

*Mohammad Aman H. Hobohm*

In the Name of God, the Beneficent and Merciful\*

Friends,

We have gathered here today for an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service for a person who has been respected and loved by people of many faiths in many countries. A respect and love which, as this Service shows, is continuing beyond her grave.

We give thanks today to God, the Beneficent and Merciful, for having given us Annemarie Schimmel, who will be remembered by all, who have met her. either personally or through her lectures and books, as a unique, an outstanding personality who has left behind a void which as it seems to us, cannot easily be filled, if it can be filled at all.

Almost a child prodigy she started learning Arabic when she was only 15 years old. She qualified for university admission when she was 16, and she obtained her first *Ph.D.* degree in Islamic studies at the age of 19, followed by a second *Ph.D.* degree in the subject of *History of Religions* in 1951.

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As successfully as her academic career had begun it continued. After having lectured in both subjects - Islam and Islamic culture, and the history of religions - at the University of Marburg, she accepted a call from the University of Ankara, to teach "Comparative Religion" in the university's Faculty of Islamic Theology. This was an extraordinary achievement: a Christian., and a woman, holding a chair in the theological faculty of the University in the Turkish capital of Ankara! And finally, and to crown her academic career came her appointment to the Chair of Indo-Muslim Culture at the University of Harvard in the year 1967. which she held until the end of 1992.

These dates represent milestones of a busy life and a great and remarkable academic career. Annemarie Schimmel's authority and erudition as a scholar of Islam and Islamic Culture are unquestionable and have gained her world-wide recognition. Honorary doctor degrees, international awards, including the prestigious *Peace Price of the German Booksellers' Association* and innumerable other scholarly honours are ample proof of the rank and place she has held in the academic world. She was undoubtedly one of the greatest scholars in her subject in the last century.

But what was it that has endeared her so much to us Muslims everywhere in the world? What was it that made so many Muslims feel that she belongs to them? What was it that caused her to be regarded, accepted, and loved almost like a sister by so many of us all over the world? By people who are otherwise extremely wary and highly suspicious of *Orientalists*, of *Mustashriqun*?

Had it been her fame as a scholar alone, her learning and erudition she would probably have been respected by an "inner circle" of Muslim scholars only, who became aware of her through their own studies, as she has been respected by her Non-Muslim colleagues. But what about the love and affection which even ordinary Muslims have shown her and show her still, even after her death?

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I who have known Professor Schimmel for more than 50 years, whom she regarded as a friend, and whom she honoured by allowing him to call her *Appa* - elder sister - *appa Annernarie* or, endearingly, *Appa Jan-*, venture to say that she has won the hearts of Muslims everywhere because she - more than anyone else among her colleagues - has combined in her person and in her work, what Muhammad Iqbal, the great Muslim thinker and poet of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent has called “the high pitch and the low of the same melody: 'Ilm-o-Ishq' - Science and Love, united from the very day of creation” And thus she showed us that scholarship and love are not incompatible. This is perhaps the reason, why among European colleagues she did not win the same acceptance as among Muslims. Another reason may have been her romanticism and that she wrote poetry, at which some of her non-Muslim colleagues turned up their nose. Yes, our Umm Hurairah, as she sometimes signed her letters, was romantic, -- but so what? Did it detract from her scholarship?

It was her deep and sincere love for the subject of her studies, namely the religion of Islam and its followers, the Muslims, shining through all that she has ever said in her lectures and written in her books, which has caused a resounding echo in our hearts.

Whoever has listened to her lectures and read her books - and mind you, she has written more books than an average person reads in his whole life - cannot fail to perceive this love and be struck by it. It permeates everything that she has ever expressed. And, since love begets love, it is no wonder that her love has been amply requited during her life and that now, after her death she is remembered fondly and with great affection by countless Muslim friends and admirers.

Through her many lectures in many languages and in many countries as well as through her publications Annemarie Schimmel has built bridges of understanding between Orient and Occident, between the world of Islam and what is called “the West”. She has shown in a most convincing way that Islam is entirely different from the adverse picture,

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which Western media so often present. Usama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda, terrorism and fanaticism are a perversion of this great religion and not its true spirit. Professor Schimmel, drawing from a seemingly inexhaustible store of knowledge never tired to prove as only a scholar of her caliber could do that Islam throughout history has been a civilizing force of the highest order.

Professor Schimmel has always exerted all her authority and her scholarly competence to inform and explain and to bring the truth to light. She did so all her life even against severe criticism and hostility from some of her own Orientalist colleagues.

But she not only directed her efforts to explain and inform and to remove misconceptions about the religion of Islam and its followers towards Non-Muslims. She also helped us Muslims to understand our religion better and to comprehend the vastness of its beneficial impact on all spheres and phases of life.

A brief glance at the impressive list of her publications shows the whole bandwidth of her approach. Whether it be on Iranian/Persian or Turkish poetry, Arab lyrics, Calligraphy, Muslim architecture, Music, and other aspects of Islamic art, she has also given us Muslims a deep insight into our religion and Islamic culture which goes far beyond of what the average believer knows.

Her books on such topics as “flowers and Gardens in Islam”, “The Three Promises of the Sparrow”, “The Rose”, and similar publications, not to speak of the long list of her books on Islamic Mysticism, and her translations of Islamic mystical poetry, have been eye-openers not only for Non-Muslims but perhaps even more so for us Muslims, eye-openers in the sense that through them a world unfolds of which most of us were, and still are, unaware.

She has opened our eyes to a comprehensiveness of Islam, which is of an entirely different quality than what we are normally given to understand by our religious teachers. Her understanding of the comprehensiveness of Islam, based as it was on the principle of

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“Tauhid”, the Unity and Oneness of the Divine Being, was greatly influenced by Islamic mysticism and, however contradictory it may sound to some, by the thoughts of Mohammad Iqbal.

She firmly believed that Islam is far more than just law, important though it may be, -- much more than rigid formality. She showed the world and us Muslims that Islam is beautiful, and that there is infinitely more to Islam than “the veil” and “halal meat” and, worse still: “Jihad or Holy War”! Again and again she stressed that Islam is first and foremost “faith”. A faith rooted deeply and firmly in the heart of the believer: Faith in God, the One and Only, Who, as the Qur'an tells us, “has inscribed for Himself the rule of mercy” - kataba rabbukum ‘ala nafsih -r- rahmat”. And it was this “rahmat”, mercy of the Lord, for which she constantly craved as expressed by the signature under her letters: “Faqirah ila rahmati rabbi”.

Even in the last weeks before her death she mentioned several times to me that it was her wish to write one more, her final book, - a book on “Prayer in Islam”. Being herself an ardent believer in the efficacy of prayer this wish of hers shows once more how highly she regarded piety, a quality of the heart as she described it and how important to her was the communication with the Divine Being, the beneficent and merciful God, as an expression and proof of “Faith”.

Annemarie Schimmel truly loved Islam and she truly loved the Muslims - as she loved God. and love Him she did in a very personal way. It was this love which enabled her to approach the subject of her studies and research free from bias and malevolence.

She be thanked for her love and for this her approach. She be thanked for what she has done for a better understanding between East and West, and she be thanked for having left us, in her thoughts and works, a legacy of immeasurable scholarly and spiritual value.

But above all it is the Beneficent and Merciful God, to whom our thanks are due for having given us that wonderful person, scholar and friend: ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL! May her soul rest in peace, amin!

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