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# Spiritual Anthropology of Islam\*

Translated by Shuja Ali Mirza

First Discourse: Unseen and Visible

## I. Realms of Knowledge

Man is not separate from the world, nor is the world apart from man. Man subsists in the very substance of the world and the world manifests itself in, and through man—expounding itself through his speech.

This bond and unity between man and the universe implies that the awareness and knowledge of the two are not separate and distinct from each other. He who in some fashion apprehends the world—synthetically and in harmony with man—comes to know man to the degree of his awareness of the world. From these preliminaries, the bond and concord between anthropology<sup>1</sup> and ontology becomes evident. Since ontology and anthropology are but two fields of knowledge, a bond exists between them and between this connecting principle of knowledge and man's modality of cognition. This means that the ontological and anthropological perspectives of every man arise from the limits and scope of his understanding and knowledge. Likewise, his level of knowledge is proportionate to his awareness of man and the world.

Now, because every soul arrives at a harmonious understanding of man and the world according to the level of its awareness, and conversely, its apprehension is also in line with its understanding of man and existence, it can be concluded that there is a concordance (*tawāzun*) between epistemology, anthropology and ontology. So, the person that is afflicted with doubt and scepticism in the realm of knowledge and awareness becomes a nihilist vis-à-vis his ontological perspective, and a humanist in his dealings with the phenomena of man.

The person given to sensory knowledge and awareness, on the other hand, thinking that the senses and experimentation are the exclusive means of attaining knowledge, finds himself left with a world that is entirely material. In this case, it is only natural that his anthropological perspective should gain validity and recognition only after it, like other material phenomena, is made empirical<sup>2</sup>. Now the person who depends on the “researches of his mind” and with a rationalistic outlook regards rational processes as the only means of attaining knowledge, attempts—like Descartes<sup>3</sup>—to prove the existence of man himself by way of rational thought, and denies—like Hegel<sup>4</sup>—ontological reality and existence to all that does not measure up to the standards of rational thought.

Those who live in a world of myths are predisposed to speak, in their knowledge of being, of masters of species (*arbāb al-anwāʿ*) and a multitude of gods and goddesses. Their picture of man is likewise mythical. In a mythical understanding, the senses and reason do not play a major role and, in their stead, it is human desires, accompanied by imagination and fantasy, which receive emphasis. In this type of knowing, it is possible to perceive certain forms and visions of the intermediate and imaginal world, though these are only the preliminary stages in the hierarchy of intuitive and spiritual understanding.

Intuitive knowledge<sup>1</sup> and spiritual understanding, when not limited to provisional glimpses of the imaginal world, and after having acquired a supra-rational and intellectual dimension, call for a different type of ontological and anthropological perspective than what has so far been covered. From this perspective, man—in his body, soul and spirit—and the world—in its entirety, become the signs and words of God Almighty.

The highest kind of intuitive knowledge is Divine Revelation. Revealed knowledge, unlike its mythical counterpart, is not anti-rational. Moreover, it neither ignores nor rejects outright sensory and experiential forms of knowledge. What it does do, however, is reveal the imperfections and ineffectuality of rationalism and empiricism, in so far as they deny levels of knowledge beyond their own, or attempt to reduce transcendental knowledge to the level of their own dialectic. As such, Revelation attempts to break asunder the bonds and shackles, and extend the arbitrary boundaries that have been put on the lower sciences of humanity. The end result of this revealed knowledge is a unitive or “*tawḥīdī*”<sup>5</sup> ontology and anthropology. In a *tawḥīdī* ontology, existents are nothing but the words or signs of God; and in a *tawḥīdī* anthropology, man is nothing less—existentially and essentially—than the Word of God (*Logos*). As the Word, man is in dialogue with the signs of God and is really His interlocutor;

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<sup>1</sup> Or knowledge by witnessing – *maʿrifat al-shubūḍī*. Tr.

and finally, due to his comprehension and knowledge of the reality of all things and the Divine Names, he is named the “vicegerent of God”—the *khalīfat Allah*.

Based on the above typology of knowledge and what has been said regarding the multiple forms of awareness in understanding man and the universe, five corresponding perspectives on epistemology, ontology, and anthropology can be put forward. The following table shows these types and levels:

Type	Epistemology	Ontology	Anthropology
Contemporary Philosophical	Relativity of Perception/ Truth, Scepticism	Nihilism	Culture-making Animal, <i>homo faber (cultura)</i>
Scientific and Positivistic	Empiricism and Sensationalism	Materialism	Tool-making Animal, <i>homo faber (instrumentum)</i>
Classical Philosophical	Rationalism	Idealism and Rational Order	Rational Animal, <i>homo sapiens</i>
Mythological	Imaginal and Isthmian Apparitions	Lords of Species and Pantheism	Mythical Creature, <i>homo mythicus</i>
Religious – Islamic	Revelation and Intellect	Monotheism or <i>Tawhīd</i>	Divine Vicegerent, <i>logos</i> , and Interlocutor

The interdependence of the various levels of knowledge, in the three realms mentioned above, is hardly a matter of doubt or dispute. But beyond the mere existence of a logical coherence between epistemology, ontology and anthropology, there remains the potentially controversial matter of the existence of a hierarchy between them and the relative positions that they occupy in that hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

Some hold epistemology to be prior to anthropology and ontology. They believe that, with a change in man’s basis of knowledge and the resulting change in his

<sup>2</sup> Jean Wahl, *Traite de Metaphysique* (Paris: Payot, 1953), ch. 8.

exposition of epistemological issues, his outlook on ontology and anthropology also changes.

Others are of the opinion that the awareness of existence and knowledge, or its methodology, lie in the domain of the awareness and knowledge that a person has of the human soul. That is, they put anthropology before the other two fields of knowledge.

A third group gives priority to ontology. They believe that man's awareness of being has direct bearing upon his knowledge of his soul and knowledge itself.

All three of these opinions, in spite of the arguments and proofs put forward in their favour, are united in their admission of the logical interdependence of the three fields of knowledge.

## II. Religious and Worldly Perspectives

Islam's perspective on man and the world is not mundane or materialistic. In the mundane outlook, physical nature and the life of this world hereunder constitute all of reality. Islam's outlook on the world is religious, and in a religious outlook the physical world is but a part of reality—the other part being beyond the physical realm or precisely, metaphysical. The physical and metaphysical domains are variously referred to in religious terminology as “earth” (the world hereunder) and “heaven” (the hereafter); “visible” (*shahādah*) and “unseen” (*ghayb*); *mulk* (the corporeal world or “kingdom”) and *malakūt* (the spiritual world or “dominion”). In the ontology of religion, the physical is not disconnected and divorced from the metaphysical; nor are the two situated on one level—in a “horizontal” relation, so to speak. They are rather, part of a single hierarchy, which integrally connects them in a “vertical” manner; such that the physical world falls under the dominion of the metaphysical, and the spiritual (*malakūt*) dominates the corporeal (*mulk*). Hence, the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical is essentially of a different order than the relationship between physical objects themselves.

The metaphysical comprehends<sup>6</sup> the physical in such a way that the latter comes to be known as lower and outward, or manifest, while the former is higher and inward, or immanifest. The relation between the manifest and the immanifest is not of the order of two things on the horizontal plane. It is, rather, a transcendental relation, which when compared to normal worldly relationships, appears mysterious and quite incredible.

The metaphysical realm is the inward, unseen and higher level of the physical realm itself, and due to the type of relationship that it has with physical objects, it “colours” them, giving them the appropriate quality. It is for this very same reason that the religious perspective does not see the natural physical world as a homogenous and uniform multiplicity. Rather, each and every part of the physical world—in line with the type of relation it has with the metaphysical and unseen realm—assumes a metaphysical aspect. The relation between the physical and metaphysical is similar to the one between the words of a script and their meanings. From the physical point of view, words are nothing but sounds and things that are interrelated only horizontally. But every word that is uttered or written conveys a particular message due to the relation and connection that it has with its meaning. In this way, every word—with a view to its meaning—acquires particularities that it would not otherwise have had without its semantic (*maʿnawī*) relation. Needless to say, the relation between words and meanings is an arbitrary one, in that it is established by cultural context and the exercise of human freewill. The connection between the physical and metaphysical worlds on the other hand, is real, pertaining to the order of existence.

Words and expressions, set in various cultures, are accompanied by differing meanings and messages. These meanings, in those very same settings, have real and tangible effects—both individual and social. Some words cause pleasure and elation, while others, result in anger and distemper.

From the religious perspective, every part of the natural world, depending on the type of relation and connection it has with the metaphysical—and hence its own inner or unseen aspect—is subject to particularities and categorizations of its own and peculiar to itself.

The metaphysical realm, being the unseen world, is the source of holiness and the different values or qualities. Parts of the physical world in accordance with the relation they have with the unseen world are infused with certain values and qualities. This is why some things are “naturally” considered holy and pure, while others are seen to be base and profane.

In the secular and mundane appraisal of things, transcendental qualities (or values) and the qualifications that physical things acquire in respect to them are all imaginary—existing only in the thought and fantasy of men. From this outlook, the real source of transcendental matters are nothing but the physical dimensions of human existence along with certain tendencies that can be traced to matter. From the religious perspective, however, the above qualifications have roots in a supra-natural transcendental reality. This transcendental reality is not a

concoction of the mind. On the contrary, the very mind and cognition of man, in its self-conscious journey towards this reality, apprehends and discovers it.

