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The Divine Love Story: Suicide
Bombings and After-Life Love

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“Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for.” –Dag Hammarskjold

In recent years much has been said about suicide bombers and what compels them into action. Political causes are aired over the radio and TV daily, proclaiming that some recent suicide attack was committed in the name of a group or an ideal. We as a global community have little choice but to listen. Perhaps that’s the point. Any organization seeking political change or societal upset would no doubt strive for such attention. Perhaps that is the reasoning of the recent influx in the application of suicide bombers. Yet, as persons, not as political affiliates or members of a nation, we are left with a sense of if not fear, or disgust, then curiosity. What in the world could compel someone to suicide bomb? I doubt very much that these acts are committed simply in the name of the parent group claiming responsibility. There must be more at work than simple politics and national strife. Perhaps the enticement lies not in this world at all, or in this life for that matter, but somewhere outside our sphere of understanding. Somehow the person committing this devastating act has been largely ignored. I think the real root for these attacks lies in isolation and loneliness. As Hammarskjold suggests, isolation can pilot us toward things so grand, that we will die for them.

It’s not uncommon in the realm of academia for multiple avenues of research to parallel one another, unaware of the prospective benefits one research topic can contribute to another. Often this overlapping of ideas can go unnoticed. When researchers remain ignorant of possible explanations resting dormant in other research fields much can be lost. However, when common ground between different academic conversations is

discovered much can be garnered. All that remains is the task of developing a meaningful association. This paper will attempt to do just that. By connecting two nearly opposing dialogues I hope to offer something innovative and perhaps entice others into new realms of enquiry.

The analysis of love is not a new one, nor is it one to be disregarded as impractical. Some of the most esteemed academics have tackled the concept and the varying sub-concepts, of love. It is an ideal that houses a wide array of complex aspects worthy of valid and stringent research. It would seem that love has mystified not only those who have the pleasure of experiencing it, but those who strive in the difficult pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Love is debatably as old as human-kind, and the quest to understand it only slightly younger.

Indeed, if the hunt for a tangible understanding of love is deep-rooted, then the study of suicide bombings is infantile. Though the human race is well aware of the idea of martyrdom, current events and conflicts have brought research focused on suicide bombing to the forefront. This study is only as old as the tactic, and much remains to be studied and understood. Much has been accomplished though. Exploration into the plentiful facets of this disturbing trend has resulted in clarification. Not unlike love, the primary topic of sacrificial bombings has resulted in the sprouting of numerous applicable sub-categories. Investigations into all known aspects of the topic have resulted in definitive steps towards understanding. Yet, like the ideal of love, much remains a mystery, unconfirmed, or debated.

Though I am far from an expert in either category, it seems that research in one realm can potentially aid study or comprehension in the other. One of the many aspects of

love that has received attention is the idea of the “love story”. This concept may not be as prevalent as the quest for a concrete definition, but it is still essential. Ample attention has been applied to the subject of love narratives in the academic discussion of love. Nevertheless, due to the distance between the topics of love and suicide attacks, this idea has never been applied to the latter. It is with this in mind that I construct this essay. By applying the idea of a love story to religion I hope to broaden our understanding of suicide bombers, while perhaps opening a new route of approach in the conceptual analysis of love. However in order to understand my research and stance, we first must be acquainted with has already been posed.

The core concept I wish to apply is that of love as a story. As I mentioned before, a fair amount of research has been performed in this field. I examined two texts in order to build the foundation of my study. Both were critical in understanding the concept of love stories and their application. Robert J. Sternberg, Mahzad Hojjat, and Michael L. Barnes published the first, titled, *Empirical Tests of Aspects of a Theory of Love as a Story*. In this work the authors test the theory of love as a story by applying a questionnaire to a sample of participants. The authors attempted to validate the potential application of this theory by defining possible love story genres and evaluating whether participants’ answers were predictable accordingly. Though the authors admitted much was left to be studied, the program did yield note-worthy results. Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes suggested that according to one’s adopted love story, and that of their partners, one could calculate the relationships’ possible outcome, which was often negative. Though the authors acknowledge that their study needs more research, they do set forth a premise that can be carefully applied elsewhere. It should also be noted that the work

