abstinence is implied as the solution in preventing such a horrible torment in after life.

Sodomy must also have been a social norm within the Hebrew society of the time of Moses, else there was no reason for the Torah to mention the episode of Sodom [Genesis 18:19], or prescribe punishment for such an act. According to Torah:

"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood [shall be] upon them." Leviticus 20:13

The term "Sodomy" is in fact a derivative of the name "Sodom" and the Biblical account of what the people of Sodom did.

Since Hebrews lived among Egyptians for a long time they must have adopted some of their customs into their culture, one might assume that sodomy could have also been a social norm within the Egyptian society of that time period.

The Christian Scriptures does not directly deal with the question of sodomy, however, Paul addresses issue of effeminacy which some Christians have associated with homosexuality:

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (I Corinthians, 6:9-10)

Similar references to effeminacy can also be found in Islamic Hadith which is, in a sense, a verification of the account of the New Testament. Narrated Ibn 'Abbas:

The Prophet cursed the effeminate men and those women who assume the similitude (manners) of men. He also said, "Turn them out of your houses." He turned such-and-such person out, and 'Umar also turned out such-and- such person. Sahih Bukhari 8.820

There doesn't appear to be too much room for effeminate men within the Muslim community. However, effeminacy might not exactly equate with sexual tendencies toward another man. Furthermore, both the Qur'an and the Hadith deal with

male-male sexual relationship in particular.

The mentioning of the story of Lot, the nephew of Abraham and the people of Sodom in the Qur'an appear to imply that Arabs of the time of Muhammad must have also had similar social norms regarding sodomy. Else there was no reason for Prophet Muhammad to repeat, by the virtue of inspiration, the Biblical account of Sodom and Gomorah in the Qur'an.

Such tendencies could still be seen today in both east and the west. While sodomy between men and boys is an acceptable norm in preliterate societies particularly during initiation rites, its presences in the more advanced and modern societies can also sensed.

Admittedly the human sexual creativity and artfulness in modern societies has far ascended above that of the preliterate societies whose childish and primitive methods of male-male sexual engagement is still confined to sodomy in its simplest form between strong and weak. In the more modern societies this element appears to have expanded into the complex territory of consensual sex among adults, marriage, etc... above and beyond the act of sodomy.

If, we are to ascend above the phobia of political correctness, and look beneath all progressive forms and variations in sexual expression, sodomy alone appears to represent the most basic arch-type of male-male sexual activity and capture, as a metaphor, the gist of all that which might be placed under the modern umbrella term known as homosexuality. Perhaps this might begin to hint at why the archaic term of sodomy is used as a synonym for the modern term of homosexuality in translations.

The Qur'an does not directly refer to "lawaat", "sodomy" or the homosexual act. On the contrary the Qur'an treats this issue in a peripheral manner. The following verses of that Book describe the story of "Lot" and the people of Sodom and hint at sodomy by implication:

"For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bonds." (Qur'an 7:81) Moreover;

"Would ye really approach men in your lust rather than women? Nay ye are a people grossly ignorant." (Qur'an 27:55)

Surih Sho'ara:105 of the Qur'an reiterates further on this same theme.

Imam Ali describes the reason behind the injunction of the Qur'an against sodomy in a rather practical manner:

"Amir al-mu'menin, peace be upon him, said: Allah has laid down...abstinence >from sodomy for increase of progeny..." (Nahj-ul-Balagha, selection from the preachings of Ali, # 253, p. 621)

Regardless of such admonishment and unlike the severe approach of the Torah in punishing those guilty of sodomy, the Qur'an appear to treat this issue in a far more lenient manner than the Torah:

"And as for the two of you [i.e. The sentence structure refers exclusively to two men and not a man and a woman. KH] who are guilty thereof [guilty of sexual relationship. KH], punish them both. And if they repent and improve, then let them be. Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful." (Qur'an 4:16)

Qur'an while speaking of "punish them both", does not prescribe any form of punishment, as in the case of adultery, for sexual relationship between two men and prescribes acceptance of their repentance. However, there are some Ahadith (i.e. Traditions, saying of Prophet Muhammad) that prescribe the severe punishment of the Torah for those guilty of this charge. For example the following two Ahadith are from Sunan of Abu Dawood vol 4, chapter on the people of Lot. The Arabic text reads as follows:

"man laata beh ghulaam faqtaloo al-fa'il val-maf'ool." Which translates to:

"When a man commits sodomy with a boy: kill the doer and the one done to."

Please note that the usage of the term "Ghulaam" simply means "boy" in Arabic and has nothing to do with a slave-boy.

Also; "qala an-nabi man vajde tamoooh ya'mala 'amale qawme Lot fa-aqtaloo al-fa'il val-maf'ool." Which translates to: "Prophet said: He who commits that which the people of Lot committed [i.e. People of Lot committed Sodomy. KH]: kill the doer and the one done to."

