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Trees: Symbols of Unification, Love, and Peace among Civilizations

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Abstract

Trees – a part of nature in almost all civilizations – have a cultural value and usually it is the representation of God's superiority, monotheism, peace, and love. In most human civilization, trees are the origin of humanity and human power. In this essay, trees are a symbol of unification and creating peace and love among people. Trees grow towards the sun in parallel, yet they are far from each other. In other words, not only do they vary from one other, but they also have unity. The space between trees is symbolic of friendship as well as cordial and peaceful dialogue. The color green, more significantly, is the color of liberty and forgiveness. It indicates that there is no obstacle to reach towards perfection. The trees' shadow is the symbol of a base and social justice. The liveliness, freshness, and fertility of the tree are symbolic of love in perpetuity, so human civilization can have both unity and peace by love.

Keywords

theology, tree, symbol, peace, love

Throughout history, human culture and civilization have moved progressively toward perfection — absorbing elements, values — and criteria, from all human societies in their move from one generation to another so that various cultures and civilizations have found common dimensions. In the present world, the people of

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various societies are facing, on the one hand, the vast dimensions of the spiritual (beliefs, rituals, pains, hopes), and on the other hand, the vast dimensions of the materialistic (mass media, positive and negative heritage of modernity). In other words, apart from local and national problems, each group of people is faced with global problems, each of which may be an issue for dialogue between civilizations.

The various subjective and objective conditions of the world have been instrumental in the international move towards the dialogue of civilizations. After World War II, there has been a psychological ground for the acceptance of the ideas of peace, friendship, cooperation, trust, and dialogue. On the other hand, the theory of “conflict of civilizations” presented by Huntington¹ has had an effect on the acceptance of the idea of the dialogue between civilizations (cultures and religions).

One of the most important issues the world is facing — one which should be discussed in any conference on the dialogue between civilizations — is the environment and safeguarding it against pollutants. Such universal problems as the pollution of the environment, global warming, and water dearth have made collective management mandatory.

Industrial civilization has had unpleasant effects on the environment and the health of people and animals. The industrial world should therefore be called to a dialogue on the issues of environment and the survival of life. A seminar on the dialogue between civilizations could appropriately pave the way for this purpose.

When we speak of the dialogue between civilizations, we go beyond any individual, community, city, or country and try to see universal problems and issues from a universal perspective. There is no doubt that in this great universal confrontation, where the dialogue is replaced with struggle and hostility, the basic shared goals of the attending parties are peaceful coexistence, love for humankind, and unity of thought and action.

It is the duty of the scholars attending this great cultural dialogue to discuss environment-related issues and to familiarize the people of different societies with the cultural values of the environmental elements, thus showing respect and consideration for human dignity and existence. Also, confronting the destructive effects of industrial civilization and showing scientific ways to counteract them should be among the main issues discussed in this dialogue.

The destructive heritage of modernity—pollution, dearth of water, the squandering of sources that cannot be replaced, and global warming—all affects the destiny of the people living on the planet, regardless of their conditions, nationality, language, and religion. As the people of the world have now found a shared destiny, there must be a unified action at a universal level. Clearly, this is not possible without cooperation, mutual understanding and a sincere dialogue

1. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); *idem*, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Journal of Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs* 27.3 (Summer 1993): 22–49.

between civilizations. In other words, the survival of life now depends of the efforts of scholars and thinkers to achieve mutual understanding, unity of action and peace at national and international levels.

For this dialogue to take place, two conditions must be met: shared need (the parties attending the dialogue must have realized the necessity of the dialogue) and shared language (no dialogue takes place in different languages). We are of the conviction that the tree is the most sublime divine sign. As an element of the environment, it symbolizes life and its cultural significance and is therefore shared by all cultures of the world. Every nation, depending on its culture and state of knowledge and the requirements of the time, has held it sacred in its own way. The myths, fables, and symbols related to the tree across cultures date back to the time before the advent of religions. In our attempt to know being, it has found a spiritual and religious expression in the most ancient stages of human culture and civilization. The presence of talking trees in myths and the symbolic relation between humanity and the tree provide further evidence that the tree is the archetype of life and eternity. We believe that revealing the secrets of the tree, and the profound cultural significance associated with it, provides a dialogue between civilization, a dialogue which in turn provides a solution to the problems the environment is facing today and creates unity among the nations of the world. The existence of talking trees in myths and beliefs of all nations and the symbolic relations between humanity and the tree is further evidence for this claim.

