

Dim Ilahi
essay
(original)



*The
Din
Ilahi*

An order dated May 26, 1593 bearing the seal of Abul Fazl was issued from Lahore in which the Emperor forbade killing of peacocks and hunting of any kind in the parganas of Mathura, Sahar, Mangotah and Od.

Akbar's love for animals is also evident from the paintings of his period. Peacock was his favourite bird and in many paintings of the court peacocks appear in their exquisite colours.

Abul Fazl used Akbar's love of animals to project his image as a ruler of the animal world also. Tigers did not attack men who uttered Akbar's name. His Majesty looked furiously at a tiger in Mathura and "the brute cowered down before the divine glance, and turned right about trembling all over." With a blow of his foot, he finished a wolf. He caught hold of a snake with his hand. A dog, *Mahuwa*, did not eat food for seven days in Agra when an attempt was made on Akbar's life at Delhi. A ruler whose authority was recognised both by men and animals could extend his power to the realm of conscience and religion. Thus alone his authority could have a supra natural and a supernatural dimension. Even the spheres and the elements obeyed him and like the Red Man he gave orders to them. Rains stopped at his order and water started pouring at his will.

Where specifically did Hazrat Inayat Khan get his idea of Universal Worship? Not just from a vague & general "Indian spirit" of tolerance & eclecticism (altho such a spirit surely exists), Hazrat drew from a special tradition inside his own Chishti Sufi Order. His spiritual ancestors in the Order included certain 16th century Mughal princes who taught & practised a "new religion" based on radical tolerance for & amongst all religions. That new faith was founded by Emperor Akbar, who called it DIN ILAHI, the Divine Religion. It attracted & enlisted poets & literati, women & Hindus, Zoroastrians & Jains, perhaps some Christians, & certainly a number of Chishti Sufis.

Historians claim that the DIN ILAHI failed & disappeared with Akbar's death, more or less. Our contention however is that the Mughal emperors continued to possess the power of initiation in the DIN ILAHI, whether they used it or not. The Mughal "King of Delhi" Bahadur Shah II (pen-name Zafar) very obviously practised the DIN -- he was a poet (actually a good one, a pupil of the great Ghalib) & a sufi shaykh in his own right. As a powerless figure-head he tried to unite Hindus & Moslems & expel the British from India by encouraging the "Mutiny" of 1853 -- but the Uprising failed & Zafar fell tragically -- died in exile in Burma, the last of his dynasty.

As Zafar was a Chishti it might be said that at his death the DIN ILAHI fell to the inheritance of the Chishti Order. Freed of the actual tyranny of the Moghuls (who, after all, were monarchs, however "enlightened" they might've been) the tradition took on an intense secret Romantic glow. Hazrat Inayat Khan decided the "West" was ripe for the long-hidden true faith. He was no doubt encouraged by Theosophy in this belief.

We do not claim that Universal Worship "is" the DIN ILAHI. What we do claim is that we have received the "visionary right" to Revive & Restore the DIN on its own spiritual foundations, which have lingered in the Imaginal World (Mundus Imaginalis) till now like unclaimed luggage at some celestial railway station's "Lost & Found" -- trunks full of magical treasure. But at last someone has found the claim-ticket -- the mystic key to unlock this baggage.

No one has a greater right to bless this Revivification than the heir of Hazrat Inayat Khan -- Pir Zia Inayat Khan -- & he has done so.

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The Court of Akbar was visited by Portuguese Jesuits, but sad to say not one of them seems to have grasped the new esotericism. (Anyway, no written testimonial of such understanding exists.)

But Akbar was also visited by Protestant Englishmen & other North Europeans. So far I have not been able to detect whether any of these agents represented the Rosicrucian Order. Remember that Paracelsus, John Dee, Giordano Bruno, the Rosicrucians of Prague, etc., were more or less contemporaries of the Mughals & their DIN ILAHI. Like its Indian counterpart, Rosicrucianism was also an elite "new" cult based on radical tolerance ("even with Jewe & Turcke"), rooted in mysticism,

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adopted by aristocrats with a deep fascination for "Oriental" mysteries (as hinted at in the R.C. manifestoes of the early 1600s) -- attractive to poets & artists -- and so on. We suggest -- no, we assert that the DIN ILAHI and the Societas R.C. exercised mutual historical influence -- & that both partook of a synchronic spirit of the age that permeated the world atmosphere from London to Delhi.