Since the Qur'an has not clearly prescribed a punishment for sodomy, some Schools of Thought in Islam have considered sodomy as "mobaah" [i.e. meaning allowable in an impunable and indifferent sense.] while others have considered it "jaa'iz" [i.e. meaning allowable, permissible and lawful.]. For example Maleki, the founder of the Maleki School of Thought within Sunni Islam says:

"Having sex with a young man (without beard) is fine for a man who is not married and who is on a trip." (cit. Hesaam Noqaba'i, Hoquq-i Zan, pp. 126-127, section on "lavaat"/"sodomy")

The Shi'ah books of law also leave the door unlocked for the cases of "Oops, I forgot! sodomization of boys. The following Shi'ah ruling hints at this:

"If he has had sexual intercourse with a boy according to precautionary rule, it becomes unlawful for him forever to marry the boy's mother, his sister, or his daughters even if they are boys not adults. If one is married to one of such ladies before such act, it does not affect the already existing marriage, although it is a precautionary rule to avoid such marriage. Extending this rule to the case wherein one doing the act is a minor the one letting it done to him is an adult, is objectionable, according to a clear view it does not apply. The daughter or brothers and sisters of the one letting it done to him do not become unlawful to one who has done the act." (Islamic Laws of Worship and Contracts, p.

614, CR #1259 Ayatullah Al-'Uzma Al-Sayyid Muhammad Al-Husayni Shirazi)

In the Ottoman Empire the Khalifs use to keep young boys in the Harems for satisfying their sexual appetites [Such reference may be found in books such as: "The Spirit of Laws" by Montesquieu and "Chronicles of Shirly Brothers"]. Within the Iranian society "bache-bazi" or "sexual play with young boys" has been an under the carpet social norm for many centuries and the ambiguous nature of the Qur'anic prescription has not been able to bring halt to this social illness. Will Durant refers to this issue in his book "History of Civilization". He writes:

"Sexual indulgence was apparently more abundant and enervating in Islam than in Christianity, though it was usually kept within the orderly limits of polygamy. Turkish society was almost exclusively male, and since there was no permitted association of men with women outside the home, the Moslems found companionship in homosexual relationships, Platonic or physical. Lesbianism flourished in the zenana." (Will & Ariel Durant, History of Civilization vol 7 (The Age of Reason Begins) p. 520)

Also:

"The women were 'very richly habited,'wrote Tavernier, and 'little otherwise than the men...They wear breeches like the men.' The women lived in the privacy of the zenana, and seldom stirring from their homes, and then rarely on foot. There were three sexes. Much of the love poetry was addressed by men to boys, and Thomas Herbert, and Englishman at Abbas' [i.e Shah Abbas of the Saffavid Dynasty. This Dynasty appeared before the Qajar dynasty, during which The Bab and Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed Their revelations. KH] court, saw 'Ganymade boys in vests of gold, rich bespangled turbans, and choice sandals, their curled hair dangling about their shoulders, with rolling eyes and vermilion cheeks.'

Chardin noted a decrease in population in his time and ascribed it to:

First, the unhappy inclination which the Persians have, to commit that abominable sin against nature, with both sexes [Here he is referring to sodomy. KH].

Secondly, the immoderate luxury [sexual freedom] of the country. The women begin there to have children betimes, and continue fruitful but a little while; and as soon as they get on the wrong side of thirty they are looked upon as old and superannuated, The men likewise begin to visit women too young, and to such an excess, that though they enjoy several, they have never the more children for it. There are also a great many women who make themselves abortive, and take remedies against growing pregnant, because [when] they have been three or four months gone with the child, their husbands take to other women, holding it ... indecency to lie with a woman so far in her time.

Despite polygamy there were many prostitutes. Drunkenness was widespread, though Muhammadan law forbade wine." (Will & Ariel Durant, History of Civilization vol

It is important to point out that Durant's observation is not far from the truth. Perhaps the following quotes from the Shi'ah compilations offers a certain measure of validity to Durant's view:

"The woman becomes the owner of the dowry by the contract and it is reduced by one half by divorce before sex, also because of death of one party, according to a more clear reason if sex is performed by the front or back the dowry becomes an established right and the same rule applies if he tears her virginity by his finger and without her permission." (Islamic Laws of Worship and Contracts, p. 626, CR #1350 Ayatullah Al-'Uzma Al-Sayyid Muhammad Al-Husayni Shirazi)

If we are to consider the following factors:

- 1- The usage of the term "Ghulaam" and "Ghelmaan" in the Hadith and the Qur'an compared to the usage of the term "Ghelmaan" in the Book of Aqdas;
- 2- The fact that slavery was not abolished in Islam, and as a result it was possible for a Muslim to have a slave boy [In the Hadith Prophet Muhammad, while using the term Ghulaam, focuses the punishment on the act of "lavaat", or sodomy, as opposed to associating the term Ghulaam with slavery.];
- 3- That regardless of the warnings of the Qur'an and the punishments prescribed in the Hadith, yet, some Muslim scholars of both Sunni and Shi'ah schools had the door left unlocked for the practice of sodomy [The quotes offered above clearly hint at this issue in the context of boys, women and even marriage.];

Then, it is hard to believe that Bahá'u'lláh was concerned about slave boys being raped by their masters. On the contrary He appears to be:

- 1- Abrogating the rulings of the Muslim clergy who left the door unlocked for such a thing to happen within their communities, regardless of the directives of the Qur'an.