The heavenly tree — a giant tree which grew in the center of the earth and rose towards heaven and gave order to the world of existence surrounding it — is still living in the memory of many nations. It was in the shade of this tree that life became possible and the tree found a specific significance as a symbol of the world and its life in myths, and was worshipped as the sacred abode of God by many nations. The god residing in this tree sometimes spoke to human beings through the tree. It reminds us of the tree Moses saw and the talking trees in the story of Alexandria as told in the *Shahnameh* and the *Eskandarnameh*. The tree is often depicted as a singing tree, appearing on a mountain which is the axis of the world. Maybe one of the most beautiful manifestations of the talking tree appears in the story of the Assyrian tree. This is a literary piece composed in Pahlavi during the time of Ashkanians. It is a fascinating dialogue between a palm and a goat, a symbolic dialogue between two civilizations: agriculture and cattle-breeding. It shows that the passage through the agricultural period to that of cattle-breeding has not been easy. Sidney Smith considers the goat as representing the Zoroastrian religion and the tree as representing the religion of the Assyrians who worshipped gods.²

2. For more information, see Ebrahim Gheysari "Manzumei be še'r-e dari nazir-e deraxt-e āsurik" (a poem in the Dari language similar to the Assyrian tree), *Sokhan* 25 (Winter, 1976): 773–80, and *Seventh Congress of Iranian Studies* 2 (1955): 362; Yahya Mahyar Navvabi, "Manzumeye deraxt-e Asurik" (the poem of the Assyrian Tree), *Bonyad Farhang Iran* (1926): 9; Ebrahim Gheysari, "Manzumeye raz va miš dar rustāye Bolbās" (Abolabbās amirolmomenin) xuzestān (the poem the Vine and the Ewe in the village of Bolbas, Khuzestan, 1955), *Sokhan* 25 (Winter, 1967): 166;

The tree has been one of the most ancient elements of nature worshipped as a totem by various nations, associated with its own rituals, including sacrifices. It may be said that totemism is the most primitive form of religion and the most basic form of social and ideological system among the early civilizations. The belief that the tree shares some sort of kinship with us and the belief in the birth of plants in ancient myths and some ancient religions constitute the most secret relations between plants and the human being and provide proof that plants were regarded as sacred. In Iranian myths, the mandrake is considered the origin of all races. In Iranian myths we read that on the day of Mehr in the month of Mehr, a plant grew in the form of two joined stems of rhubarb (*mehrgiyāh*). The two stems later found human forms of the same height and size and the divine spirit was breathed onto them, appearing as a couple by the names of Mashye and Mashyane. After nine months, the couple gave birth to a twin, and the twin gave birth to seven twins who were the ancestors of various races. The seven twins in turn gave birth to 15 twins, each of which were the ancestor of a nation. One of the 15 twins were a man and woman by the names of Houshang and Gouzak, respectively. Iranians are descendants of this twin. They gave birth to Kiyumars and the Arians. According to this belief, the origin of all civilizations is the mandrake, literally the plant of compassion. This belief is also traced in Hindi myths and Vedanta, among the black people of Mālākā island, the Mištak people and the aborigines of central Italy. The metamorphosis of the human as the tree is a manifestation of totemism. The growth of the tree from human blood, from the spirit of the dead (in Shintoism), belief in the sacredness of trees and forests, attributing trees to gods, the sacredness of *hodibiyyeh*, *zāt anvāt*, and *ozzā* trees among Arabs, the story of the *Ras* friends in the Qur'an³—all are practical reflections of belief in the sacredness of trees. As an example, in the ancient civilization of Iran and Ilām, the moon appears as a tree on the top of a mountain, a god worshipped by Iranians. Ozzā has also been a tree worshipped by Arabs.⁴

Farhad Abadani, "Deraxt-e Assurik" (the Assyrian tree), *Journal of Isfahan Faculty of Letters* 2; "Notes on the Assyrian Tree," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 4 (1929): 69–70; *The Pahlavi Text*, ed. Jamasp Dustur (Bombay: Manoochehr, 1897).