Belief in the existence of metaphysical dimensions of reality is a common feature of all non-materialist ontologies. Some anthropologists though, have claimed this to be particular to the religious worldview.<sup>3</sup>

### III. Tawḥidī Exposition

If religion is taken to be a set of beliefs and rituals, apart from those that a purely materialistic and worldly outlook offers, then the belief in spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of being can very well serve as the boundary between the religious and secular spheres. If this scheme is adopted, then Islam falls simply and clearly into the religious category. This, however, belies the very special type of belief in the unseen that Islam holds. From the Islamic perspective, the unseen world is in a hypostatic unity with the seen and has a “unitive form” than can only be described as *tawḥīdī*. What this means is that, in the final analysis, the world is one single unseen realm that transcends all the other states of being, and is more hidden than all the planes of creation. Everything that exists in the various levels of the world—the natural world in particular—derives and descends from the unseen and will once again return to it.

Islam holds that *tawḥīd* is the true religion, and sees both materialistic and polytheistic outlooks to be in error and void of truth. It calls God’s prophets the messengers of the true religion. The Qur’ān says,

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَىٰ الدِّينِ  
كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse.<sup>4 7</sup>

In the Islamic outlook, all of the prophets—from Adam to the last of them, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus (may Peace be upon them all)—were called to *tawḥīd*. All believed in the One God and were subservient to Him only. The differences between them lie in the divine laws that they brought—laws that God revealed for the guidance of men in different times and ages. Every prophet

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theology & Comparative Perspectives* (Routledge, 2001), 21. Edward, B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (4th edition, John Murray, 1903), 424.

<sup>4</sup> Qur’ān, 9:33

verified the prophet that came before him and foretold the coming of the messenger after him. The Qur'an affirms this in the following verse:

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَبْنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا  
لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدٌ

And when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel! Indeed I am the apostle of God to you, to confirm what is before me of the Torah, and to give the good news of an apostle who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad...<sup>5</sup>

The Qur'an, while emphasizing *tawhīd*, refers to those who believe in multiple gods to be in dire error, and sees those who speak only of the material world to have gone astray. Likewise, the Qur'an calls the worship of God and subjugation to His commands the *dīn* or "path" of all existents (from the ontological perspective) and the message or "calling" of all the prophets (from the theological and religious point of view). In this respect, God has neither differentiated amongst any of His prophets, nor has He condoned the following of anything other than the prophetic religions. He has said:

أَفَعَيَّرَ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْعُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا  
وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ

Do they, then, seek a religion other than God's, while to Him submits whoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be brought back?

قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ  
وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا  
نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Say, 'We have faith in God, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus were given, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.'

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 61:6

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an, 3:83-85

#### IV. The Stages of Descent

In the Qur'ānic view, all existents have descended from God, and all of them return to Him. In some verses there is talk of the manifestation, emanation and descent of the world from the divine realm. In others, the return of things to Him is spoken of. A third group of verses mention both these movements, in both a general and specific way. The verse,

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return,<sup>7</sup>

mentions in general the origin and destination of the movement of human beings. The following verse, on the other hand, outlines the descent of all things, including man:

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ

There is not a thing but that its treasures are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure.<sup>8</sup>

The use of the word “thing” in the above verse is such that it includes all the objects of the natural world and everything that can be conceived.

The verse quoted above begins with the negation of an indefinite clause. The exception that follows amounts to the inclusion of all things except those mentioned in the remainder of the verse—namely, God Himself and the “treasures” that are with Him. Hence, it can be concluded that everything that is in this natural and physical world has descended from the said stores or treasures.<sup>9</sup>

This verse not only expounds the idea of derivation or descent itself, but also goes on to point out some of its stages. In other words, the concept that everything has treasure houses points to the fact that there is not only one store or treasure for a given thing, but rather, that there are a number of them, and that their descent is not from just one place. At every stage of descent, a treasure house or repository is envisioned, from which a thing—in given and specified measures—emanates and is brought forth. Further deliberation upon this verse reveals other particularities of the stages of descent: Firstly, the natural world is the last and bottom stage of descent and everything that exists on this level must have descended from prior and preceding stages. Secondly, the particularities of

<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān, 2:156

<sup>8</sup> Qur'ān, 15:21

<sup>9</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, vol 12, p. 143.

the existents in the natural world, for the human being who happens to be in it, are apparent and known—categories such as time, space, motion, dimensionality, etc. Thirdly, the descent of things starts from the Divinity and its first actual stage is from the treasure house that is closest to Him. It can be added that the particularity of this first stage or level, from which the descent takes place, is that it is unlimited and undetermined. This is because the verse states that the Divine descension and sending down is by certain measures and determinations. So, the predetermined existents, at their outset, are not only free of all of the faults and imperfections of the natural order, but are also beyond all types of measures and delimitations. The latter occur only after the process of descent towards the natural world begins.

The above quoted verse accords with the explanation that “determining” (*taqdīr*) is a stage that lies between the level of the treasure houses (*khazā'in*) and the natural world. In line with such an interpretation of this verse, three overall stages of descent can be spoken of when discussing the descent of existents into nature.

First, is the stage of the treasures (*khazā'in*). The definitive feature of this level is that the things in it lack a particular measure or limit and exist in a non-delimited fashion. Second, is the stage of the determining (*taqdīr*). This level, though free of temporal and spatial limits and their corollaries, such as gradual change and movement, is nonetheless given to certain measures and amounts. The realistic phenomena of the dream-state correspond to this level of being. This is so because, though they have specific measures and a degree of dimensionality, they are neither limited by time nor by the other limitations of the natural realm—being free from the vicissitudes of the latter. Third, is the stage of the natural and physical world. In addition to dimension and quantity, the things in the natural world are subject to other limitations specific to this realm.

## V. The Stages of Ascent

Just as the verse quoted above alludes to the stages of descent, there are other verses that mention the stages of ascent of things in general, and the ascent of man—from nature to God—in particular. Verses such as,

وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

and beyond them is an isthmus, to the day they are raised.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Qur'ān, 23:100

The verse specifies three general levels in the stages of ascent from the level of man to the Divine: First, there is the stage of the natural world (*ṭabīʿat*), in which the addressees of the verse are situated. Second exists the stage of the intermediary world or isthmus (*barzakh*), which is the stage that (temporarily) supersedes man and continues until the next, third stage. Third is the stage of the day of Resurrection (*yawm al-baʿth*), which is the final stage and the one in which men are summoned into God's presence.

In the mentioned verse, the second stage forms the middle-ground between this world and the Resurrection and is called the intermediary world or isthmus precisely because of its mediating function.

Muslim thinkers, in deliberating upon the above-mentioned verses of the Qurʾān as well as on certain related traditions, and by availing themselves of both the methods of mysticism and discursive philosophy, have put forward arguments and proofs for the stages of descent and ascent of the world and man. The Peripatetic philosophers have, in their turn, set up proofs for the two stages of ascent and descent. They call the world that is free of measures and amounts the “world of intellects”, and the one that is dependent on it the “world of nature”. They have, however, been unable to prove the existence of the middle ground between the natural and intellectual orders. The mystics or *ʿurafā*, on the other hand, have reported in their visions a world similar to that found in traditions; a world where things have measures and quantities but are not material.<sup>11</sup> In both Transcendental Philosophy<sup>12</sup> (*Ḥikmat al-mutaʿāliyah*) and the Illuminationist school<sup>13</sup> (*maktab al-ishrāqī*), the existence of this middle world has been proven.<sup>14</sup>

## VI. The Stages of the World

The discussions above point to the existence of three general stages in the world. Man and the world pass through these three stages in their arc of descent from the highest level –from which the arc of ascent begins—to the lowest, and they continue to traverse the three stages of the arc of ascent, back to their origin.

The three stages in these two arcs of ascent and descent—depending upon the perspective in question—are known by various names. The first stage, in its being the source and store of all things descended from it, is known as the treasure house (*khazāʿin*); in its role as the corrector of the faults and

<sup>11</sup> Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Mutaʿāliyah*, vol. 7, p. 257.

<sup>13</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, p. 352.

<sup>14</sup> Aṣhtiyānī, *Sharḥ Muqadameh Qayṣarī*, p. 483.

imperfections of the lower levels, is known as the *jabarūt*. *Jabarūt* literally means omnipotence and power. This first level is also known as the Guarded Tablet (*lawḥ mahfūz*) because of both its constant and unchanging nature and the fact that the reality of all things is kept safe and guarded in it. This stage or world is known by other names also, such as the world of decree (*qaḍā*), the world of intellects (*uqūl*), the world of ideas (*muthul*), and the world of immaterial essences. Seen from the arc of ascent, it is also called the Greater Resurrection (*qiyāmat al-kubrā*).

The second stage, which mediates between the other two stages, is by the same token, called the isthmus (*barzakh*) and because it has some measures and quantities (despite its immaterial nature), it is called the world of measure or decree (*qadr*). Now, due to its sovereignty over the natural and corporeal world and kingdom, it is called dominion (*malakūt*). Other names include: the imaginal world (*mithāl*), contiguous imagination (*khiyāl al-muttaṣil*), non-contiguous imagination (*khiyāl al-munfaṣil*), the Tablet of Negation and Affirmation (*lawḥ al-maḥw wa al-ithbāt*), and finally the Lesser Resurrection (*qiyāmat al-ṣuḡhrā*). These names pertain to the whole or parts of the second stage where it is seen from different perspectives.

The third stage is the natural world (*ālam al-ṭabīʿat*), and is also known as the material (*mādī*), kingdom or corporeal (*mulk*), visible (*shahādah*) and lower (*dunyā*) world.