Consideration of various verses of the Book of Aqdas indicates that the Manifestation of God is either reinstating, modifying or abrogating certain laws and practices of various Scriptures and peoples. For example in Paragraph 9 of the Book of Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh refers to the misconception of the religious

leaders, regarding the presence of hair and bones of a dead animal invalidating one's obligatory prayer, saying: "the prohibition of its use hath stemmed, not from the Qur'an, but from the misconceptions of the divines." In verse 107, Bahá'u'lláh appears to refer to yet another misconception of the Muslim divines stemmed from their indifferent attitude toward sodomy which was against the spirit of the laws of the Qur'an and goes on to prohibit such practices;

- 2- Pointing at an underlying social problem, namely sexual appetite towards young children, particularly boys which has been and continues to be a problem plaguing many societies and cannot really be identified as a culture specific

phenomenon;

3- Identifying the "subject of boys" as an arch-type to convey His displeasure with all non-conventional forms of sexual expression we identify as homosexuality.

This is perhaps why Bahá'u'lláh reveals in the Book of Aqdas:

"We shrink, for very shame, from treating the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desire." (Verse 107 of the Book of Aqdas)

While the permissivity of our society has reached a point that that we are expected to advocate the discussion of this issue in the name of eliminating homo-phobia, the Manifestation of God states: "We shrink, for very shame, from treating the subject of boys." That is to say, He finds the presence of such an animalistic trait in a human being to be unworthy of the human station to the extent that even its discussion is considered shameful by the Law-Giver of humanity, much less revealing laws dealing with it. He does not associate shame with adultery, murder and theft, yet, He chooses to associate it with sodomy. Perhaps there is a challenge in this statement for both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike regarding why Bahá'u'lláh addressed this issue the way He chose to address it in the Book of Aqdas.

Unlike the Qur'an, the Book of Aqdas and other Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh are extremely clear about the question of "lawaat", "sodomy" or homosexual act in general and Bahá'u'lláh has clearly forbidden it in His Tablets (I have already quoted an example of this from among Arabic Tablets.). Bahá'u'lláh has relegated the nature of punishment for committing such an act to the Universal House of Justice. Hopefully such an approach will eradicate once and for all this social illness from among humanity.

Of course one might ask why did Bahá'u'lláh address this issue in the Book of Aqdas in the context of "subject of boys" and "sodomy" instead of that which we characterize today by the umbrella term "homosexuality". In my humble opinion:

1- The Manifestation of God is addressing humanity in a context people could relate to it. One hundred years ago, sodomy characterized the most important non-conventional mode in human sexual tendency which has become only an aspect and an element of what we identify today as homosexuality.

2- Sodomy is used by Bahá'u'lláh as an arch-type or the ultimate example in demonstrating sexual intercourse between two individual of the same sex. This metaphor is quite powerful in its implications that it captures the gist of that which we identify as "homosexuality". Note 134 of the Book of Aqdas (p. 223):

"The word translated here as "boys" has, in this context, in the Arabic original, the implication of pederasty. Shoghi Effendi has interpreted this reference as a prohibition on all homosexual relations."

3- The Manifestation of God is perhaps attempting to treat an underlying "root cause" of human problem in the society and not just band-aiding some of its symptoms.

The Bahá'í teachings on sexual morality center on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Bahá'í law thus restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married.

In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi it is stated:

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature. To be afflicted in this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap.

Bahá'u'lláh makes provision for the Universal House of Justice, to determine, according to the degree of the offense, penalties for adultery and sodomy (Q&A 49).

Moreover, Shoghi Effendi elaborates on this issue as follows:

21. "Regarding the question you asked him about one of the believers who seems to be flagrantly homosexual-- although to a certain extent we must be forbearing in the matter of people's moral conduct because of the terrible deterioration of society in general, this does not mean that we can put up indefinitely with conduct that is disgracing the Cause. This person should have it brought to his attention that such acts are condemned by Bahá'u'lláh, and that he must mend his ways, if necessary consult doctors and make efforts to overcome this affliction, which is corruptive for him and bad for the Cause. If after a period of probation you do not see an improvement, he should have his voting rights taken away." Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 6/20/53 to NSA of Canada.

22. "Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history, is the question of immorality, and over-emphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.

We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant and uncompromising, understanding

but immovable in our point of view. The thing people need to meet this type of trouble, as well as every other type, is greater spiritual understanding and stability; and of course we Bahá'ís believe that ultimately this can only be given to mankind through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God for this Day." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 5/21/54 to an individual believer.)

The Universal House of Justice wrote in this regard:

24. "A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfill his or her life's purpose." (The Universal House of Justice, letter dated 2/6/73 to all NSAs.)

I hope that these lines offer the readers a small glimpse of the context within which this particular law of the Book of Aqdas should be viewed.

Warm regards,

Kamran Hakim

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