paid little attention to the possibility that the theory of love as a story could be applied to religious conviction. C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, the authors of *The Mythology of Modern Love: Representations of Romance in the 1980's*, would concur with much of the work done by Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes. These authors also investigate love stories and their impacts on people, but stray away from actual human relationships and focus instead on media depictions. These authors also notice potential troubling aspects of employing love stories as a romantic guide. Instead of focusing on human participants however, they instead take note of trends in soap operas in the 1980's. They suggest that media encouraged ideals can result in dismal encounters in reality. They thus imply much in the way of love stories affecting human actions. Though the scope of their research is limited, their suggestions are vast. These two essays thus offer strong foundations in which to construct a bridge. But, to do so an understanding of what lies on the other side of the academic void must be grasped first.

To truly apply religion as a love story to the act of suicide bombing, we need to understand the implications of religion, suicidal acts, and the relationship between the two. In order to grasp religion I narrowed my research materials down to one faith: Islam. This was done not out of prejudice, but due to overwhelming data. The theory I propose can be applied to any religion and I suggest that so much be done. But, due to constraints and the fairly common practice of suicide bombing by Islamic extremists, I have narrowed my scope to Islam alone. This being the matter, a grasp on Islam is required. In order to understand Islam's impact on sacrificial bombings I first examined Farhan Ali's and Jerrold Post's work, *The History and Evolution of Martyrdom in the Service of Defensive Jihad: An Analysis of Suicide Bombers in Current Conflicts*. This work proved

to be a plethora of informative data. The authors, using excerpts from the Koran, illuminate origins of self sacrifice in the name of religion. By translating pivotal passages in the Koran, the authors offer a clear understanding Jihad and sacrifice. This text also deals directly with the numerous interpretations of the Koran performed by numerous agents and their resulting implications. These authors attempt to guide those unfamiliar with Islam through its various stages in history. These authors attempt to clarify the Islamic mindset for their Western audience, for example, when they proclaim, “He further states that the act of martyrdom is not a bloody or destructive event, but a positive outcome of those who have sacrificed” (629). The focus of this paper is on war directly though. Little attention is paid to love, but instead to followers’ dedication in faith. They focus primarily on religious institutions’, both past and present, impact on suicide bombings. Quintan Wiktorowicz and Karl Kaltenthaler take the idea of religion and its often adverse impact on humanity in their work, *The Rationality of Radical Islam*. In this work the authors argue against the notion that suicide bombers are irrational. These authors proclaim, “If we accept that religion does matter, seemingly irrational behavior becomes understandable as a rational choice” (319). They take many of the verses used to define Islam in Ali’s and Post’s work to suggest religion in certain circumstances offers an incentive for martyrdom. Instead of implying that suicide bombers are merely irrational zealots, they suggest they are instead forward thinking, conscious agents of a cause. They veer away from the common grievance-based explanations for such horrific acts and instead propose that such deeds are incentive inspired. Thus the authors focus primarily on religious and society based rewards, not on loss or repercussions. They pay little heed to the idea of loss resulting in action, but instead focus for the most part on

what can be gained through conflict. They also address God's will, not his/her divine love.

To grasp religion and love stories is to only understand a portion of the overlapping concepts though. To truly apply either idea to the other, we must first understand those who kill themselves and the very act of suicide. In, *Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?* the authors David Lester, Bijou Yang, and Mark Lindsay address both the people who commit suicide and the act itself. These authors avoid the idea of society for the most part. Instead Lester, Yang, and Lindsay focus on the individual. They indicate their intent when they propose, "In order to show that suicide bombers may possess suicide risk factors and that psychological profiles may be possible, this essay will draw on cases that are not suicide bombers, but which resemble them, and on evidence that is incomplete, in order to suggest that the assertions made by others and noted earlier are premature and may be incorrect" (284). They compare and contrast "normal" suicides with those of suicide bombers. Using what little data was available, the authors attempt to develop a profile of those who kill themselves via bomb in perceived conflict. They examine society's impact on individuals, but don't focus on the groups' goals or intents. Instead they focus on how individuals respond in certain scenarios. They advocate that suicide bombers are not unlike those who merely take their own life. The writers suggest that the same external forces that cause people to take their own lives equally affect those who kill themselves while killing others. Though Lester, Yang, and Lindsay examine Islamic societies and the religion in itself, they pay little attention to the guiding or comforting effects that it can have. They instead focus on certain types of people and how they respond to outside forces, not internal ones. Peter R.