Now, every level or stage is termed “visible” relative to the levels above it and “unseen” in reference to the ones below. In this way, the natural world is absolutely visible and the Divine Essence, which transcends all levels and comprehends them, is the absolute and utterly unseen or inner. The worlds situated anywhere between these two extremes—even the first stage or world of the treasures—are according to their various aspects known as either visible or unseen.

The coming and going of things to and from this world in two arcs of descent and ascent—along with the names that are given to the stages of this movement—can be seen to be a cyclic movement. If these multiple states and levels of being were to be represented in a diagram of a pyramid, then the apex would be the Absolute Being; the first stage down would be the treasure house (also called *jabarūt*, divine decree, guarded tablet, the world of intellects, the world of ideas). The next stage would be the isthmus (also called dominion, measure, imaginal world). The last and bottom stage would be the natural world. In this hierarchal representation of being, all thing and realities—both simple and

composite—are seen to descend from God. Things such as iron are said in the Qur’ān to be “sent down”,

وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ

...and We sent down iron<sup>15</sup>

as well as the Qur’ān itself,

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment.<sup>16</sup>

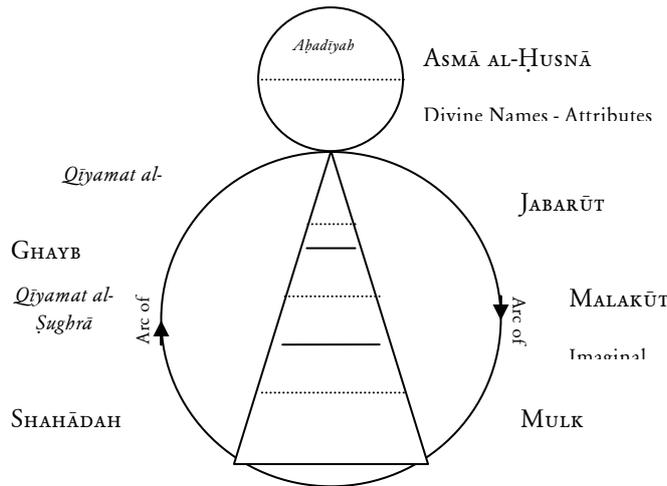


Diagram 1 – The Multiple States of Being in their Arcs of Ascent and Descent

## VII. Seven Heavens

Every higher level surrounds, envelops and comprehends the levels lower than it. Subsequently, every lower level falls under the dominion of the level above it. Every dominion—with respect to that which it encompasses and dominates—can be referred to as a “heaven” or “sky”. Correspondingly, every dominated realm—in comparison to its dominion—can be called an “earth”. In the same way that light and water descend from the sky to the earth of this lower and natural world, Divine Grace and Mercy is showered down from the spiritual skies and heavens to the realms below and the kingdom hereunder. Hence, the affairs of the earth are made and managed in heaven.

يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

He regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth...<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Qur’ān, 57:25

<sup>16</sup> Qur’ān, 97:1

<sup>17</sup> Qur’ān, 32:5

More precisely, it is possible to divide the tri-level stages above into further sub-stages, and in so doing, arrive at a number of heavens and earths that fall into a precise vertical hierarchy. In this hierarchy, every heaven surrounds and comprehends the earth below it, while the divine heaven transcends them all. The Qurʾān says,

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ

and from beyond them, God is encompassing.<sup>18</sup>

The existence of levels as well as their division into three general stages, can be discursively proven. The sub-levels and the conditions that apply in them, on the other hand, are only made apparent to those on the mystical path by way of direct witnessing. The Prophet, God’s blessing be upon him and his progeny, in his Nocturnal Ascension (*miʿrāj*), passed through the seven heavens and the Qurʾān also speaks of seven heavens and seven earths:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ  
لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

It is God who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that God has power over all things, and that God comprehends all things in knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

In a tradition from Imām Riḍā,<sup>8</sup> upon him be Peace, he described sevenfold heavens and earths—one above the other.<sup>20</sup> Now, even if the number seven here is not a hyperbole signifying “multipleness”, it is certainly not taken from Ptolemaic astronomy, since in the latter, the heavens were seen to be crystalline spheres whose number was nine, and not seven. Moreover, Ptolemaic astronomy—regardless of its factuality or error—always concerns itself with the material world of bodies, while the heavens spoken of in the Qurʾān, pertain to all the levels and states of being, physical as well as metaphysical.

Muslim philosophers have conclusively proven the three general stages of the world<sup>21</sup> and have held that further specification is only possible by referring to the opinions of the mystics and visionaries, or alternatively, by way of conjecture and guessing.

Now, if each of the above mentioned three-fold stages were to be divided into two levels and their origin—the Divine Names and Attributes, which form the Divine Heaven—is also divided into the two states of *Aḥadiyyah* and

<sup>18</sup> Qurʾān, 85:20

<sup>19</sup> Qurʾān, 65:12

<sup>20</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol 19, p. 337.

<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*, p. 275.

*Wāḥidiyyah* (as the mystics have reported), then we find that there are in total eight levels or states. The highest of these levels—the Unitive Essence—transcends all things, and the lowest is the (bottom part) of the natural order.

Hence, the highest level is exclusively heaven, and is not an earth of any level whatsoever. Likewise, the lowest level is exclusively earth, and is not a heaven relative to any other level. Now, of the remaining six levels, each is a “heaven” with respect to the levels below it and is an “earth” in respect of those above it. In this way, seven heavens and seven earths can distinctly be spoken of. These seven heavens are spiritual heavens, not material or worldly skies. It can be said that they are the heavens of the world here-under—that is to say the natural world and all that it contains is “under” and encompassed by them. Now of course in this natural world itself, there exists a heaven (or sky) and an earth pertaining to it. The heaven that pertains to this world, and is contained in it, is the very same sky that is seen by the naked eye, and the same one that is decorated by the stars. The Qur’ān says of this sky,

إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَكِبِ

Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars.<sup>22</sup>

The spiritual heavens that are, on the other hand, otherworldly, comprehend and encompass this material world, while not being characterized by the natural and corporeal order. It is for this reason that the means of arriving at these heavens and returning from them is not a worldly or materialistic means or method.

The spiritual heavens are such that the disbelievers and the arrogant cannot approach them. The Qur’ān speaks of those for whom the gates of heaven are shut and never opened:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا لَا تُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابُ  
السَّمَاءِ

Indeed, those who deny Our signs and are disdainful of them -the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them...<sup>23</sup>

Now, because the management of the earth is by way of the heavens, and the earthly bounties are sent from above, the opening of the gates of heaven and the descent of heavenly grace is tantamount to the opening up and multiplication of these earthly bounties. Hence, God gives the glad tidings to the believers in this way:

<sup>22</sup> Qur’ān, 37:6

<sup>23</sup> Qur’ān, 7:40

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ

If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth...<sup>24</sup>

### VIII. Two Motions

Man and the other existents of the natural world undergo an additional type of displacement and change, that is, other than their mere physical movements. This type of change does not take place in the natural and physical world, but rather, is the very result of entry into, and departure from, this world.

The descent of all things from the divine stores and treasures, above, to the natural world, here below—and likewise, the fall of man from paradise to this earth—is not a downward movement that has as its origin a physical place and that passes through physical space to terminate at just another point in this very same physical and natural order. This is because the origin of this descent is metaphysical and its destination is physical. The intervening distance is such that it is bordered by the spiritual heavens on one end, and by the natural world on the other. For this reason, in measuring this motion, space and time—which compose the necessary conditions of all motion and phenomena in the natural physical order—are of no consequence. The space and time of this world are themselves phenomena that appear only after the descent and at the end of the line, so to speak. By the same token, the ascent towards the Divine is neither physical in character, nor can it be compared to any upward motions in the natural world.

The difference between ascent and descent in the physical world is arbitrary and depends on the point of reference used. For instance, if a moving object has the centre of the earth as its point of reference, any motion towards this point is called “descent” and away from it “ascent”. As an example, someone who has made the earth his point of reference will label any motion towards the moon as an “ascent”. But if the point of reference is changed, and say the moon is now chosen to be the point, then any motion towards the moon becomes a “descent” and away from it an “ascent”. It is precisely because all corporeal entities in the physical world are “horizontally” coexistent and collateral that there is not a real and absolute measure to discern ascent and descent. Ascending and descending motions relative to the natural world itself, though, do have a real difference and

<sup>24</sup> Qurʾān, 7:96

point of reference; the latter being independent of any particular case. Hence a thing that is in descent is all the while losing and giving up its transcendent and spiritual dimensions, and one in ascent, is entering higher worlds of meaning.

In a descent into the natural world, the distance covered is neither natural nor worldly. An ascent from the natural world also does not involve a physical or worldly type of distance. In other words, the journey that man makes in the arcs of ascent and descent is not in space-time. It is rather, a journey **into** space and time, and an escape **from** them. In short, a journey from and to space and time is quite different from a journey within space and time.

The way, path and means of a journey of ascent in the physical world is different from the way, path, and means of a journey from the confines of the physical world. God's throne is beyond the heavens and, hence, when Imām 'Alī,<sup>9</sup> upon him be Peace, was asked about its distance from the place where he stood, he said, "From the place of my feet to my Lord's throne, is that a person sincerely says 'There is no god but God'"<sup>25</sup>

So, if ascent into the physical sky is by material and natural means, an ascent into the spiritual heavens takes place by virtue of faith, knowledge and sincerity.