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The Central Asian steppe nomads (Scythians, Mongols, Turks, etc.) practised shamanism, which is not strictly speaking a religion -- thus when they came into contact with religion per se (Paganism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam...) they were always tolerant of it, seeing it as another spiritual path rather than as a strict orthodoxy. Gengis Khan encouraged his sons to convert to different religions, alho he himself apparently remained a shamanist. As for Akbar & his Vizir Abu'l-Fazl, they consciously maintained a shamanic cult of the Mongol Goddess Alanqawa, "the repose of the spiritual world & ornament of the temporal world". Gengis Khan is "a ray of her divine light", as is Akbar -- an "emanation of divine blessings". Akbar's mother is called Maryam Makani after Mary mother of the Messiah Jesus, & Alanqawa. Akbar's cult of the Sun, "visible deity of the universe" (as the Hermeticists also believed) probably derives from Mongol practise. Akbar compiled 1001 names for the Sun (esp. Zoroastrian & Hindu) & used them as a prayer at sunrise & set, just like the Alexandrian Hermeticists & the Ikhwan al-Safa (10th century Shiite Hermeticists). At sunset he lit 12 candles in gold & silver candlesticks.

Akbar, like the Prophet Mohammad, had "fits" which resembled epilepsy but were in fact (in both cases) pure shamanic ecstasies. Mohammad like Plato criticized poetry, whereas Akbar loved it; but, like the Prophet, Akbar was "illiterate" (ummi). We might say "severely dyslexic". But to escape the written word can in itself be considered a form of revelatory potential.

What was the nature of the fits that Akbar had, is difficult to say, but fits they were. Fits could be connected with some spiritual experience also. Chengiz Khan suffered

such fits very often. Minhaj reports : "Every now and again he used to fall in a trance, and, in that state of insensibility, all sorts of things used to proceed from his tongue ... A person used to take the whole down in writing and enclose it in a bag, and place a seal upon it; and according to these he would act." Abul Fazl thus records a report of Akbar's childhood :

"When I went", he said, "I found him (Akbar) lying down. His lustrous countenance was serene and he looked as if he were asleep. In truth he was holding converse with the holy ones of heaven's court (the angels). His blessed hand moved occasionally as is seen in the recuperative states of the lords of contemplation. From time to time there fell from his pearl-dropping tongue such expressions as "God willing, I'll bring the cream of earth's surface under my sway and fulfil the desires of the sorrowful of the seven climes." ... Several times did he (Akbar) speak in this fashion."

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Akbar used wine, opium & possibly hemp, altho not in excess, unlike his grandfather Babur. In fact Akbar was quite ascetic. He walked -- often 100s of miles -- to the sufi shrines he favored, & was an almost-vegetarian (he passed laws against animal slaughter based on Jain & Buddhist practise).

Above all other influences on Akbar the greatest was Sufism, esp. the Sufism of the Chishti Order. He haunted the great shrine of Moinoddin Chishti in Ajmer (a pilgrimage there is worth 1/7th of a Hajj to Mecca), & he was close to Salim Chishti. Akbar built Fatehpur Sikri, his new Capital, to be near Salim Chishti's khaneqah. The Chishtis had a huge influence on the DIN ILAHI & many dervishes joined it. They supported Akbar in his non-canonical view of Islam & his dislike of the "mullahs" or orthodox quasi-clergy, many of them bigots & fundamentalist puritans.

Akbar in our opinion did not leave Islam (i.e. apostasize) -- a common error of historians -- nor however was he an orthopractic Moslem. He never abandoned a religion -- only kept adding to the number. (Like the poet/Hermeticist Gérard de Nerval he could have said, "What, me, no religion? Why, I have at least seventeen!") Above all he was also Hindu. The peace-with-all (SULH-i KUL) concept was adopted from Sufism & applied first (in India) to Hinduism, in an attempt to overcome both religious & caste hegemonies & create a peaceful India. Akbar didn't invent the idea of Hindu/Moslem friendship nor the typical traditional Indian response to "other" religions -- i.e., syncretism. But he set a standard for radical tolerance (not just lukewarm "toleration" but active & loving universalism) which was later to be matched only by such as Kabir, Ramakrishna or Ghandi -- & later endlessly betrayed by fanatics, nationalists, reactionaries, puritans & hate-mongers on both sides.

Other important influences on the DIN came from Shattari ("Suddenist") Sufis, from whom it adopted the practise of da'wat-i asma, "influencing the stars (planets)" via magic vibrations of Divine Names (zikr) -- an exact parallel of Marsilio Ficino's Planetary Magic in Renaissance Florence.

The Hurufis ("Lettrists") & their offshoot the Nuqtawis ("Pointists") -- now alas forgotten & apparently extinct -- were directly linked to the DIN. Akbar was a card-carrying Nuqtawi shaykh. The Hurufiyya of Iran were persecuted as heretics & their leaders were martyred. Their influence (& passion for representational calligraphy) survives in Turkish Bektashi Sufism.