3. Qur'an 25:38 and 50:12. Also see Ali ibn-e Abbitaleb, *The Nahjol balāqeh*, trans. Alinaghi Feyzoleslam (Kolaleh: Khavar), sermon 181 and Habibollah Fazayeli, *Abarqu dar rābete bā dāstān-e ashāb-e Ras va zamān-e ehtemāliy-e ān* (Abarqu in connection with the story of Ras's friends and the possible date of its occurrence) (Isfahan: Meysam Tammar, 1984).
4. See Rampoor Sadr Nabavi, "Ārā va aqāyeh-e jāme'ešenāsān-e qarbi dar bāreye tabaqāt-e tamaddoni" ("Views of Western Sociologists about Classes of Civilization"), *Journal of Faculty of Letters & Humanities* 12.2: 307; Mohammad Moghaddam, *Irān kode* (Country of Iran), vol. 16 (second print), 175; *Hamāse sarāyi dar irān az ghadimitarin ahd-e tārixi tā qarn-e chāhārom* (*Epic Poetry in Iran from the Oldest times to the 4th Century*) (Zabihollah Safa: Amir Kabir, 1954), 399–401; Jahangir Oshidari, *Dānešnāme-ye Mazd Yasnā* (*A Dictionary of Zoroaster Religion*) (Markaz, 1992), 430; Hamzatebn-e Hassan Esfahani, *Tāriḫ-e payāmbārān va shāhān* (*History of Prophets and Kings*) (trans. Ja'far Shoār; Bonyad Farhang Iran, 1967), 10; Mahshid Mirfakhraee, *Āfarineš dar adyān* (*Creation in Religions*) (Moassese Motāle'āt va Tahqiqāt-e Farhangi, 1987), 69–172, 196; Mohammad Ja'far Yahaghi, *Farhang-e asātir va esārāt-e dāstāni dar adabiyāt-e Farsi* (*A Dictionary of Mythological and Narrative Symbols in Persian Literature*) (Moasseseh Motāle'āt va Tahqiqāt-e Farhangi & Soroosh, 1990), loc. cit. for articles on the mandrake and rhubarb; Mehrdad Bahar,

As one of the most important life-giving elements of nature, the tree guarantees healthy life and provides a firm support for the continuation of life. One may even go further and claim that the tree is an advanced form of life on earth and has been a companion of humanity since the days in the Garden of Eden, and has therefore been instrumental in the formation of civilizations. On more careful inspection of this familiar phenomenon, one may say that, on the one hand, the tree is one of the most important elements of the environment, and on the other hand, a silent storyteller, filled with the spirit of existence, that can be the most eloquent speaker in the glorious feast of the dialogue of civilizations. The tree is a speaker who can tell the secret of its being sacred to the nations of the world and show how, in mystic schools, it has always been a staircase leading to divine thoughts and has been held in high esteem as a symbol of divine power and a manifestation of the principle of good and, most importantly, as a symbol of monotheism, peace, and love for humankind and transcendence.

The myth of ascending through the tree to reach the seventh sky, which is in fact a symbolic expression of heaven, is found in many mystic schools throughout the world. They all indicate a shared culture, the culture of seeking God and movement toward light and perfection.⁵

The tree was considered most sacred in the ancient world. In ancient mythology there are symbolic passages that explain how the tree came into existence. The tree is described as heavenly in a secret manner; God himself planted the first tree in heaven and then created humanity with the rest of the clay with which he had fashioned the tree. It is for this reason that, in the vast realm of human civilization, humanity and the tree have a symbolic and ancient relation; the tree was considered as the aunt of the human being and it was obligatory to respect it.⁶

Pāzuheši dar asātir-e irān (*A Study of Persian Myths*) (Tus), part 1, 137–141, 183; Jaber Anaseri, “Mehr giyāh, ašaqeye doosti va pičak-e mehrbāni” (“The Mundrake is a Bindweed and Bobbin of Freindship and Kindness”), *Chista* 10.1 (October, 1992): 5–12; Mahdokht Poorkhaleghi, “Totem parasti va totem giyāhi” (“Worshipping Totems and Plant Totems”), *Journal of Faculty of Letters* 32.2/3 (1999): 515–42; and Mahdokht Poorkhaleghi, “Peyvand-e Ozzā va Ānāhitā, peyvand-e deraxt va āb” (“The Relation of Ozza and Anahita, the Relation of water and the Tree”), *Journal of Faculty of Letters* 30.1/2 (1997): 213–24.