The next two sections will apply themselves to some of the special characteristics and conditions of the movement and journey of man and the world, from the Divine Treasures to the natural order, and then from this world back to the original abode.

## **Second Discourse: Descent and Manifestation**

### **I. Manifestation (*tajallī*) versus Displacement (*tajāfī*)**

Both man's journey to the natural world, and his consequent migration from it, are very different from his worldly travels in the corporeal world. Because our minds are accustomed to the journeys, ascents and descents that take place in the natural world, they tend to consider the descent into and ascent from this natural world in similar terms. Hence, it is prudent to pay special attention to the characteristics of physical ascents and descents prior to explaining their spiritual counterparts so as to be exactly aware of the differences between the two types. A comparison between physical and spiritual ascent and descent can help in preventing the many errors that the human mind and imagination are prone to in this regard. Because of the affinity of the human mind to the natural world it constantly attempts to impose the conditions of this world upon the other aspects

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<sup>25</sup> Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 10, p. 122

and dimensions of being. It is the intellect that, upon consideration of the particularities of the different cases at hand, keeps the imagination under control.

The first characteristic that becomes apparent concerning the descent of things into nature is that it is by way of “manifestation” (*tajallī*). Conversely, descents in the physical world are characterised by “displacement” (*tajāfī*). For a better understanding of the principle of manifestation, it is important that the concept and conditions surrounding displacement become well known. These pertain to the natural order and therefore are familiar. Only then can the points of divergence between manifestation and displacement be properly studied.

Whenever a body in the physical world descends from one place to another, the first place becomes empty of it. For example when a raindrop descends from a cloud or when a jewel is taken from a treasure vault, the cloud or vault becomes less to exactly the extent of one drop or jewel respectively. It matters not how large and great the cloud or treasure is, though it may be very large it becomes less by just that one-drop or jewel. This emptying of the cloud and vault is the defining characteristic of displacement (*tajāfī*).

In the descent by manifestation (*tajallī*), on the other hand, the descent of a thing does not cause any diminution or deficiency in the origin of descent. For example, in the reflection of a person in a mirror, and despite the real existence of the image of the person in the mirror, nothing is taken from the person himself and he is not any less than he was to begin with. Now, of course this is just an example and it could easily be said that in the forming of the image of the person rays of light or the like are taken from him and he is to this extent reduced. Despite such a remark, the example and the principle that it represents stand true, as it is clear that the example is not to be taken to its final limits. Now to be exact, in the final analysis there is actually no difference between the example and what it represents. This is because what are perceived to be the causes for the formation of the reflected image—things such as light, reflective surface, glass, mercury, angle of reflection, etc—are nothing but supplementary causes and agents that facilitate the appearance and manifestation of the image of the person. The person (i.e. the object being reflected) maintains its integrity irrespective of any such considerations and is not composed of these things which are supposed to form it.

Another and perhaps more graphic example that can be given for descent by *tajallī* consists of the mental forms or concepts that man forms in his imagination. For instance, prior to bringing a picture of, say, a lemon to mind, the person in question must have had knowledge of lemons. If he did not have this knowledge, then he could never picture a lemon simply by hearing its name.

This implies that, prior to mentally picturing the lemon, he did not have a distinct knowledge of it and the knowledge of the lemon resided with the knowledge of all the other things that he knows in a non-distinct form in his repository of knowledge.

This repository, which contains knowledge in a united and non-distinct fashion, is known as cognition (*malakat al-'ilmī*). The existence of this repository-cum-faculty makes a person who possesses it in a given field, a master of that field—capable of expert opinion and a specialist in his own right. A medical doctor who has a particular speciality, for instance knows his speciality in all states, even when he is asleep or not thinking about anything in particular. It is the “active” nature of his knowledge base that makes it possible for him to immediately bring to mind the particular cure for any ill person that he observes and then to transfer this to others by way of speech or by written text. This imagining and picturing in the mind of a cure is another example of descent by *tajallī* precisely because he forms the idea or picture of the cure by using that which exists in his knowledge base, without thereby reducing anything in that base. Any given fruit or the appropriate cure and medicine for a disease that come to the mind of a person, though not externally existent, partake in a type of existence that can rightly be called “imaginal” or noetic. The watering of the mouth when imagining a lemon or the writing of a prescription when thinking of a medicine are some of the real effects of imaginal or mental knowledge.

A fruit or a cure, both of which also exist mentally, actually descend from their imaginal origin—that is to say they are manifested from man’s repository of knowledge. This is because the cognition of the doctor or the knowledge base of someone who knows fruits is neither altered nor diminished in the least during and after the picturing and imagining. If this were not the case and some type of change took place in the knowledge base or cognition of the person imagining an object—implying a descent by *tajāfī* of the idea from the repository of knowledge to the mind—then the general and undifferentiated knowledge of a thing would cease to exist after its distinct and particular conception.

The above examples, when a rigorous attention to detail and exactness is not demanded, more than suffice to represent the idea of descent by *tajallī*.

Many Islamic source materials simultaneously give credence to the stability and inexhaustible nature of the Divine Treasures and deny that any emptying or displacement takes place during a descent from them. For instance, in *Du‘ā al-iftitāḥ* God is addressed in the following way: “the open-handed Granter of good

Who's bounties and treasures are not diminished and Who's abundance of giving increases Him in nothing but goodness and generosity.”<sup>26</sup>

In the everyday prayer of the month of Rajab that is read after the daily prayers, the following expression is to be found: “O God! Grant me all the goodness of this world and all the goodness of the next. Keep from me all the evil of this world and the evil of the next. For surely that which You give is never diminished.”<sup>27</sup>

Now, if Divine bestowal and munificence should cause the Divine treasures to be lessened, or in other words, if the descent of things from the treasures should be by *tajāfī*, then whenever God gives all of the good of this world and of the next to a single individual, two related problems arise: The act would completely exhaust the treasuries of good, and subsequently, make it impossible to give anything else of good to others.

If, however, the said descent should be by *tajallī*, then these problems are avoided. In the first place, even after all of the good of the heavens and the earth is given to a person, the Divine Treasures are not reduced in the least. In the second place, there remains the possibility that a second person who joins in the prayer is also given all the good of the two worlds—all out of His grace and munificence.

*Tajallī* is a term that has been used in the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth*. God has said in the Qurʾān,

فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا

...So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He levelled it, and Moses fell down swooning...<sup>28</sup>

In other places in the Qurʾān, there are similar references to the crumbling and destruction of whole mountains. For instance in the chapter *Ḥashr* we read,

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ

Had We sent down this Qurʾān upon a mountain, you surely would see it humbled and rent asunder, out of the fear of God.<sup>29</sup>

Both this rending asunder of the mountain and its crumbling in the account of Moses are due to a single cause. This is because the Qurʾān is a reality in which God has manifested Himself—by an effusion or self-disclosure—and hence the descent of the Qurʾān upon a mountain is tantamount to His manifestation upon

<sup>26</sup> Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī, “Du‘ā al-iftitāḥ” in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

<sup>27</sup> Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī, “Ad‘iyat shahr al-Rajab” in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

<sup>28</sup> Qurʾān, 7:143

<sup>29</sup> Qurʾān, 59:21

it. God's manifestation—just as in the theophanic episode of Moses—makes the hardest and most durable of earthly phenomena to crumble and fall apart as if it was nothing.

Imām 'Alī (upon him be Peace), speaking about God's *tajallī* in the Qur'ān, has said: "And He manifested Himself to them in His book."<sup>30</sup> In the *Nahj al-balāghah*, the Imām praises God for His manifesting Himself to His creation by saying, "All-praise be to God, the Manifested for His creation by His creation."<sup>31</sup> Hence, it can be concluded that it is not only the idea of *tajallī* but also the word itself, in its various derivative forms, which appears in various Islamic texts and resources to clarify the relationship that man and the other created beings have with God.

The descent of things from the Divine Presence, through the intermediary stages and levels and until their final destination here in the natural order, forms one single continuum. Moreover, just as the verse of "...and We do not send it down but in a known measure"<sup>32</sup> alludes to, the integrity of these levels is maintained during the descent. That is to say, the Divine Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) initiates its descent in the Divine Heaven to the treasures and the invincible world (*jabarūt*), continuing to the isthmus and the world of measures, and from there, manifesting itself finally in nature and the corporeal world. If it were otherwise, and God's majesty or the reality of the Qur'ān that is with Him were to directly manifest themselves in this lower world, then there would remain no place for the manifestation of the other existents and inhabitants of the natural and imaginal worlds. In such a case, not only the Mount of Ṭūr, but even the place of the first Qur'ānic revelation—the Mount of Nūr—would be rent asunder and all that which is to occur on the Day of Resurrection would become apparent. On this Day, all mountains are to be razed to the ground, for the Qur'ān says:

وَسَيَّرَتِ الْجِبَالَ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا

and the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage.<sup>33</sup>

## II. Continued Presence (*tadāwum al-ḥuḍūr*)

The second particularity of the descent of things from the invincible realm of the Divine Treasures to the spiritual domain of the isthmus, and then, to the

<sup>30</sup> *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 147.

<sup>31</sup> *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 108.

<sup>32</sup> Qur'ān, 15:21

<sup>33</sup> Qur'ān, 78:20

corporeal and natural world, is that the object of descent never leaves the real presence of the origin of descent. This is contrary to physical descents, in which the object must leave the origin for the descent to take place.

