

The domain of non-separation encompasses individual and collective human pursuit of truth, beauty, and tranquility—captured by Dr. King as the “inescapable network of mutuality.” Elaborated below are some basic vehicles that may be instrumental in achieving these goals.

1. Connection via Ihsan (Beauty in Action)

Our religious traditions provide conceptual and functional guidance to help us avoid the habits that derail us from our spiritual path, as well as those that help us practice divine attributes so as to accelerate the journey. The Qur’anic notion of “*Ihsan*” sets the bar yet lets the individual exercise judgment and agency in its performance.

The triconsonantal root word for this concept is H-S-N, which translates to beauty, excellence, or good. *Ihsan* (doing beautiful deeds, beauty in one’s action; pursuit of excellence, etc.) forms an umbrella concept with ubiquitous application. Other conjugations of the word include *ahsanu* (do good, act excellent) and *muhsin* (one who engages in *Ihsan*, pl. *muhsineen*). This concept is repeated again and again in the *Qur’an* well over 100 times, likely in the vicinity of 200 times. On the average, thus, every single chapter in the *Qur’an* would contain more than one exhortation to bring beauty in one’s deeds. Insert 18:1 provides a small sampling.

GOD LOVES THE MUHSINEEN

And perform beautiful deeds. Truly, God loves the Muhsineen [those who perform beautiful deeds].

—Qur’an 2:195

And, truly, God is with the Muhsineen.

—Qur’an 29:69

And those who endured patiently ... and spent out of what We have provided them ... and

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they repel evil with excellence: for them is the Ultimate Abode.

—*Qur'an* 13:22

And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Drive back [evil] with the excellent [deed]. Then, behold he who between you and him is enmity [will be] as if he were a loyal friend.

—*Qur'an* 41:34

He Who created death and life so that He may test as to which of you is best in deeds [by being in a state of *Ihsan*].

—*Qur'an* 67:2

[Those] who spend in gladness and tribulation and the ones who choke their rage and the ones who pardon humanity. And God loves the *Muhsineen*.

—*Qur'an* 3:134

Insert 18:1

Examining some more verses reveals the word *Ihsan* being clad in a long list of connotations: aesthetics, beauty, love, God consciousness (*taqwa*), excellence, humility, deference, patience, forgiveness, graciousness, gallantry, modesty, dedication, generosity, compassion, justice, etc. Putting it together, though, we can see that this is not about specific actions alone. It is about living in a state of being, mind, and heart that is beautiful all the time. Every action in this state would indeed classify as that which heals the world (*Tikkun*), making the two concepts complementary.

Umm al-Fadl al-Wahatiyya, a Persian Sufi saint, lived in the tenth century. Her clarification, which dovetails with the famous Hadith of Gabriel,⁷⁶⁰ connects the seeking of knowledge to *Ihsan* and then with witnessing God:

[The] one who seeks knowledge is the one who acts on it. Acting in one's knowledge is not in the amount of fasting, almsgiving, and praying that one does. Rather, acting in one's knowledge is in sincerely dedicating one's actions to God with correct intention and awareness that God Most High is observing him, even if he is not observant toward his Lord and witnessing Him at all times.⁷⁶¹

When seeking knowledge can be meaningful only in the action it generates—and when that action is permeated with the Love of God as a witness—the definition of Ihsan is complete.

A hadith goes so far as to say: “God is beautiful and He loves beauty.”⁷⁶² In this light, we can tell that there is divinity within an action or sentiment that carries beauty, and also that such an action or sentiment attracts the Divine Love. And as we can see from the verses in Insert 18:1, there are no prerequisites to be a Muhsin; anyone who chooses to be one can be.

2. Connection via Compassion

Connection begins where our own self stops being the prime center of our concern. We can then connect with others; and through them we reconnect with our own self (sometimes in a way that we did not know earlier). Only then are we able to actually understand our own deeper concerns. Chapter 13 discussed compassion being a central message of the Indic as well as the Abrahamic religions.

In the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan⁷⁶³ (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus answers the question “And who is my neighbor?” By declaring a stranger to be a neighbor, Jesus's response provides a revolutionary definition of the word “neighbor”—transcending any notion of proximity, kinship, tribal identity, etc. And that may be the only definition we really should use. By extension, Jesus may also have invited us to redefine our definitions of family, kin, and clan based upon the values we practice.

Hebrews 13:2-3 further consolidates the message: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those in prison as if you were there with