5. For more information see Mircha Elyadeh, *Āinhā va namādhāye āšnāsāzi (Rituals and Symbols of Familiarization)* (trans. Nasrollah Zangooyi; Agah, 1989), 35–43, 140, 149, 183–86; idem, *Osture, ro'yā, rāz (Myth, Dream and Mystery)* (trans. Ro'ya Monajjem; 1996), 116–18, 65, 154; Jalal Ashtiyani, *Erfān-e genosticism, mysticism (Gnosticism and Mysticism)*. I. *Shamanism* (Sherkat Sahami Enteshar, 1994), 49–54, 85, 109, 110; Spencer Rogers, *The Shaman: His Symbols and His Healing Power* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1982), 17; Nevil Drury, *The Shaman and the Magician* (London: 1982), 19–21; Mich Harner, *The Way of the Shaman* (New York: 1980), 25. In an article entitled “Kohan olgooy-e hayāt va jāvdānegi dar āineye āinhā” (“The Archetype of Life and Eternity in the Mirror of Customs”), we have discussed shared beliefs of various peoples concerning ascending the tree (to be published in *Journal of Faculty of Letters of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad*).
6. God said: “*Tubā* is a tree in the heaven which I have planted with my own hand; it casts shadow on the heaven”: *Tubā*, from the book series Morteza Eftekhar Shirazi, *Anvār-e Mohammadi (Lights of the Prophet)* (Isfahan: Moshtaghi, 1973), 4, and Abolfazi Rashidoddin Meibody, *Kašfolasrār va*

Clearly, once we know that the ancient people revered the tree as a divine sign, once we understand the importance of the tree as a national asset and the most important living element of the environment that guarantees life, we will be able to care for life, for its continuation, for human survival, and to save the environment as the bed of civilizations. The last of these is the most important factor for the survival of life on earth. As the descriptions of the cultural values of the great civilizations open up a window onto the beliefs and thoughts of different nations, we believe that the description of the cultural value of the tree as an archetype of life and eternity, a companion and relative of humanity since the beginning of creation, is a necessary step to take. The tree has had an significant role in the formation of human thought and spiritual civilizations and is now a crucial universal issue. To describe the tree is, on the one hand, an attempt to save life, a reply to the message of the great religions, particularly Islam, for the cleanliness of the environment; and on the other hand, is an attempt to know God, to seek God and to believe in God, to open a window onto the vast world of human culture and civilization. In the great drama of the dialogue of civilizations, to speak of the tree as the most sublime maker of civilizations and symbol of peace and friendship is to give a positive reply to Huntington's idea of conflict of civilizations, a reply to humanity's fear of finding reasonable methods of optimization of human relations, of settling the conflicts and hostilities and of removing the seemingly insurmountable problems of the environment.

The idea of the dialogue between civilizations necessitates peace, unity of intentions, rejection of absolutism, selfishness, and dogmatism as well as belief in equal rights and freedom for all nations. If we think we have intellectual superiority over other nations and yet have a narrow-minded racial and chauvinistic view of the world, this attitude deters any attempt for holding a dialogue between civilizations. As Irmgard Pane observes, chauvinists look at the whole world from the point of view of their own culture and civilization, finding it difficult to understand how others think; they are not content with anything less than the globalization of their culture.⁷

Our purpose is to show that the tree, being the most sublime element of human civilization and the archetype of existence, possess these qualities. It is, in other words, the archetype of unanimity. It has abandoned all concern for the self. It

Oddatolabrār (*Discovery of the Mysteries, Provisions of the Good*), ed. Ali Asghar Hekmat (Amir Kabir, 1992), 3:737. It is said that the date tree was made from the rest of the mud with which humans were fashioned. For this reason, it is called the sister of Adam and the aunt of humankind. The Prophet said: "Hold your aunt dear." He was asked what he meant by "your aunt." He answered: Your aunt is the date tree, which God made from the rest of the mud with which He fashioned man" (*Kašfolasrār va Oddatolabrār*), 5:253; Yahya Mahdavi, *Qasas-e surābadi* (*Surabadi's Selection of the Koranic Stories*) (Tehran University, 1968), 5; Carl Gustav Jung, *Insān va sambolhāyaš* (*Man and His Symbols*), trans. Abutaleb Saremi (Amir Kabir, 1983), 312.