A raindrop that falls from a cloud and into an eaves-trough is in a place that the cloud is not. The precious jewel that is taken from the vault and now dangles upon the person of a paramour is no longer in the vault. Similarly, the raw material of a production line that becomes a finished product and is put on the market is not to be found in the warehouse.

These are all examples of the second particularity. The latter differs from the first particularity in that, in the first, the emphasis was on the loss and depletion of the source of descent, and in the second, it is the limitation and absence of the origin of descent with respect to the place and destination of descent.

In the descent **to** the natural world as opposed to the descent **in** the natural world, the object of descent remains in the presence (*maḥḍar*) and under the dominion of the origin of descent. A good example of this is the concept that the soul, by recourse to its repository of knowledge, creates in the mind. In this case, even after it has further conceptualised the idea in detail, the initial idea remains known in general and present to the faculty from which it got its inspiration. It is clear in this example that there is no decrease in the faculty or repository of knowledge and there is no displacement of the conceptualised idea and it remains ever-present to the faculty in question. The presence and existence of the object of cognition is intimately linked to the presence and existence of cognition itself and its agent. This is so to the extent that if the soul—the agent of cognition—is even for a moment heedless of the concept and idea present in the mind, then the idea immediately ceases to be. Now, the things that descend from the dominion (*malakūt*) to the kingdom (*mulk*) are in a similar situation. They are “dominated” by the dominion, hence the name. The kingdom and all that is in it is conversely “owned” by and in the control of the dominion and ultimately the *Dominus*.

Even though it is true that, technically, the term dominion (*malakūt*) refers to both the isthmus and the imaginal world, in some cases it is also made to refer to the invincible world of the treasures (*jabarūt*). This is so precisely because of its role of comprehension of, dominion over, and ubiquitous presence with, the natural world and all the other worlds lower than itself.

The Qurʾān holds that all things have a dominion and then goes on to assert that the dominion of all things is in the power and control of God, the *Dominus*.

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things.<sup>34</sup>

### III. Limiting, Not Limited

The third particularity of the descent of things from the *jabarūt* to the *malakūt*, and from the *malakūt* to the *mulk*, is that the limitations of the descended thing do not necessitate any limitation in the origin of descent. In physical descents, however, the thing that descends always calls forward limitations in its origin and gives evidence of these same limitations.

The raindrop which has fallen from a cloud, despite its minuscule nature and even assuming that the descent was not by displacement, has certain perfections and attributes that the cloud itself lacks. The mountain spring from which water has gushed out for years on end, even though the flow has not noticeably become less, is nonetheless deprived of the perfections and qualities of exactly that amount of water which has flowed out from it. The driver who yesterday filled his petrol tank can tell how much petrol he has used up by the distance that he has travelled.

In the descent by manifestation, the limitations and qualifications of the origin do not accompany the object of descent. Hence, any given mental image that a person pictures in his mind cannot be said to indicate or qualify the limits of his faculty of knowledge. The proof of this third characteristic and particularity is, in actuality, the first two particularities of the descent by manifestation mentioned above.

So, the fruit that is envisaged in the mind is, firstly, not descended from the repository of knowledge by way of displacement (*tajāfī*) so as to create some deficiency in the origin or to give evidence to its imperfection. Secondly, it is not absent from the purview and presence of the origin so as to point out a place or state from which the origin of descent is missing or lacking.

The relationship of the *mulk* to the *malakūt* and the *jabarūt* is similar in the sense that phenomena of the natural and physical order do not delimit the higher metaphysical worlds in any way. This also applies to God Himself, as He is above all the worlds. It is the metaphysical realities and the Real Itself that manifests limited beings as well as their limitations through a process of self-

<sup>34</sup> Qur'ān, 36:83

disclosure. It is with reference to the origin of descent, then, that the perfections and qualities that the descended thing lacks come to be known.

In the prayer for the first day of *Rajab*,<sup>35</sup> God is described as the Limiter—the Setter of the limits of all things (*ḥāddu kulli maḥdūd*), meaning that it is God who reveals and causes all things to descend in particular measures and limits and the decree of all things is in His command. Hence, the measure and limits of any thing can only fully be known by a reference to the Divine Essence while nothing can delimit this Essence nor confine it to any definable realm.

#### IV. Manifestation of Unity

The fourth characteristic of the descent to nature is, in fact, a corollary of the previous three. To explain, the numerousness of emanations and descents by manifestation provides ample evidence for the greatness and majesty of the origin of descent. When things are sent down by way of manifestation and effusions, the manifold aspects and dimensions of the source and agent of manifestation become better known. In the descents that occur within the physical world, on the other hand, the greater the number of things sent or produced from a source, the more the source is diminished.

All things in the natural order are transitory and perishable. As any thing in the corporeal realm ages, it declines and comes nearer to its non-existence. The Qurʾān says:

وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ

And he whom We lengthen in age, We reverse him in creation...<sup>36</sup>

It is for this reason that the more years that a mine has been in operation, the greater is the fear of it becoming depleted of ore. Similarly, reserves that have been drawn upon for a long time are accurately thought to be nearing their end.

Heavy usage of a physical object is generally considered to be a liability for it. On the contrary, less usage or its “newness” is considered to be an asset. However, if the descent in question is not in the physical world but from the meta-physical to the physical world—that is to say that it is by *tajallī* and not *tajāfī*—then the reverse holds. In this case, the more the origin of descent is “used”, the more apparent becomes its grandeur and sublimity.

<sup>35</sup> al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, “Shahr Rajab, Awwal Yawm min Rajab” in *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid*, p. 804.

<sup>36</sup> Qurʾān, 36:68

The person who is able to study a simple geometric shape and come up with hundreds of axioms and corollaries about it provides evidence for his powers of cognition and intellection. The more he is able to expand on in this study, the greater the depth and breadth of his knowledge. The situation of the physical and corporeal world is analogous to this. The greater the spread and scope of this world (*mulk*) and the more multiplicity it espouses, the greater appears the grandeur and depth of the spiritual world (*malakūt*), the invincible world of the Divine Treasures (*jabarūt*), and in fact, the Divinity Itself.

Now, it is for this very reason that on various occasions the Qurʾān has recounted the multiplicity and numerousness of nature, and in some other cases, has explicitly declared man’s impotence in being able to count the same.

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا<sup>37</sup>

If you enumerate God’s blessings, you will not be able to count them.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this statement from God about the innumerability of His bounties, He has referred to all of them as being signs, proofs, and evidences of Himself and His boundless treasures.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail at sea with profit to men, and the water that God sends down from the sky —with which He revives the earth after its death, and scatters therein every kind of animal and the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for a people who intellect...<sup>38</sup>

In his commentary on *Duʿā al-Sahar*, Imām Khumaynī<sup>10</sup> writes the following with regards to the phrase of prayer, *Allāhumma innī asʿaluka min ʿazamatika...*: “He is great in His essence, great in His attributes, great in His acts. And from the greatness of His act is known the greatness of the name presiding over it, and from its (i.e. the name’s) greatness is known the greatness of the Essence while it

<sup>37</sup> Qurʾān, 14:34

<sup>38</sup> Qurʾān, 2:164

(i.e. the name) is in its own capacity (and according to its own level and limits) one of the manifestations (and effusions) of it (i.e. the Divine Essence)".<sup>39</sup>

In the above mentioned text, Imām Khumaynī holds that the grandeur of God's acts and the greatness of His Names are the signs of the greatness of His Essence, due to the fact that they have emanated and descended by *tajallī* from Him. He continues on to discuss the great nature of the acts of God.

## V. Comprehensive Distinction

The fifth characteristic of the descent to the material world is that the difference and distinction between the descended thing and the origin of descent is what can be called a "comprehensive distinction" (*tamāyuz ihāfī*) and is one-sided. In a physical descent, however, the distinction is two-sided and the otherness is by separation. Two things can be said to be "distinct" from one another when one of them has an attribute or perfection that the other lacks. If all of the attributes that apply to one of the things applied to the other, there would be no distinction between the two and in fact they would be one thing. For example if all of the particularities of a given clock existed in a second clock—viz. mass, height, width, depth, colour, form, position...—then they would be indistinguishable in all their aspects and would really be one single clock.

Differences and distinctions that exist in physical things are always two-sided and are separative (*ʿazlī*). That is to say, each one of two material things, despite their points of commonality, contains aspects and particularities that the other does not have. This can be likened to two brothers who share common parents but mutually differ in many personal traits and characteristics.

A comprehensive distinction differs from a separative and two-sided distinction in that, in the former, it is only one of the two sides that contains the attributes and perfections that the second is lacking in.<sup>40</sup> This second side, then, does not have any characteristic that the first does not have. The set of whole numbers and levels of light are two examples of this type of distinction. In the sequence of whole numbers the numbers nine and ten, say, are distinct one from the other. The distinction lies in the quantity that exists in the number ten, but which the number nine is lacking in. This is because nine does not have anything that ten lacks or needs, whereas ten has everything that nine has plus something extra.

<sup>39</sup> Rūḥullah Khumaynī, *Sharḥ Duʿā al-Saḥar*, p. 33, line 9.

<sup>40</sup> ʿAbdullah Jawādī Āmulī, *Taḥrīr Tambid al-Qawāʿid*, p.122, 332.