"Calligraphic Face" [According to the Hurufiyya, or the "Abecedarians," both Macrocosm and Microcosm (i.e., humanity) can be expressed in the forms of the sacred Arabic alphabet. The Hurufiyya were eliminated as heretics but their teaching has influenced much Turkish popular religious art, especially the "calligramme"]

THE RISHIS

It was sometime in 1589 that Akbar came into contact with the Rishi movement of Kashmir. When in Srinagar he met Gohar Sufi, a Rishi with liberal and free views. The Rishi movement illustrates the extent to which Islamic mystic tradition and Hindu mystic lore could be integrated and developed. Shaikh Nur-u'd-din, the founder of the Rishi movement and his four enthusiastic disciples—Bam-u'd-din, Zain-u'd-din, Latif-u'd-din and Nasir-u'd-din—presented Hindu ascetic traditions in Islamic garb. According to Abul Fazl the Rishis of Kashmir did not denounce men of other faiths. They believed in the service of mankind and planted

trees so that all men could benefit. The control of breath (*pranayama*) as practised by Natha Yogis, was practised by them also. They were strict vegetarians

The Wahdat al-wujud (Unity of Being) School of Ibn 'Arabi was represented then in India by Shaykh Tajoddin or Taj al-Arifin of Ajodhan, who first "legalized" the practise of prostration to Akbar. If "All is One" then the realized soul "is" already God. As one poet put it:

Raise the cry of "I am God" -- don't fear the gibbet
For rope & stake on this path are the means of ascent

-- Abul Maali Ghurbati

This "pantheistic monism" is nowadays refuted by many orthodox sufi admirers of Ibn 'Arabi -- but his "radical" followers persist in their heterodox views, even today. From this tendency, which I call "ultra-sufism", only one more step remains to reach the stage of the DIN ILAHI.

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Akbar founded an Ibadat khaneh (Worship House) or we might say, Institute for Comparative Religion -- or House of Wisdom. The modern Chishtis have also referred to this tradition in their Seven Pillars of Wisdom School. Akbar's notion was to bring together representatives of "all" religions -- all that were accessible to the Mughals, that is. Jesuits spoke at some of these sessions. When Akbar decided he'd more-or-less absorbed all that such a method could provide he basically gave it up & inaugurated the DIN ILAHI.

In 1582 formal debates on religion came to an end & the DIN ILAHI was promulgated (under the official name Tawhid Ilahi, "Divine Unity"). Each member received a shast or token of some sort with the slogan Allahu Akbar -- a Koranic expression, "God is great", which could also mean "Akbar is divine"! Full members swore to sacrifice property, life, religion & reputation -- & abjure their attachment to all merely exoteric Islam. Animals & plants were to be respected & protected -- nowadays we can say the DIN ILAHI has always been truly green, like all true Hermeticism.

Abul Fazl says:

"The amusement which His Majesty derives from the tumbling and flying of the pigeons reminds of the ecstasy and transport of enthusiastic dervishes: he praises God for the wonder of creation. It is therefore from higher motives that he pays so much attention to this amusement."

Wine & other intoxicants were permitted & perhaps even encouraged:

In every direction proclamation is made
For everyone & not just the initiate sage
That the wine of joy is now to be permitted
But by no means the wine of rage!

-- 'Urfi

The elite of the DIN comprised a few score dervishes, poets, yogis & courtiers, but thousands more joined as ordinary (non-oath-bound) devotees.

"Other multitudes ask for lasting bliss, for an upright heart, for advice how best to act, for strength of the body, for enlightenment, for birth of a son, the reunion of a long life, increase of wealth, elevation in rank, and many other things... Not a day passes but people bring cups of water to him, beseeching him to breathe upon it.... Many sick people of broken hopes, whose diseases the most eminent physicians pronounced incurable, have been restored to health by this divine means."

Akbar's son Jahangir (the future emperor) wrote:

"Disciples and sincere followers were presented on his introduction, and to each it was necessary to be given the token and the likeness (*shast-o-shabah*). They were given on his recommendation. At the time of initiation some words of advice were given to the disciple: he must not confuse or darken his years with sectarian quarrels, but must follow the rule of universal peace with regard to religions; he must not kill any living creature with his own hand and must not flay anything. The only exceptions are in battle and the chase.... Honour the luminaries (the Sun, Moon etc.) which are manifesters of God's light, according to the

degree of each, and recognize the power and existence of Almighty God at all times and seasons. Be careful indeed that whether in private or in public you never for a moment, forget Him.