7. Tooba Kermani, "Māhiyat va me'yārḥāy-e goftoguye tamaddoni" ("Nature and Criteria of the Dialogue between Civilizations"), *Goftemān* 3 (Winter, 1998): 200.

constantly aspires toward light⁸ and heaven and is consistent with the aim of its other fellow beings. It shows no hostility in its recurring movement from spring to spring. It does not sell its shadow and gives away generously and has no pride resulting from possession. The sky ever rests in its arms and it has become one with the life of the earthly.⁹ And it cannot be made into the stock of a rifle as long as it is alive. Thus, in the dialogue between civilizations, the fairest voice is that of the tree, the voice of a civilization that knows no East, no West; it is *lā sharghiyaton va lā gharbiyaton*.¹⁰

The fairest voice is the voice of the tree, / Which, never through its life, / Does it moan about anything; / Neither about the saw of the lightning; / Nor about the roar of the thunder; / Nor about the whip of the wind; / Nor about the cold of autumn. / The fairest voice is the voice of the tree, / Which speaks no word all throughout its life, / And stands firm, / With hands that produce. / What difference does it make to the tree? / It offers its fruit to God, / On fingers which rise toward the sky. / But children get the fruit by stone, / The elderly by using a ladder; / The youth by breaking branches. / We salute the tree, / Which has no pride resulting from possession, / Offering whatever it has, / Even if it is beaten by stone. / We salute the tree once more. / For as long as it is alive, / It cannot be made into the stock of a rifle.¹¹

The tree is the symbol of peace, generosity, resistance, fruitfulness, transcendence, and moving toward light. It symbolizes universal unity, giving us the following message: "A society can be called civilized whose people have given up selfishness and have attained an understanding of the self and God and have experienced the light of knowledge. Such a society is necessarily rooted in a cultural past, and depending on that, it can move towards light, perfection, unity, and mutual understanding. Such a society is the winner in the arena of the dialogue of civilizations. It has a civilization that knows no East or West. It is a manifestation of *lā sharghiyaton va lā gharbiyaton*. It is a society in which there is no conflict arising from cultural differences, a Fokoyamaian society,¹² a society in

8. "Happy are those trees that love light and that the expanded hands of light are on their shoulders." Sohrab Sepehri, *Hašt ketāb (Eight Books)* (Tahoori, 1984), 308.

9. "I have never seen two firs in hostility; / I have never seen a willow sell its shade to the ground; / The elm-tree gives away its branch to the crow for nothing." Sepehri, *Hašt ketāb*, 288, 308. Also see the poem "Barā y-e deraxt" ("For the Tree") by Siyavosh Kasrayee, parts of which are quoted here: "You have desire's high stature, O tree! / The sky ever rests in your arms, / You are most high / Your hands overflow with stars / Your soul is permeated with spring / You are most beautiful, O tree!... As you are tied through a thousand strands / With the souls of the earthly / Don't fear the thunder / Don't fear the lightning / For you remain standing. / Rise, O frightened one! For like our hope, O unique one, / You are with us and yet lonely" (trans. Ali Khazaei Far), *Motarjem* 5 (1995): 68.

10. Qur'an 24:36.

11. Part of a poem by the contemporary Iranian poet Ali Mousavi Garmaroodi.

12. The view of Fukuyama is the logical result of the concept of the universal village proposed by Marshall McLuhan in 1960: see Hossein Deheshyar, "Negāreši enteḡādi bar goftmān-e goftoguy-e

which struggles cease to exist and an all-embracing culture appears which produces a unified civilization and replaces the unity of outlook with the diversity of differences of opinion. While Marshall McLuhan speaks of cultural dominance, Fukuyama speaks of cultural unity. If Fukuyama's dream is realized in a not very distant future, we may say that the main rational message of the dialogue of civilizations is this: "All the world civilizations are the branches of a single tree whose roots lie in heaven. It may be the tree which was first planted by God Almighty in heaven and was associated with light."¹³

Based on the theory of the unity of history, as Shelgel observes, societies, while they take different forms in the course of history, share certain basic qualities; in other words, underlying the historical diversity there lies a unity which follows a general continuous course. This idea took the form of a special theory about the philosophy of history since the time of Montesquieu, Bachofen, Taylor, McLennan, and Morgan.¹⁴