Bright light is different from weak or dim light. But dim light cannot be said to “have” something that accounts for this difference. Now it can be argued that both dim light and the number nine **have** attributes that bright light and the number ten respectively don’t have. For it can be said that the number nine is “lower” or “less” and that dim light is “weaker”. But it must be noted that these attributions are reflective of a lack or need in the number nine or dim light, that is they are a result of what they “don’t have” and not what they “have”. This lack or weakness is only perceptible when compared to its opposite attribute. So, it is only by looking at the greater number or the stronger light—that exist in the number ten and bright light respectively—that one becomes aware of the lack of these qualities in the number nine and dim light. Hence, the reference point of attributes that result from an absence and negation of existential qualities is never found in the side that lacks them, but rather in the opposing, “fuller” side.

The above are two examples for the purposes of illustration only and their divergence, upon a strict analytic comparison, from the idea that they represent does not reduce the veracity of the idea in the least.

When the things that descend from the Divine Treasures to the isthmus and imaginal world and then to the natural and physical world are compared to their ideas and realities in the higher worlds, it becomes apparent that the distinctions are not two-sided ones and the differences are not ones resulting from separation. For these things, which have descended by *tajallī*—and even after their descent remain within the scope (*iḥāṭah*) of the origin and subsist in its continuous presence—do not possess anything that the origin lacks. On the other hand, the origin of descent has perfections that they do not. Now, if certain particularities such as ignorance or temporal and spatial limitations—exclusive to the material domain—are attributed to the lower levels, it must be understood that these attributes are not based on the positive and existential aspects of the lower levels. On the contrary, they arise from the aspect of imperfection, weakness, lack and need inherent within these levels. Hence, the fact that the higher levels do not contain these “negative” attributes in no way limits them from having one-sided comprehensive distinctions with the lower ones. Comprehensive distinctions are impossible only when each side contains aspects that are not in the scope of the other side, thus, preventing one from being totally present for the other.

The spiritual realities (*ḥaqāʾiq malakūti*), from which the material things of the natural world have descended, contain all the perfections of the lower levels. Because these higher realities are not bound by the limits and imperfections of material things, they encompass and comprehend them and are always present with them. God, Who is the origin and source of all manifestations and

effusions, is above all levels and states of being and hence comprehends and encompasses all things.

God's distinction from other existents is also a comprehensive distinction. This is because there is no possible existent which has a perfection that God does not, and which He does not encompass. It is due to this comprehensive distinction between God and all levels and states of being that He is not absent from any of them and is omni-present. The Qur'an says,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَهٌُ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَهٌُ

It is He who is God in the sky, and God on the earth...<sup>41</sup>

He is present in the heavens and the earth, without being of them or coloured by them and without being limited by any of their limitations. The heavens and the earth subsist by His being. The sky is the sky and the earth is the earth by His existence. He gives to all things their limits and definitions but is Himself free of all such things.

Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in his *Manzūma al-ḥikmah* mentions separative distinction and otherness and contrasts it to what he calls “attributive distinction” (*tamāyuz waṣfī*) —the latter being identical to the comprehensive distinction that was mentioned above. He takes the term “attributive distinction” to be derived from a saying of Imām ‘Alī, in which the Imām differentiated God from His creation. Mullā Sabzawārī<sup>11</sup> writes, “and one of the sayings of Amīr al-Mu’minīn Sayyid al-Muwaḥḥidīn ‘Alī (upon whom be Peace) is: To unify Him is to make Him distinct from His creation, and distinction is otherness in attributes not otherness by separation”.<sup>42</sup>

## VI. Absolute Unity

In the descent to nature, the origin cannot be put alongside the things that descend from it and be counted as though it were one of them. In a physical descent, on the other hand, because there is no *tajallī* at play and the descent is by *tajāfī*, the origin of descent can always be counted alongside the descended objects as making up one collection.

Every physical object in the natural world occupies a certain space and position. No two objects can ever exactly be located in the same space. Every physical object is juxtaposed by other objects and can be said to be “horizontal” to them.

<sup>41</sup> Qur'an, 43:84

<sup>42</sup> Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ Manzūmah*, p. 83

This rule applies to the origin of physical descents just as it does to the things that derive from it. It is for this reason that things in nature can always be counted alongside one another.

The particular number that is associated with any given item in a set of objects depends upon where the counting was initiated from and, thus, is arbitrary. As such, repeated counts may yield different numbers being associated to the objects in the collection. For example, in a set of three objects, the first one counted is the first of three, the second is the second of three and the third is of course the third of three. But if the order is changed and the second object from the first count is the starting point, all of the numbers change without any particular problem arising.

In the descent to nature, because the origin is comprehensively distinct to the things that descend from it, it encompasses them and is present with them wherever they happen to be. For example, if two things descend by way of *tajallī* from the origin, the encompassing nature of the origin means that the two things are not taken into account when the origin itself is regarded. In other words, when the perspective in question is centred upon the origin, all that has come from it remains in its perpetual presence and light and thus is virtually annihilated and reflects only the origin. But if, on the other hand, attention is paid to the two descended things, a multiplicity (or duplicity in this example) is observed. This, when further deliberated upon, results in the intellectual understanding that reality does not stop at these two things and that there is a third agent at play that could be nothing other than the origin of the two. At this point, if the third “thing” is considered, the “other” two things are no longer seen as being alongside it so as to be counted along with it.

When the perspective of multiplicity is taken into account and becomes the point of reference, descended things become distinguishable and the encompassing unity which surrounds them—not being of their level—does not add anything to their quantity. Now, because this unity and origin have been referred to above as the “third” thing, to prevent any misunderstanding, it must be said that it is not the third of a group of three but rather it is the “third” of a set of two.

The third of (a set of) three, as has been mentioned above, is an arbitrary attribute whose referent differs when the order is changed. The third of (a set of) two on the other hand, is a real attribute and remains the same regardless of the differing perspectives applied to the set. The “third of two” is an attribute then that is only given to a thing that encompasses and comprehends other things. The latter are never characterized by such an expression.

The comprehensive distinction of every level with respect to levels lower than it was seen to establish the higher level's presence in the lower levels. This cannot be taken to mean, however, that realities of the higher level are brought down to the level of the lower so as to be counted as one of the existents of that lower level. It is for this same reason that God, Who encompasses and is infinitely near to all things, can never be said to be on a par with them, nor can He ever be enumerated along with them. The Qur'ān echoes this truth by, on the one hand, emphasizing God's omni-presence and immanence, while on the other, refuting the idea that God is rank and file with other things and that He subsists alongside the things that have effused from Himself. The Qur'ān labels such ideas as polytheistic and designates their holders as disbelievers.

With regards to God's immanent presence in all things, the Qur'ān says:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

He is with you wherever you may be.<sup>43</sup>

About the blasphemy of counting God to be a thing among others the Qur'ān has this to say:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ

Surely they disbelieve who say 'Surely God is the third of the three'...<sup>44</sup>

In the Qur'ānic terminology God is not the third of three but rather the third of two, or the fourth of three, or the sixth of five.<sup>45</sup>

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ  
نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا آدْنَى مِنْ  
ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا

Have you not regarded that God knows whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth? There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth [companion], nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be....<sup>46</sup>

That is to say, wherever something exists, He also is present.

If God were the third of three, the fourth of four, the fifth of five, and the like, then He would be alongside the things that have come from Him and, hence, not present where they are. Now, it is because He is the third of two and the fifth of

<sup>43</sup> Qur'ān, 57:4

<sup>44</sup> Qur'ān, 5:73

<sup>45</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Sharāḥ al-Rabūbiyah*.

<sup>46</sup> Qur'ān, 58:7

four that the last part of the verse quoted above applies to Him, and because of this it is said “He is with them wheresoever they may be.”

From the vantage point of the Qur’ān, because the entirety of the universe has come from God by way of *tajallī*, He is the One who is with all existents in all states, yet can never be counted alongside any one of them and is Unique from them. He is a One for which a second cannot even be supposed (for multiplicity to be brought about after the supposition).

Because God is absolute, he has not bounds and delimitations. He comprehends all things and hence can never be put alongside them. His unity is not countable and numerical.

Imām ‘Alī (upon whom be Peace), said that “He is One without number.” This is because a thing that has a number to it can be more or less. Now to simply know that something exists says nothing about its quantity. But absolute existence is not like this. By the very nature of its absoluteness it can be said that it is one for which an “other” cannot exist.

The quality of unity cannot be separated from reality and from God’s existence, just as omni-presence, comprehensiveness, encompassment, and immanence cannot be negated from Him. With respect to Him there is no “other” so that this other should be His son or father. And again, for Him no “second” can be postulated so that it could be His like, associate or companion. These truths are only insignificant drops from the oceans of knowledge that the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* in the Qur’ān contains. “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Say, He, God is One. God is Absolute (*Ṣamad*). He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him”.

*Ṣamad* is a great invincible stone that contains no fissures or cracks whatsoever and is a sanctuary whose confines are impregnable to outsiders. Absolute unity (*wahdat al-ṣamadī*) is an all-pervading unity that leaves no room for empty spaces. The verses of the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* and the first verses of the chapter of *al-Ḥadīd*<sup>47</sup> in the Qur’ān indicate the presence of an all-inclusive, all-pervading, comprehensive unity in immanence with all things. There is a saying narrated from Imām Sajjād<sup>12</sup> (upon him be Peace) to the effect that God knew that in the latter days there would come a people who would be given to contemplation and rigorous thought, and hence, He revealed the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* and the first verses of the chapter of *al-Ḥadīd*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Qur’ān, 57:1-6

<sup>48</sup> Kulaynī, third ḥadīth of “kitāb al-tawḥīd, bab al-nisbah” in *al-Kaḥfī*, vol. 1, p. 91.