*Lame or low or crooked or unrefined
Be amorous of Him and seek after Him*

Members imitated Akbar in venerating icons of "angels" (Hindu & Zoroastrian deities) as well as the Virgin Mary & St Ignatius (founder of the Jesuits). Akbar decreed that all Indians were free to worship in "mosque, idol temple, fire temple, church or synagogue." (Jews from Kerala could have attended the Ibadat khaneh.) Some of his devoted followers took to proclaiming La illaha illAllah wa Akbar Khalifat ullah (No god but God & Akbar his Caliph).

O God show us the way to approach you —
Of that heart-ravishing beauty reveal one glance —
Write on hearts only letters worth reading —
Show us only pictures worthy to be seen.

-- Akbar's Prayer

"It has been our disposition from the beginning... not to pay attention to the differences of religion... and to regard the tribes of mankind as the servants of God.... It must be considered that the Divine mercy attaches itself to every form of creed, and supreme exertions must be made to bring oneself into the ever vernal flower-garden of "Peace with all."

— Akbar

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It would be a pleasure to go on quoting Akbar & his great Vizir, Abu'l-Fazl, & the many poets who joined the cult, but enough has been said to convey the basic facts of the DIN ILAHI. We must end by asking why do we want to revive & restore this lost faith?

We believe that religious exclusivity remains one of the chief evils of the XXIst century -- not much "progress" since the XVIth! The other big religious error of our times seems to be vulgar materialism, the belief in a universe of "dead matter". The only cure for both these dis-eases would be an existentialist faith based on the re-paganization of monotheism & the vision of a living universe, & an anima mundi that would make consciousness itself tantamount to meaning (via the "divine Imagination").

Monotheism constitutes our spiritual heritage -- we can't now simply "go back" to a long-lost Western paganism & thereby escape the clutches of Jehovah, so to speak. Shamanism offers a clue to our dilemma because it consists of spirituality without (or prior to) any religion -- but again, we can't simply "bomb ourselves back to the Stone Age"

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-- nice as that might be.

The way to combine shamanic content (i.e., the stuff that really works) with both pagan & monotheistic forms lies in the process of syncretism, the unabashed mixing of all the forms, not in a mishmash of formlessness but as constellations of sparks in which each spark contains all the others -- a "Net of Indra" composed of light.

The DIN ILAHI appears to us as the exact Eastern equivalent of Western Hermeticism, as already explained. Hermeticism always serves as a field in which syncretic action is carried out. Egypto-Greco-Roman, Abrahamic & even Oriental & shamanic sources comprise the grand synthesis of Hermeticism, while the DIN ILAHI provides a perfect example of the Hermetic sect in an Indian Sufi context.

So it's appropriate that we are reviving the DIN ILAHI here in a Chishmii space, where it historically belongs. All practitioners of Hazrat Inayat Khan's Universal Worship might consider themselves already also members of the new DIN ILAHI, but we want to open the doors to an even larger potential membership: -- all those who love India enough to sense the romance of our proposal -- the sheer olfactory aesthetics of it, the complex attar of rose, henna, oud, ambergris & jasmine it evokes. We ask only one of the sacrifices Akbar demanded of his initiates: that of reputation. You have to risk being seen as a heretic -- or even a fool.

To quote Abu'l-Fazl (quoting the great sufi Attar):

Infidelity then to the heretic & religion
to the pious -- but the dust
Of the rose belongs alone to the
perfumer's heart.

(Note: The quotations are all from an excellent book, Akbar & Religion, by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (Delhi, 1989), who in turn often quotes from Abu'l-Fazl's Ayn-i Akbar, Akbar nama & other Ilahi-related Persian & Urdu texts.)

Appendix

Divine Era Calendar

Revivification of the DIN ILAHI: March 11, 2011 (year 455 of the Divine Era)

The Ilahi Era actually began on March 11, 1556 (27/28 Rabi II, 963), having been established on March 10, 1584 (8 Rabi I, 992). The Era corresponds with Akbar's regnal years, whereas the Establishment of the Era was the result of Akbar's revelation, 28 years after he became emperor, that he had already been "divine" all along.

So -- March 11 is our New Year Day. The Zoroastrian months can be used, or the Christian (both are solar calendars), or the Islamic (lunar) year & dates can be used.

October 15 is Akbar's Birthday (5 Rajab, 949/1542). October 17 (14 Jumadi II 1014/1605) is his 'urs or death anniversary. Thus we have two festival seasons, the Spring (March 10/11) and the Fall (October 15 & 17).

To these holidays add all major Zoroastrian, Hindu, Islamic, Judeo-Christian & other holy days, etc. ad lib., especially the joyful ones, as occasions for "rational mirth" (as the 18th cen. Masonic Druids used to say) -- e.g., Nau Ruz (Persian New Year/Spring Equinox) and Christmas (Christ's birthday/Winter Solstice), Hindu Diwali & Shiva Ratri, the Islamic 'Ids, and so on.