Based on this theory, we may also accept the idea of the French sociologist Mauss, who, in his definition of religion from a religious point of view, states that civilization is a sum of beliefs and important and diversified phenomena developed in many countries.¹⁵ Shari'ati's definition of civilization is also compatible with this idea. According to Shari'ati, civilization is a sum of spiritual and material progresses.¹⁶ Thus, civilization is not bound to a particular race or place; rather, it is the result of the blending of all civilizations in the course of history. The reason for this is that various cultures are in constant contact and as a result find shared aspects. While each culture can claim to have its own identity, cultures should not talk of separation. And as human civilization is the shared heritage of all human societies, the dialogue of civilizations is not realized unless we recognize the roots of our beliefs in mythological symbols which lie beyond the memory of the nations. For this reason, we are of the opinion that among the recurring symbols, the tree is the living history of the human being. In mythological symbolism, the world is one of the most complex and unknown symbols beyond the body of which there is a secret which, when revealed, makes an opening into the vast world of human culture and civilization. Revealing the cultural values of the tree as an environmental element and generalizing it to a universally accepted belief provides a new approach to the civilized world of today and yesterday.

tamaddonhā" ("A Critical Survey of the Discourse on the Dialogue of Civilizations"), *Goftmān* 3 (Winter, 1998).

13. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (London: Penguin, 1991), 149. Harold Baley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (London and Cambridge: Ernest Benn Limited), 268–79. The word tree in Latin, *arbor*, means "father of fire." This word is written as *arbre* in French and *albero* in Italian, having the same meaning as in Latin.
14. Ali Shariati, *Eslām šenāsi (1): eslām čist? (Knowing Islam; What Is Islam?)*, book one (no date or publisher), 22.
15. Emeh Sezer *Nežād parasti va farhang (Racism and Culture)*, trans. Manuchehr Hezarkhani (Ketab Zaman, 1971), 70.
16. Shariati, *Eslām šenāsi (1) eslām čist?*, 22.

Using the tree as a spiritual symbol of various nations, we may slowly cross modern humanity in a meaningful movement from the lands of various civilizations, all of which are no doubt the branches of a single tree, taking us to a distant past, to the beginning of existence. In yet another meaningful movement, we may bring past civilization to the attention of modern humanity in an attempt to show that amazing events have happened on the earth which have paved the way for the rise of various civilizations, the memories of which are revocable. Likewise, the tree, in its cyclic movement from spring to spring, reveals the secret of its being revocable. In this meaningful movement one wishes with nostalgia that one would return to the simplicity, genuineness and unanimity of the time of the Assyrian tree.

When T.S. Eliot said that the historical feeling includes an understanding that indicates not only a sign of the past but its presence as well,¹⁷ he had a subtle idea in mind; that is, the continuity of the past and its connection with the present and the future. Cicerone stated that to be neglectful of what has happened before your birth is like staying an infant forever because human life has no value without what, according to history, comes from the lives of our ancestors. The people who are indifferent to past history, and who wish to start from the beginning, have no chance of success.¹⁸ For this reason, some people have gone so far as to say that a nation's civility depends on its past, and that the nation that knows its past and respects it, is a truly civilized nation.¹⁹

Thus, in the great drama of the dialogue between civilizations, one may profoundly look at all the mysterious phenomena that have had some role in the emergence of civilizations or have been shared by civilizations—phenomena that came into existence along the course of history and came to be inseparable parts of national beliefs—reconstruct the past, revere it, and claim to be civilized. The tree is one such mysterious phenomenon, a mirror reflecting the memories of former generations and our forefathers.²⁰ It is a glorious banner on the summit of human culture, symbolizing knowledge, wisdom, blessing, light, continuity of life, and immortality as well as growth, fruitfulness, and flourishing. It carries the message of awareness, resistance, bravery, assiduousness, beauty, calmness, liberality, generosity, freedom from want, nobility, companionship, and unanimity. More importantly, the tree symbolizes the stairs through which one may entertain divine thoughts. It is the secret of unity, peace, reconciliation, good word, good thought, and good deed. All this the tree reveals in a gentle “green” conversation.²¹

17. Quoted in Gholam Hossein Yousefi, *Čašmeye rošan, didāri bā šaerān (The Bright Spring)* (Entesharat Elmi, 1990), 156.

18. Ibid.

19. *Mardom Giyah (The Mandrake)*, 1.1:9.

20. A reference to a line from a poem by Shafi'ee Kadkani, quoted in Sayyed Mohammad Bagher Borghe'ee, *Soxanvaran-e nāmi mo'āser-e Iran (Iran's Great Contemporary Eloquent Men of Letters)* (Khorram, 1994), 3:197.