## VII. Descension and Emanation

In the descent of things from the Divine Treasures, descension always accompanies emanation (*ṣudūr*)<sup>49</sup> and creation. In the descents within the physical world, however, there is no talk of creation and the formation of a new thing—there is only a change in the spatial coordinates and position of the thing undergoing descent. Due to the fact that this physical displacement takes place in a certain time, all material existents necessarily have a temporal nature. The raindrop that falls from the cloud is exactly the same drop of water that it was before it fell from the cloud—its descent only entails its movement and displacement from the sky to the ground. As such, in any physical descension, the descending thing leaves an empty space in the origin after its departure from it and hence the descent takes place by way of *tajāfī*.

The existent which emanates from the boundless Divine Treasures by *tajallī* on the other hand—measured out in certain proportions in the isthmus and appearing finally in the material realm—is fashioned anew at every stage. This means that the physical reality of corporeal objects in relation to their imaginal existence in the isthmus, as well as the imaginal and spiritual form of the same in relation to its being in the Divine Treasures and the *jabarūt*, is new.

The natural and physical form of a thing is not the same as its imaginal (*malakūtī*) or its invincible (*jabarūtī*) form. A descent through these worlds is not just a matter of a change in place and time. Rather, the *jabarūtī* and *malakūtī* realities of a thing stay constant and unchanged on their own levels, but here, the form of the thing that has descended by *tajallī*, is new and different—a novelty of creation in its own right. It is for this reason that the Qurʾān, which holds God to be the Revealer and the source of descent of all things to nature, describes God as the Creator (*al-khāliq*) and Originator (*al-fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth.

*Fāṭir* is the nominative noun of the Arabic root F-Ṭ-R meaning the splitting or rending asunder of darkness by light, non-existence by existence. Hence, the *fāṭir* is the subject who first creates something. It is in this meaning that the exegesis of the Qurʾānic verse,

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

All praise be to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth,<sup>50</sup>

is that He created the heavens and the earth when before they did not exist. That is to say, His act of creating is not like that of an artisan who takes a material

<sup>49</sup> Implying origination and generation as well as emanation.

<sup>50</sup> Qurʾān, 35:1

object and by applying his skill, changes its form to yield “another” object. The nature of God’s creation is such that, without a precedent in the *malakūt* or the *mulk*, He makes things to descend from His treasures, and with every descent into a lower level, He manifests them there for the first time.

Regarding the innovative nature of God’s creative act, Imām ‘Alī (upon him be Peace) says, “He did not create things from primal materials, nor from eternal archetypes, but rather He created what He created....”<sup>51</sup>

### VIII. Illuminationist Relations

The eighth characteristic of the descent to nature is that the object of descent does not have an independent existence of its own. To explain, the thing that has descended is really nothing but a relation and nexus (*rabṭ*) with the origin of descent. Furthermore, any actuality and concrete existence that the thing in question can be said to have is accounted for solely by this relation and its nature. In a physical descent, on the other hand, the thing that undergoes descent by *tajāfī* continues to exist in its own right after the descent—in such a way that at this point the existence or non-existence of the origin of descent is of no consequence whatsoever.

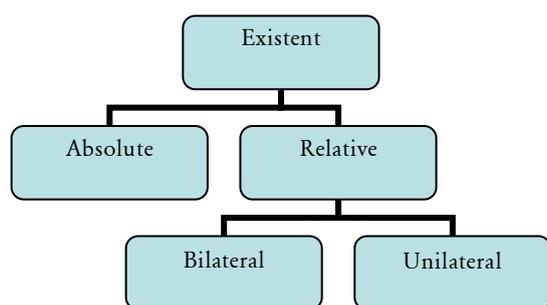
The dependent nature of things that descend by way of *tajallī* can be deduced from the previously mentioned characteristics of this type of descent. This is because this type of descent was seen to be by way of emanation, innovation and origination<sup>52</sup>. All of these meanings involve relations.

In an initial categorization, all existents can be divided into two groups, absolute (*nafsī*) and relative (*nisbī*). The latter can be further divided into two types, those whose relation is one-way and unilateral (or unipolar or uniaxial to be precise) and those whose relation is a two-way or bilateral. The bilateral relationship is termed, *idāfah maqūlī*, and the uniaxial one is called, *idāfah ishrāqī* (illuminative relation).

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<sup>51</sup> *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 163.

<sup>52</sup> The word “origination” in this chapter refers to the “originative act” and “originating”, and it is not to be taken in its meaning of “origin”. Tr.



A non-relative or absolute existent is one whose reality and meaning is for itself and not dependent upon another reality or meaning—as in the case of “man”. A relative existent, on the other hand, is one in whose meaning and conception there is implicit the idea of another reality. The actualisation of this relative existent then, depends upon the actualisation of the other.

The bilateral relation (*idāfah maqūlī*)—such as fatherhood, tallness, childhood, loving, etc —is not an absolute attribute or quality, but is, rather, a relative one. The meaning of “tallness” is dependent upon two sides that are called the two terms of the relation. These terms are realities which, when measured and compared against each other, give birth to the idea of “tallness”. For instance, when two men, two trees or two walls, are measured in height and the quantities duly compared, one of the two is given the relative attribute “tall” and the other “short”. Loving also needs two sides. In this relationship, both lover and beloved are required. The lover can be a man or any other sentient being, while the beloved could be God or any of His creatures.

In a bilateral relation, the existence of the relation is dependent upon the pre-existence of its two terms. Hence, it is impossible to postulate the existence of the former if one or both of the terms are absent. For example, it is possible for a man and the thing that he could love to exist without there being a relation of love existing between the two. However, it is not possible for the man to become a lover without there first being in place both himself—the man—and the object of his love.

The uniaxial relation (*idāfah ishrāqī*)—such as creation, origination, or emanation—is like the bilateral relation in that two distinct sides can be posited for it. The difference between the two is that the uniaxial relation, for its actualisation, depends on only one of the two sides or terms—the other term not really having an existence or actuality apart and separate from the reality of the relation itself. Hence, the external and concretely existing referent of this second term of the relation is none other than the relation itself.

The descent by *tajallī*, which was seen to be the emanation and origination of existents, is a uniaxial relation (*iḍāfah ishrāqī*). This is because conceptually it has the two sides—the originator and the thing originated or created—to make it a relation in the first place. Now, origination and creation do not occur without the existence of an originator and creator. Moreover, the creator can exist prior to the existence of the created being but the converse does not hold. The created being—emanated by *tajallī*—is actualised in the very process of creation and emanation. Hence, the second term of this relation cannot be prior to the first, or to the relation, and in fact is a part and parcel of the relation itself. This fulfils the conditions of a uniaxial relation.

In descents by *tajāfī*, the thing that descends exists prior to the actual descent. The descent only causes its position to change. Hence, in this case, both the object of descent and the origin of descent have concrete existences independent of the actual act of descent.

The descent of the corporeal world (*mulk*) from the dominion and spiritual world (*malakūt*), and the latter from the Divine Treasures, is also by *tajallī*. By means of this descent, the object of descent acquires its existence, essence and actuality, while God, by His bestowal of being, plays His part as its Originator and Creator. Hence, the *mulk*, not having actualisation of its own *a priori*—as does the Creator—has no concrete reality whatsoever prior to the act of emanation, descent and creation.

The reality of the natural world and the *mulk* is identical to divine emanation and creation, and it is by means of the latter that God manifests Himself in the created order. While a distinction can be made between the Creator and the act of creation—the former being in all respects prior to the latter—the same cannot be said of the created and the act of creation. The created and creation are really one single reality and any distinctions made between the two are merely mental concepts. In this type of relation, it is only the first term—the Creator or Originator in this case—which has priority over the relation itself; the second term—the created being—is identical to the relation (the relation of creation and origination in the example at hand). To repeat, the second term of the relation is the same as the relation to which it seems an adjunct. The first term of the relation is prior to the relation. Hence, the second term is posterior to the first.

The unity and identity that the uniaxial relation has with the second term of the relation means that, like the relation itself, the second term also lacks an independent existence and is an adjunct of and dependent upon the first term for its reality. Again, the originated and created is not a “thing” from beforehand for

the act of origination or creation to be attributed to it—in hindsight as it were. It is the very act itself.

It is due to the identity presiding between the created or originated on one hand, and the act of creation or origination on the other, that the Qur’ān has referred to the reality of man by the terms “origination of God” (*fiṭrat Allah*) or the “creation of God”.<sup>13</sup>

The Qur’ān says,

فَطَّرَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

the origination of God upon which man has been originated,<sup>53</sup>

directly implying that the reality of the originated is not different from origination itself. Now, origination was seen to have a relative and not an absolute meaning in which the idea of bond and nexus with the source and the first term was the defining theme. Thus, it can be concluded that man has a relative reality that only acquires a semblance of actuality, and in fact any meaning whatsoever, due to his relation with his Origin, God.<sup>14</sup>

Termining man the “origination of God” is an outstanding feature of the Islamic perspective. As such, it stands in opposition to the other familiar terms used to describe man. Terms such as “homo sapiens” and “homo faber” are absolute, non-relative terms that define man as an “independent” being in his own right.

*Fiṭrah* or origination is a special type of creation and man has been created upon nothing other than this special origination of God. Now, just as the creation of God is a uniaxial relation and connotes a relative meaning unrealisable without a bond and connection to the *axis mundi* that is God, man too is a relative being who has no reality whatsoever without this connection and bond with the Absolute.