Hills and Leslie J. Francis take the opposite approach and focus primarily on religion's impact on suicide in, *The relationships of religiosity and personality with suicidal ideation*. These authors explored the idea that certain religions reduce suicide rates. The authors tested this theory on a sample of participants and compared results based not on the variety of faith, but on three types of religious orientations. The authors compared those sampled on whether their faith was intrinsic, extrinsic, or quest based. They went on to propose that religion does little in determining suicidal tendencies, instead it is how the person of faith embraces the ideal. Their research indicated that individuals, men in particular, who scored high in the quest category were more likely to entertain thoughts of suicide. These individuals generally struggled in the search for answers to complex concerns. They hunted for clarification on topics as obscure as the meaning of life. Though this work was relatively short, it spoke volumes. It suggested that religion has little to do with suicide. Yet it also suggested that certain individuals who struggle with overwhelming concerns can find solace in the structure of faith. The authors neglected to take note of suicide *for* religion however. The authors looked at the deterring power of faith, but not the causation it could potentially produce. The final work I chose to investigate also assessed the idea of religion through the scope of intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest. In Eva Jonas' and Peter Fischer's work, *Terror Management and Religion: Evidence That Intrinsic Religiousness Mitigates Worldview Defense Following Mortality Salience*, the authors don't focus on suicide, but instead on one's ability to use religion as a buffer against the fear of death. After performing numerous studies, these authors suggest that predominately only those vested intrinsically in religion obtain death induced fear management from their religious beliefs. They thus suggest only those who

internally identify and believe in their faith garner the feelings of safety guaranteed in the afterlife. The authors also suggest that all religions make claims about life after death. Religion is in essence a means to salvation, life after death, regardless of faith. They don't make note of sacrifices for religion however. These authors take note of the potential benefits from strong, personal oriented religious belief, but they ignore the possible consequences.

Most of us are fairly familiar with the notion of love stories. Many of the narratives read to us when we were in our youth were based on the idea of perfect love. It takes little effort to find examples prevalent in our society today. Movies depict the same pursuit of ideal love, as do novels, and television series. It isn't much of a stretch for most of us to see the similarities between love stories and the religions we adhere to. But why does this matter, and how does it relate to the idea of religious oriented suicide attacks? The key idea we must grasp is not the premise of love stories, but how their message can affect our behavior. It would seem, as with many influences, that love stories can have an effect more powerful on some individuals, while only slightly influencing others. Nonetheless, a powerful impact on one person can later result in a devastating impact on society. It is this relationship, the sway that love narratives can have over individuals that we must grasp.

Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes deal with the powerful impact love stories can have on people in their work *Empirical Tests of Aspects of a Theory of Love as a Story*. In this essay the authors tackle the idea of love tale adoption, its personal application to life, and the possible results. These esteemed authors first indicate that love stories are commonplace in society and thus easily inferred as a proper guide. The perception of