21. Maryam Jalali has made an attempt to reveal the symbols of the tree in her PhD dissertation and has reached these findings. The book will be printed soon.

Every tree can be both a symbol of a unified universal civilization aspiring toward light and a symbol of peace and unity. Trees are separated by no walls; they grow in parallel toward light, while each keeping its distance from others. Such being the case, trees symbolize unity in diversity and diversity in unity.²² The space between trees is for friendship, a beautiful place for entertaining guests, a place where various groups of people come and go, where friendly and peaceful dialogues take place.²³ Most importantly, the green color of the tree is the color of freedom and passage, a color that indicates that there is no obstacle to attaining perfection. For this reason we may sit in the shade of the tree and reflect about the survival of humankind and social justice. We may look at life and politics from a spiritual point of view and call humanity to coexistence in a healthy environment, to tolerance, and to mutual respect.²⁴ Like the tree, we may generously give away all material and spiritual values while teaching lessons of patriotism, resistance, and dying. As Mahmood Darwish observes, the tree teaches us the love for our homeland, inspires us with movement toward the depth and toward the summit. It does not leave its homeland; it stands firm. If it reflects on migrating, it dies. Its love for survival does not afflict it with pains; rather, it heals its wounds and causes it to grow new cells and develop new roots. It also teaches us how to die; standing, with roots deep in the earth.²⁵

22. According to Romans, the Sephirotic tree (lights, attributes and names of God) has two left and right branches which refers to the dualism of being. The two branches finally reach unity through a shared trunk. The tree is often up-side-down, and expresses the symbol of the emergence of existence from the origin of existence. The tree of life is also a symbol of unity in the context of diversity and the movement from diversity to unity. Branches grow out of a single trunk and spread and then reach unity after branches grow with different seeds. See J.E. Cooper, *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 176; *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (London, 1976), 331.
23. In the past, kings and judges sat under tall plane trees and oaks when they judged cases. The place provided them with the peace of mind necessary for judgment. One example is the Hodeybiyeh Peace Treaty negotiated under a tree: "Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance unto thee beneath the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and he sent down peace of reassurance on them, and hath rewarded them with a near victory" (Qur'an 48:18); Jafar Sobhani, *Farāzshāyee az tārix-e payāmbār-e eslām (Parts of the History of the Prophet of Islam)* (Daftar Našr-e Farhang-e Islami, 1992), 367, 368; Hešām ibn Mohammad ibn al-Kalbi, *Bothāy-e Arab (Idols of Arabs)* (trans. Yousef Fazayee; Atae, 1969), 33; Shahaboddin Abu Abdollah Yaghoot al-Hamavi, *Mo'jamolboldan (The Gazetteer of Towns and Cities)* (Beirut, 1955–57), loc. cit. under *Hodaybiye* and *šajare*. Germans also held their courts under old oaks. Holding sermons under trees has also been very common. Wolfgang has made a sermon in the shade of an oak. See Munc de Bocour, *Ramzshāy-e zende jān (Symbols of the Vivace)* (Markaz, 1994), 119; Ahmad Marashi, "Hezār sāl ke čizi nist begu čand hezār sāl" ("A Thousand Years Is Nothing: Say a Few Thousand Years"), *Danestaniha* 6.21 (1985): 16, 18. Examples of judgment and speaking about important matters under trees can be found in the *šāhnāme*.
24. Parts of a speech made by the Iranian president, Mr. Khatami.
25. Mahmood Darwish and Nazār Qabbāni, "Mosāhebe bā do šaer-e arab" ("Interview with Two Arab Poets"), trans. Ali Vaseghi (Chapakhsh, no date).

When we see trees growing everywhere, and observe their link with water and light,²⁶ we unconsciously visualize the pre-existent memory of the growth of the first tree and the blessed marriage of heaven and earth and the secrets of unity, monotheism, and light, the most essential human desires, are revealed.