Some of the verses of the Qur’ān speak eloquently of the bond and nexus that constitutes the substance and reality of man.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.<sup>54</sup>

The word “needy” in this verse comes from the Arabic root F-Q-R. Its singular is *faqīr*, literally signifying a person whose spine has been broken. Such a person can only hold himself up with the support of another. Similarly, man too

<sup>53</sup> Qur’ān, 30:30

<sup>54</sup> Qur’ān, 35:15

can only rise and subsist by taking the hand of God and being connected to Him. This connection and bond is man's very existence and actualisation. If man, in actuality, were not "needy", then he would have to be an independent existent, as there is no other logical possibility, and this is absurd. That man's neediness is a positive and existential quality for him can be seen in the prayer of Imām Ḥusayn<sup>15</sup> (Peace be upon him) in which he refers to it as a "having" rather than a "not having". He says, "O' God. In all that I own and have I am needy (and dependent upon You), so how can I not be needy (and independent of You) in my poverty."<sup>55</sup>

It is not only man whose existence is full of indigence and need. On the basis of what has thus far been covered, all that exists in the *mulk* and whatever subsists in the *malakūt* is deprived and needy and has the bond and tie with God at its crux. This is because God is not the Originator of man alone. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. All things turn to Him in their needs, as the Qur'ān says,

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

All that is in the heavens and the earth beseeches Him...<sup>56</sup>

He in His turn responds to them all for the above verse continues,

كُلُّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ

...and at every turn He is (in response) at work.

Imām 'Alī (Peace be upon him), also speaks of the continuous subsistence of all things by God. He says, "Everything is submissive to Him, and everything is subsisting by Him (*qāim bihi*)."<sup>57</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. A note on "anthropology" and its usage here is in order. The word "anthropology" comes from *anthrop-* + *-logia*, meaning the science of human beings. The word *anthropo* in Latin, and *anthrop* or *anthropo* in Greek and French means "human being". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists the second meaning of anthropology as the, "theology dealing with the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings". The word "anthropology" is not based on "anthropoid" or any other derivative meaning implying "ape", "monkey" or animal. The word "anthropoid" comes from the Greek *anthropooides*,

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<sup>55</sup> Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, "Du'a al-'Arafah" in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

<sup>56</sup> Qur'ān, 55:29

<sup>57</sup> *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 109

- meaning "resembling a human". The "-id" in this word is a patronymic suffix which means "one belonging to a (specified) dynastic line", eg. Abbasid. So "anthropoid" here means "the being belonging to the human line", or "human like". The interesting thing is that this would imply that the apes are from us and not vice versa—verifying the Islamic and traditional idea of the possibility of *maskh*, as alluded to in the commentaries of verse 2:65 of the Qur'an and traditions from authoritative sources. Modern and scientific anthropology is usually divided into the two disciplines of physical and cultural anthropology. Philosophical anthropology is a newcomer, appearing at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this work, the author is attempting to show how all of these modern disciplines are deviations and truncated forms of the original "religious" anthropology. The latter is sometimes "posthumously" referred to as "spiritual anthropology" and is the intent of the author here in almost all cases where the word "anthropology" is used without a preceding adjective. Tr.
2. This refers to the formation of the discipline known as "scientific anthropology".
  3. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher who has been called the father of modern philosophy. He radically distinguished between the mind, which he perceived as indubitable, and the body (or matter in general), which he explained on the basis of purely mechanistic principles. The axiom *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") is his most famous formulation.
  4. Georg Hegel (1770-1831), German idealist philosopher who developed a dialectical scheme that emphasized the progress of history and ideas from thesis to antithesis and thence to a higher and richer synthesis. He is quoted as having said, "The rational is the real."
  5. *Tawhīd* is the fundamental principle and forte of the Islamic tradition. It includes the idea of the unicity of the Godhead as well as the principial unity of all Being in both its transcendental and immanent modalities. There is no exact equivalent for this term in English. "Monotheism" will be used to refer to *tawhīd* in some cases but in general the word will be left in its transliterated form. Tr.
  6. The word "comprehend", or its derivatives, will be used throughout to designate the translation of *ih̄tāḥ*, so as to allude to the greater scope of this Arabic word than its usual English translation of "encompass". Tr.
  7. Translations of Qur'anic verses have been mostly adapted from the recent translation by Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī titled *The Qur'an with an English Paraphrase*. Tr.
  8. 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (765-818), upon him be Peace, after the martyrdom of his father, Mūsā ibn Ja'far, he became the eighth Imām of the Shī'ah. The conflict and jostling for power between the two sons of Hārūn—viz. Amīn and Mā'mūn—afforded him an opportunity to teach and propagate similar to the one found by Imām Ṣādiq in his time. Hence, many of his discussions and dissertations on matters of belief and theology have been recorded and have survived for posterity. Most of the Sufi tariqahs in the Islamic world trace their chain of authority and grace to the Shī'ah Imāms through Imām al-Riḍā. He was martyred at the hands of an Abbasid caliph and is buried in Mashhad, Iran.
  9. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600-661), upon him be Peace, the first man to believe in the Prophet, upon him and his Progeny be Peace. The Prophet called him the gate of knowledge and chose him to be his trustee. Ibn 'Arabi held that the Imām was the closet of all people to the Prophet, the pinnacle of the universe and the esoteric reality of all the prophets of God. Ibn Sina wrote about him saying that he was amidst the companions of the Prophet just as the intellect is amongst sensible things. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd traces all the fields of knowledge in the Islamic world back to the Imām. The book, *Nahj al-balāghah*, contains some of the Imām's letters, speeches and words of wisdom. This book, being a great source of knowledge of the Unicity of God as well as of sociological matters, comes second to only the Qur'an in its effects upon Islamic culture. All Muslims are united in acknowledging the Imām's position and worthiness as a Caliph and successor to the Prophet; they are not united however in the case of others and are divided into the two main sects of Sunni and Shī'ah.
  10. Sayyid Rūḥullāh al-Mūsawī al-Khumaynī (1902-1989), known as *Imām Khumaynī*, mystic, philosopher, jurispudent, and the most outstanding Islamic political figure in contemporary history. He lived at a time when Islam (and Shī'ism) found itself on the far periphery of the political and military paradigm established by the West and, being culturally weakened, was on the verge of internal collapse. Witnessing this state of affairs, Imām Khumaynī ardently applied himself to learning and acquiring the Islamic sciences in a comprehensive manner. By embarking upon the Path—in all of its mystical, moral and practical dimensions—he activated and became the very embodiment of the Islamic and Shī'i heritage that he carried. In his capacity as the *Marja'* (Supreme Religious Authority) of the Shī'ah of his time, and making use of the potentials that existed in the Shī'ah culture of Iran, he guided the Islamic Revolution of Iran to its eventual victory and thus introduced the Islamic world as a new player on the scene and as a pole of civilisation to the West. Some of his mystical writings include *Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāyah fī sharḥ al-Khilāfah wa al-Wilāyah*, *Sharḥ e Du'ā al-Saḥar*, *Asrār al-Salat* and marginal notes on both the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabi and *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns* of Ibn Fannārī. His *Kitāb al-Bay'*, in five volumes, is one of his works on jurisprudence. His lessons on jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence have also been published.
  11. Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (1797-1878), one of the greatest commentators of Ṣadrā's philosophy who by his profound thoughts and teachings played a decisive role in the defence and dissemination of Islamic philosophy and culture at the critical juncture in Iranian history which was witness to the encroachment of western ideas. His comprehensive work, *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah* gained wide acceptance

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and became a standard philosophical text. The section on metaphysics of this book has been translated into English by T. Izutsu and M. Mohegheh. Sabzawārī was also the author of such books as *Asrār al-Ḥikmah* and a commentary on the *Mathnawī* of the famous Persian poet Rūmī.

12. ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (659-713), upon him be Peace, the fourth Imām of the Shī‘ah who, after the martyrdom of his father and during the reign of the Umayyad caliphs, became the spiritual and temporal leader of the Shī‘ah. He was the epitome of worship and piety. The political situation in his time did not allow him to openly promulgate Islamic teachings and hence he opted to compose prayers and supplications which indirectly served this purpose. The *Ṣaḥīfah Sajjādiyyah*, is a compilation of some of his supplications. This book has also been called the “Psalms” of the Family of Muḥammad and its place in the Islamic universe is like that of the Psalms in the Bible.
13. The word “creation” in English already has the dual connotations of both the act of creating and the end product or result of it. Here the author is attempting to show a similar linguistic link between *fiṭrah* and *maṣṭūr*, but the argument in this case, based primarily on Qur’anic exegesis and the philosophical discussions of the preceding pages, goes beyond the realm of language and carries with it metaphysical implications of the first order. Tr.
14. From the above explanations it can be seen that the usual translation of the word “fiṭrah” as “nature” can be problematic.
15. Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (626-680), upon him be Peace, the son of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭimah, and the grandson of the Prophet. The Prophet would refer to him as “the leader of the youth of heaven” and as “the ship of salvation”. After the consolidation of the Islamic state and its relative security from external dangers, internal deviations and aberrations in the Caliphate appeared. Imām Ḥusayn took a stand against these innovations and refused to swear allegiance to the Umayyad caliph, Yazīd. In consequence, he, along with more than seventy other men—friends and family of the Prophet—was martyred on the plains of Karbala in 680. His martyrdom had profound and lasting effects on the Islamic world and the history and culture of the Shī‘ah. Imām Ḥusayn, upon whom be Peace, is the third Imām of the Shī‘ah.