love stories as a romantic road map results in adoption and eventual application. Sternberg, Hojjat and Barnes note, “Almost all of us are exposed to large numbers of diverse stories that convey different conceptions of how love can be understood. Some of these stories may be explicitly intended as love stories; others may have love stories embedded in the context of larger stories” (199). They continue, indicating possible sources, when they remark, “These stories may be observed by watching people in relationships, by watching television or movies, or by reading fiction. It seems plausible that, as a result of our exposure to such stories, we form over time our own stories of what love is or should be” (199). The authors of this essay thus make a couple notable points in the understanding of love stories. They first indicate that love stories and their ideals aren’t always present in the familiar idea of a love narrative. Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes instead suggest that love stories can often hide their influence and guidelines in non-love oriented narratives. They also suggest that these stories don’t have to fit the rigid concept of story, but can be garnered from the numerous sources commonplace in today’s world. These authors indicate that from these sources members of society develop an idea of what love consists of. All these suggestions are pivotal. Their first point embraces the idea of religion as a love story. It isn’t hard to imagine various faiths as such. Often religious teaching and texts are grounded in a historical and chronological order. They read not unlike stories, ones claimed to be non-fiction, but history. Yet, even if these teachings are not seen as simple clear-cut love tales, our authors insinuate that this doesn’t matter, as the ideals of a love story can remain hidden in less apparent sources. It doesn’t have to be an obvious love story to be embedded with the same message. Our authors also take note of the numerous outlets that could potentially

influence our adoption of a love guide. Indeed, their list seems plausible and realistic. They take note of fictitious stories, yet not of historical or non-fiction however. This seems to be a slight oversight. It would seem that historically grounded examples of love would have an even more powerful attraction to those looking for a love guide to adopt. These authors may not give humankind enough credit. It seems likely if a person was given the choice of choosing from a fiction formulated guide versus one claimed to be real, they would choose reality. Those who adhere to certain faith will no doubt argue that their religion and its teachings are real, regardless of their ability to prove as much. The various religious texts could thus be viewed as a non-fiction guide for those who follow that faith. It would seem credible to therefore suggest that religions are perceived by those who believe in them as a fact based, historical, moral guide: a story that concludes only in the afterlife and centers on a divine being's love.

If what Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes suggest is true, we as individuals can adopt an idea of love from a gamut of sources. Yet, each of these sources must vary to some degree. If this is true, then each source could inherently offer a different viewpoint on love. With each viewpoint one could glean a different set of standards or guide lines. These different standards would seem to imply different outcomes, methods, and goals. This would appear to create differences in application. Different love stories result in different actions performed by the characters unique to the love story. Yet, to what degree should one hold fast to the standards and roles put forth by the love narrative? Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes indicate that applying such standards can prove problematic when they remark, "It appears then, that maladaptive stories are more likely to lead to dissatisfaction than adaptive stories are to lead to satisfaction..." (214). Though these

authors' study dealt directly with relationships between people, it seems their study could easily be applied to the divine. They suggest that strict adherence to the guidelines put forth by a love story can result in disappointment. Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes observe that adoption of love stories that cannot adapt or evolve to reality predispose their follower to dissatisfaction. Harrington and Bielby also note of this lack of desire or inability to adapt in their study of 1980's soap operas: *The Mythology of Modern Love: Representations of Romance in the 1980's*. Harrington and Bielby declare, "In other words, attitudes about intimate relationships have begun to change, but behavior has not yet caught up. Confusion over this transitional state is clearly indicated by the continually traditional depiction of love relationships on daytime soap operas and prime time romance genre programs" (142). Both groups of authors thus take note of a trend. They point out that people will often remain devoted to a love story's guidelines, regardless of changing norms or personal disappointment. One has to wonder, why? It would seem that if a certain set of standards were resulting in more failure than success, one would dispose of that set of standards. Or as if Harrington and Bielby set forth: if society's standards are changing, you as an individual would too. Yet, people regardless of society or success rate often stand fast and hold on to their adopted love story model. No one as of yet has addressed as to why this occurs. It would seem that the only reason one would weather disappointment and societal changes would be out of hope for a promised reward. Why else would one adhere to a dying or failing standard? However, if the love story adopted promised an end result far out weighing the price paid to receive it, it would no doubt be a rational course of action. Thus certain love stories must entice people to adopt them as a guide due to an incredible end result. All other forms of love

may perhaps pale in comparison to the final prize offered in the conclusion of these love stories. Without a doubt divine love could fall under this premise. Undeniably few forms of love, if any, could match the perfect love that is displayed in religious teachings. If one is to view religion as a love story, then those following its guide lines would no doubt accept disappointment and fly against society's standards in order to achieve it. The authors above suggest that people will accept such a fate for other forms of love stories, and if this is true, then people will no doubt go to great lengths in the pursuit of what is promised in the religious love story.