In a mystical approach, which takes us through pre-existent memories and along vast human cultures and civilizations, we may observe all the events taking place surrounding the tree in the course of history and in human thought, and repeat the myth of life and survival. The tree of knowledge tells us about the first rebelling action of the first man and woman in an attempt to lay down the first pillars of human civilization and makes us reconstruct the story of our birth, evolution, and pride. The cedar tree, an evergreen tree always pictured with the moon or the sun shining above it, reminds us of the continuity of life and of liberality and courage; a life in connection with sunshine and light, associated with pre-existent memories and ancient myths, which gave a second birth to the religion of worshipping the sun, the moon. Mani's religion and the Tree of Light. Mazdak's Overturned Tree. Islam and a second beginning of Islam. The age of the first tree and Yggdrasile heavenly tree. The age of the rhubarb plant, of Mashye, Mashyane Hum and Vispubish (all seeds). The age of the Asyrik tree; of Zoroastrian's heavenly cypress tree. Of Ahura's fire and the green treaty written on the Cypress of Kashmar. Of the story of olive and light and *lā sharghiyaton va lā gharbiyaton*; of Sina's mount and Moses' fire tree. Of Mary's palm and the story of Tuba and the sun. Of Ilya (Tuba) of the Brahman's religion. Of Banians (Indian figs) and Buddha's Illumination. Of Ashvata and Suma. Of Hebrew's Menorah; of the tree of knowledge and life. Of the tree of good word, good thought, good deed of the figure of Frahvar; of the story of the Last Lotus (*sedratol montahā*) and the sun. The story of *sedratol montahā* and the light of Mohammad. And the light diffused from the Light of Lights. And, finally, of the mystic story of the Overturned Tree—the story of an overturned tree cast out of the Garden of Eden that tries to return from the earthly world to the heavenly world—repeating the mythological marriage of earth and heaven—telling the secret of the link between the tree and light, and the link between humanity and the light diffused from the Light of Lights.²⁷

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. [This lamp is] kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth [of itself] though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to [hu]mankind in allegories, for Allah is knower of all things.²⁸

26. See Mahdokht Poorkhaleghi, "Namādhāye hampeyvand bā deraxt" ("Symbols Related to the Tree"), *Journal of Faculty of Letters, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad* 31.3/4, 475–88.

27. See the present writer's doctoral dissertation entitled "Namād-e deraxt va arzeš-e farhangiy-e ān dar še'r-e Farsi tā pāyān-e qarn-e šešom" ("Symbols of the Tree and Its Cultural Values in Persian Poetry until the End of the Sixth Century") (Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Faculty of Humanities).

28. Qur'an 24:35.

Thus, in our mystical approach to the dialogue between civilizations and the subject matter of our discussion, we may consider civilizations as diversities revolving around one axis. They are like scattered particles oozed from the undying source of existence. In their circular movement around the One, they should try to reconcile contradictions. The dialogue of civilizations may be likened to a mystical dance which, through association with the word *logos*, which is the manifestation of the perfect man and the divine word²⁹ and the blessed saying *lā elāh ellal-lāh*,³⁰ “there is no god but Allah”, reaches unity. In their circular and upward ascension, civilizations need not experience a confrontation. They may serve as the basis of a universal and unified civilization which the human being has always been waiting for; a civilization in which we free ourselves from contradictions and diversities and attain unity, peace, understanding, and love for humankind. It is only under such conditions that one may say that civilization is the supreme manifestation of the human attempt for perfection.

We have come to believe that in human society, peace, understanding, and perfection may only be attained in the shadow of the tree. The tree’s ascending motion toward light is a magnificent manifestation of a silent dialogue of friendship, peace, and monotheism, calling the world to unity, giving the good message that all the civilizations of the world are branches of a single heavenly tree which, not long ago, linked heaven and earth, revealing the great secret of unity and monotheism and the secret of the goodly saying *lā elāh ellal-lāh*, “there is no god but Allah.”

Thus, in the great drama of the dialogue of civilizations, we may sing in chorus the song of monotheism, love for humankind, and peace, which are the shared desires of all human beings, and murmur the following:

Let us bring baskets, / To fill with all this green, / And plant trees on each corner of speech, / And walk to the summit of compassion with the wet feet of rain; / And open doors to man, and light and plants and insects.³¹

Seest thou not how Allah coineth a similitude: A goodly saying, as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven. (Qur’an 14:24)

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29. Mircha Elyadeh, *Čašmandāzhāy-e osture (Views on Myth)* (trans. Jalal Sattari; 1983), 9, 10.

30. A reference to the Qur’an 14:24: “Seest thou not how Allah coineth a similitude. A goodly saying, as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven.”

31. Sepehri, *Hašt ketāb*, 293, 298.