Simply suggesting that religions may be viewed as a love story does little to help shed light on the disturbing trend of suicide bombings. To grasp the possible implications of this theory, we must also understand specific religions, those who commit these devastating acts, and the proposed and possible motives that compelled these agents. This research will focus on Islam, but it is by no means limited to this faith. Instead, I implore that it be applied elsewhere. I am no religious scholar, yet I doubt very much that heinous acts have not been performed by all faiths in their pursuit of their following. In order to see if applying religion as a love narrative is feasible, we must limit the scope of research. We must also focus on an activity that appears to fly against the morals of society, if not even the teaching of the religion in particular. It is because of these reasons I primarily focus on Islam and suicide bombings.

In order to understand suicide bombing and their potential triggers we must also grasp what has been suggested already. While hunting for clarification on this topic I noticed a key trend. In the current academic conversation on suicide bombings, three primary foundations for suicidal attackers have been debated. Throughout the

conversation the debate continues on which three factors are the primary basis for the formulation of a suicide bomber. Authors in the debate primarily adhere to the idea that either societal influences, sanity of the individual, or susceptibility to religious teachings results in suicide bombers. I have not doubt that all this factors are critical in molding a person into a bomber. However, they should not be viewed as separate entities. Instead, we should note that all may be intricately connected, bound by invisible threads emanating from the viewing of religion as a love narrative.

Religion is often cited as the primary actor in creating a suicide bomber. In many ways I suggest this to be true. However, I also suggest just the opposite. Religion in itself seems to have little sway on suicide. It is hard to hold often gentle teachings as guilty. Instead I suggest under certain circumstances, if faith is seen as a route to love, it can in fact have devastating effects, yet the faith in itself cannot be held liable. Indeed, suicide is an act frowned upon or forbidden by many religious teachings. This fact implies that religion as a love story does not influence suicide attacks, but forbids it. To kill ones' self is to eliminate any chance of divine love. Farhana Ali and Jerrold Post explore this idea in the context of Islam in their essay *The History and Evolution of Martyrdom in the Service and Defensive Jihad: An Analysis of Suicide Bombers in Current Conflicts*. These authors write, "Many scholars argue that suicide is one of the major sins in Islam that annuls one's faith and those well versed in religious text often cite the Quranic verse, Al Maeda, that clearly rebukes those who kill..." (626). In regard to Islam then, these two authors propose that based on the religious texts of the Quran, suicide is forbidden in the context of Islam and will alienate those who kill themselves from the divine. We must conclude then, that if one was to accept religion as a love story, a pursuit of divine love,

that they would not be inclined to kill themselves or others, but to avoid the act at all costs for the consequences would be far too great. A strict following of the religious guide lines would be in order or the end reward (God's love) would be forbidden. Yet, this argument holds little water. Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes suggested that people inherently decide what love story to pick and how strictly to apply it. They also noted that many sources are viable in the search for love story adoption. Hence, people will adhere to the story they prefer or believe to be the most valid.

As with many religions, Islam is constantly in a state of debate. Scholars argue the translations or meanings in many religious texts, and as with many narratives, those who follow the tale lend greater importance to aspects others ignore. Religions are not a static or rigid story. The characters remain and usually overall themes persist, but people as individuals determine what is of the greatest importance. Ali and Jerrold also advocate this when they account, "Today, the debate among the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) on the permissibility of suicide continues to divide the Muslim world; some view suicide as a legitimate tactic while others contend that is illegitimate on the basis that it was never employed by the Prophet of Islam, and therefore, suicide is *haram* (forbidden)" (626). Thus, these authors quell the notion that religions, Islam in particular, dissuade suicide. Instead they imply, at least in regard to Islam, that faiths are defined by their interpretation, and these interpretations define the guidelines of the faith. Hence, individuals, in the hunt for divine love will decide what rules must be followed in order to achieve the divines' recognition. Even religious texts, stories known for their firm regulations, are as fluid as many traditions, open to interpretation by those who follow their teachings.

Peter R. Hills and Leslie J. Francis also defeat the idea that religion hampers suicide, or for that matter encourages it, in their work *The Relationships of Religiosity and Personality with Suicidal Ideation*. Hills and Francis in their study attempted to determine if strong religious faith lessened the potential for suicide. They propose that it has little effect when they remark, “Second, there were no significant differences between the mean SI (Suicidal Ideation) scores for (a) those who affiliated to churches and those who were not, (b) for churchgoers who attended church at least weekly and those who attended less frequently, and (c) for those who prayed daily and those who prayed less frequently” (291). Hills’ and Leslie’s study thus implied that those who adhered more devotedly to religious faiths were just as likely to consider suicide and those who were not such strict followers. This again lends strong support to the idea of individual analysis. We can conclude that religion has little sway on people when it comes to suicide. To suggest that Islam, in the context of an oral or textual guide, influences suicide attacks is nearly impossible, nor does it reduce it. Hill and Leslie propose that even the most devote, if not fanatical followers, of religion are just as likely to entertain suicide as those much less devoted. Thus there is no inclination that religious beliefs lead to suicidal acts, or for that matter, dissuades them. Yet a difference does exist and it pertains to the purpose of religion. Hills and Leslie continue, “Neither an extrinsic nor an intrinsic orientation was a significant predictor (of SI), although quest was a significant positive predictor for men but not women. Characteristic of quest is the search for finding an explanation of existential concerns and doubts, and a meaning in life” (291). These authors thus concur with the idea of interpretation. They conclude that religion in itself has little bearing on an individual’s considerations of suicide. However, the guidelines

proposed by religion can have an effect on those who are troubled by internal conflicts. People who struggle with identity and concepts larger than themselves were more prone to suicidal thoughts and more swayed by religious ideals. With this in mind, viewing religion as a love story could shed light on the realm of suicide bombers. It would seem a reasonable conclusion to suspect that those tormented by internal strife and confusion about life feel isolated. To be isolated is therefore to be unloved. I doubt very much that people who feel loved describe themselves as alone or alienated. Wouldn't some one in such a situation hunger and search for companionship, love, or at least answers to daunting questions? It would appear plausible to conclude that such individuals could find all of this in religious teaching, if they viewed them as a love narrative. Divine love would dispel isolation while answering troubling concerns while religious teachings could guide one to this promised relationship. It is under these circumstances that religions become critical: when unloved, isolated people, see religious teachings as means to be loved.

Unfortunately simply noting that certain individuals are prone to isolation and thus religious influence does little to clarify suicide bombers. Many people world-wide are isolated, lonely, or confused by the way of the world. Very few of this people become suicide bombers. The application of religion as a love story requires more than proof of limited influence of religion on suicide. Though religions have little sway on suicidal thought, it cannot be ignored that religion is the claimed basis of suicide attacks. This is claimed not only by those supporting these strikes, but often by those who commit the act. It is critical though to understand that on average most people are not influenced by faith to commit or not to commit suicide by their religious practices. Instead it seems that

it requires a special interpretation of religious teachings to land at such a conclusion. However, if those certain individuals in a state of isolation conclude that God's love will alleviate their pain, then religion becomes paramount. This conclusion can not come from the average followers' faith however; it must come from someone looking for love. It is in this context, a person viewing religion as a guide to love, that we can get at the core of suicide bombers. People who strictly follow the rules of their faith usually lead normal lives. Yet, people isolated, un-loved, and desperate interpret the guidelines of religion not as a compass for life, but as a road map to the ultimate loving relationship. They will follow this map feverishly in an attempt to gain a loving relationship with the divine.

Suicide bombers are usually influenced by the religious love story only after they have been altered themselves, often by the harshness of the world. In order to be hungry for love they first need to feel loveless. In David Lester's, Bijou Yang's, and Mark Lindsay's work, *Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible*, they attempt to create a profile for those who suicide bomb. They often note the austere lives of those who agree to kill themselves and others via bomb. These authors in regard to Islamic societies observe, "The fathers, who are supposed to be charge of their sons' child-rearing, are usually absent, and the child-rearing is left to the oppressed mothers who inflict their own pain onto their sons" (287). These authors in a hunt for a psychological understanding of suicide bombers first take note of adolescent isolation. They hold fast to the idea of societal influences reducing the sanity of an individual. The authors suggest that this isolation results in anger and susceptibility when they remark, "Lachkar argued that boys raised in such a society can easily form an intense identification with a charismatic leader who appeals to the society's mythological fantasies and allows them to

act out their anger and aggression” (287). Indeed it would seem that such a childhood would make one angry and spiteful. Anger and revenge doesn’t seem to get at the core of suicide bombers though. Many Muslims or persons of different faiths have no doubt had a miserable or upsetting childhood, yet they don’t complete suicide missions. Lester, Yang, and Lindsay propose that the key lies in the lack of love these children feel, but they ignore the pursuit of love. It would seem rational that those isolated from loving relationships would no doubt pursue them, perhaps at all costs. If love is absent in your family, then a love of equal or greater strength must be found. Divine love would be an obvious choice. Perhaps these attacks are not revenge and anger driven, but desperate grasps for love. Instead of charismatic leaders in the society, we should focus on the charisma and pull of the divine. God’s teachings are based on faith and love, no voices in troubled communities can trump his. Again these authors take note of similar factors when they, in regard to a Palestinian girl, write, “Her father died when she was only six, a common occurrence in the histories of suicides. Her mother remarried but left her with other family members, so that she lost both her father and mother. Her relatives noticed that she hid behind a happy façade, and they suspected that she was unhappy. She fell in love with a leader of a violent Palestinian group in Bethlehem, Jaad Salem, but he died on March 8 in a confrontation with Israeli forces” (290). Again Lester, Yang, and Lindsay display a sense of isolation in suicide bombers. They suggest that such factors are common in those who commit suicide. Yet, to kill ones’ self is drastically different than suicide bombing. These authors do a good job in unearthing pivotal aspects in the realm of suicide attacks, but they don’t dig deep enough. No doubt an individual who entertains thoughts of suicide shares characteristics with those who suicide bomb, but they are not

the same. The young woman mentioned in their work did not simply want to take her own life; she attempted to take it and others. Instead it would appear plausible to explore the idea that her faith had guided her. She was no doubt alone and no doubt felt unloved. Yet, she didn't search for a simple end to her existence, but instead tried to achieve an act worthy of reward. She had wanted love, an ever lasting guaranteed loving relationship, and her perception of religion suggested that it could be gained in such a manner. Eva Jonas and Peter Fischer support this in their work *Terror Management and Religion: Evidence That Intrinsic Religiousness Mitigates Worldview Defense Following Mortality Salience*. They proclaim, "Becker (1971) argued that religious worldviews are so effective for terror management because they provide cosmic significance and directly address the fear of death by claiming that death is not the end of existence" (565). These authors' suggestion applies well with the idea of the divine love story. As with the women mentioned before, someone alone, afraid of being forever unloved, could no doubt find solace in the divine. If in this desperation they took religion as a guide to achieving love, they would no doubt find comfort in the strict guidelines and promised reward. For certain people, the divine love story is no doubt the only reliable and concrete relationship that exists in a harsh and fluid world.

It is still unclear on the motivation to kill in the name of love however. As mentioned before, the direct application of many faiths condemns suicide and murder. Where does the idea of suicide bombing equating to a meaningful route to God's love come into play in Islam? The answer lies with the very idea of a story. As with many traditions, religious love stories are prone to alterations. This is where society plays a key role in the creation of suicide bombers. It is a common practice for political groups in

certain Islamic societies to recruit individuals for suicide missions. These recruiters attract followers, often disenchanted with current affairs, and employ them in current conflicts. They pay special attention for suicide bombing candidates. These politically savvy groups infuse their recruits with their interpretations of divine teachings. Often the ideals they preach fly in the face of the larger religious communities. Usually these teachings embrace the idea of martyrdom in the quest for God. Ali and Post note this when they comment, “Finally, a growing concentration of communication power in a handful of insurgents enables them to develop central ‘myths’ or messages tailored to the needs and concerns of local populations” (631). Therefore, these groups tailor and alter the divine love story to entice those they wish to recruit. By translating their faiths’ texts as they see fit they find an avenue of action for the real world in the divines’ message. They then filter this to others. Those who like this love story adhere to it. They generally use the same method of attraction as well. In *The Rationality of Radical Islam*, written by Quintan Wiktorowicz and Karl Kaltenthaler, this is exposed numerous times. They observe, “The calculus for individuals is clear: follow the divine rules and receive a spiritual payoff; remain deviant and suffer eternal consequences” (312). They continue to elaborate, “These ideologies are, in essence, outlines of strategies for obtaining the spiritual payoff- what individuals must do to ensure salvation” (312). Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler thus suggest that often suicide bombers’ commitment is not to the cause for which they die, but for the pursuit of salvation. These individuals are enticed by the narrative they are exposed to, and pursue it, usually to the gain of those who versed them on the idea initially. They do this not for political reasons, but for spiritual ones. Again, something is missing however. Not everyone is swayed by the idea of spiritual salvation.

If these teachings were so enticing it would seem nearly all peoples of certain faiths would be sacrificing themselves. Indeed, it seems only a select few choose to suicide bomb. All religions promise some sort of afterlife reward, but few followers are killing themselves in the name of it. Then again, most probably don't view religion as a love story; conversely, those who do, if told suicide bombing was a method to achieve heavenly love, it would seem a tempting possibility. We can thus see how alteration of the religious teachings by others would persuade individuals to kill themselves and others. The alteration or interpretation of religious teachings by some has a drastic affect on others. When these changes are made, new routes to divine love are opened for others. It is therefore their means to finding a loving relationship with the divine.

To grasp love is as difficult to understand as suicide bombings. Nonetheless, effort and diligence is required in both arenas. Much remains to be learned in both subjects. These two topics should not be viewed as worlds apart, but instead closely linked. The application of the love story to the realm of suicide bombings could inherently expand both ideas, and lead to greater understanding. I have attempted to highlight their close relationship in this essay, with the desire for others to carry it further. These two topics are closely intertwined, and to grasp one requires a familiarity with the other. Suicide bombing is far from being an out-dated tactic, instead its' popularity is growing. In order to curb this ghastly method, we need not focus on politics, but on the divine love story. Once we can completely grasp what is offered to many, but perceived as feasible by few, in religious narratives, we have little hope to regulate the frequency of suicidal bombings.

It should be noted that much has yet to be explained however. This paper was constructed on a foundation of previously performed research. It is far from conclusive, but not merely possibility. In order to further grasp the implications of the divine love story and its influence on suicide attacks more research is urgently required. Much of what has been suggested here is based on limited data compiled from authors who admit the questionable nature of the source. In order to truly understand this concept information is needed from regions of the world where little work is being done in the psychological or sociological fields. People who struggle to survive have little interest in such things. Thus the data in this essay is often formulated around what could very well be unrepresentative. Effort is needed prior to suicidal attacks to truly appreciate the factors that compel such activities. Unfortunately this suggests that societal change may be needed in the regions where suicide bombing persist and that seems to be inherently the progress no one can achieve. The implications of the divine love narrative should not only be seen as applicable to suicide bombings either, nor of course Islam alone. Other disturbing trends could be viewed through this lens. Abortion clinic bombing and group suicides come to mind. Regardless, this paper is merely a start. Much of what has been proposed here is based on limited information. Further research is a must, as to ignore any possible explanations is to empower the very act hoped to be illuminated.