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Āyatullāh Muḥammad ‘Alī Taskhīrī, Director

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P.O. Box 15875-6995 Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Telephone +98 21 88822532, +98 251 7755464

Fax +98 21 88321616

www.taghrib.ir/english

altaqrib@gmail.com

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§ PLACES OF CONFLUENCE ~ Muslim Communities the World Over

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Editorial

The recent popular uprisings in many parts of the Muslim world took almost everyone by surprise. The immediate causes of the wide-ranging protests and civil resistance in these countries are a matter of much discussion and debate. Theories ranging from the purely materialistic and economic to the metaphysical and religious—with a number of conspiracy theories in between—have been put forth as the probable causes of these revolutions-in-the-making. Wikipedia’s claim that “the demonstrations were precipitated by high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, a lack of freedom of speech and other political freedom and poor living conditions,” can be taken to be the general consensus of Western observers. On the other end of the spectrum is the message coming from Iran that the revolts signify an “Islamic awakening.” What can conclusively be said is that these two perspectives are not as diametrically opposed as they appear to be.

There is no doubt that the uprisings were at some point fuelled by domestic concerns and matters related to bread-and-butter. But the fact that they threaten to destroy the support for Israel—the holy-grail and supreme idol of Western contrivance—signifies a depth and dimension that belies any materialistic paradigm and underlines the reality that man does not live by bread alone.¹ On the one hand the despots and monarchs that ruled these Muslim peoples plundered their wealth and kept them in dire poverty, hence the valid economic grievances. On the other hand, the people in question are self-respecting Muslims who could no longer accept the humiliation and abasement implicit in the full support that their governments gave to Israel and its genocidal campaign against their brethren in Palestine. But is the former reason enough to label these uprisings as ‘secular,’ or, for that matter, is the latter a sufficient cause to call them ‘Islamic’?

The ‘Islamic’ nature of any movement can be assayed in a number of ways and from different perspectives. The material cause of any movement involves its human participants and their basic cultural mores. In the case at hand, the vast majority of the people taking part in the uprisings are downtrodden Muslims who identify with Islam on some level, both seeking their self-respect as well as their economic rights from this identity. The

¹ The Bible says: “Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.” Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4.

formal cause, on the other hand, comes from the worldview and depth of understanding embodied by the leaders of the movement. In this regard the Western media has told us time and time again that it was the young, educated secular activists who initially propelled the “nonideological” revolutions. The upwardly mobile youth tweeted their way towards an awareness of their state of political repression and came to “understand” the imperativeness of freedom. In their newfound worldview, it was the inalienable rights of the majority, and the power that comes with numbers, that called for such socio-political activity. While the aspirations of these youth to become free from oppression are hailed by all religions, including Islam, they cannot be labelled as ‘religious’ or ‘Islamic’ simply on that account. This is because freedom is never absolute and any “freedom from” is always accompanied by an “attachment to.” Religion ultimately endorses a freedom from falsehood and the people of falsehood when it naturally leads to an attachment to the truth and the people of truth. If freedom is followed by a vacuum of vision and the absence of any real doctrine or ideology based on the truth, it can only be falsehood that can come to fill the vacuum. This is precisely the correlate of the Qur’anic principle:

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ ۗ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا

And say, ‘The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed falsehood is bound to vanish.’ (17:81)

It would appear that in the case of the uprisings, the truth did not come in an active way and with any real substance. It could be that the necessary vision and discernment of the truth was lacking, or that the will and courage to implement it was just not there. In some cases it was clearly for fear of the Empire and its vociferous media machinery that the Islamists withheld from presenting their position, or vacillated between it and the liberal dogma that the media likes to hear. As the movements develop and mature, the absence of principled Islamic leadership is clearly and painfully visible for one and all to see, not least the agents of the Empire who are even now actively working to coopt the popular revolts.

Such a state of affairs has led some analysts to paint these movements as struggles for independence and dignity, à la democracy and modern human rights. They hold that the closest parallel to the uprisings are the changes that occurred last decade in Latin America, where people had enough of their place as pawns in the struggles of others and started to push for de-

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mocracy and their own voice. The pundits continue by observing that today, increasingly Latin America is moving in its own direction, as will the Arab nation if allowed by others, in particular the Empire, to sort out their own issues (a hypothetical scenario which would include the US withdrawing its bases from Muslim lands and refraining from funding its friendly tyrants and monarchs).

To assay the recent events from yet another perspective with the hopes of shedding further light on the realities at hand, it can be said that the “friendly tyrants” mentioned above are “friendly” on two counts. They are, of course, the “friends” and vassals of the lords of the Empire, who love them in much the same way as plantation owners in the Old South held affection for their slaves, as long as they were obedient, respectful, and subservient. But they are “friendly” in another way as well. To explain: according to Plato’s depiction of the decline of political systems from the ideal republic in which the Philosopher-king rules, by sequential degenerations through the stages of aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny, the present “tyrants” in the Muslim world would fall under the tail end of the stage of oligarchy. The oligarchy is giving way to a proper democracy and the latter, on the verge of transforming into an unprincipled anarchy, will lead to the actual stage of tyranny. Hence, this Platonic way of looking at things would conclude that the present “tyrants” pale in the face of the actual tyrants to come, and the former are, relatively speaking, “friendly” harbingers of the latter! ²

Yet another perspective is that of eschatology, in particular the Messenger of Allah’s (ﷺ) prophecies with regards to his Ummah and its political transitions. One prophecy from Sunni sources delineates the decline and degeneration of the Ummah, and its ultimate restitution as follows:

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: **Prophethood** will preside amongst you for as long as Allah wills, and Allah will remove it when He wishes to remove it; then the **khilāfah** in the way of the prophethood will preside amongst you for as long as Allah wills, and Allah will remove it when He wishes to remove it; then a **clinging kingdom** [or

² This is not to deny the real and actual despotism of the kings and oligarchs recorded in history, nor is it to negate the insidious oppression of liberal-democracies, but rather, the intent here is to underscore the fact that this degeneration of intellectual thought naturally devolves into an unprincipled and immoral order where nothing but brute force and might rule. Or to put it differently, the inner and hidden oppression (of the truth) gives way, in successively more intense stages, to an outer and apparent manifestation of it in the form of a martial tyranny.

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'biting/tormenting kingdom' [ملكاً عاضاً] will preside amongst you for as long as Allah wills, and Allah will remove it when He wishes to remove it; then an **oppressive kingdom** [ملكاً جبرية] will preside amongst you for as long as Allah wills, and Allah will remove it when He wishes to remove it; then the **khilāfah** in the way of the prophethood will preside amongst you; then he became silent.³

Another narration is as follows:

قال النبي (ص): سيكون بعدي خلفاء، ومن بعد الخلفاء أمراء، ومن بعد الأمراء ملوك، ومن بعد الملوك جبابرة، ثم يخرج رجل من أهل بيتي، يملأ الأرض عدلاً كما ملئت جوراً، ثم يؤمر بعده القحطاني. فوالذي بعثني بالحق ما هو بدونه.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: After me will come the Caliphs, and after the Caliphs the Emirs, and after the Emirs the Kings, and after the Kings the Tyrants, and then a man will come out from the People of my House (*Abli bayti*) who will fill the earth with justice just as it was filled with tyranny; then after him, the Qaḥṭānī will be made emir, and by Him Who sent me with the Truth, he is not lesser than him.

It is to be especially noted that in these narrations, as well as in many others within both the Sunni and Shia corpus of traditions, the tyranny persists and fills the earth, thereupon, suddenly, a radical change towards justice is brought about at the hands of the Mahdi ('a). Hence, it follows that any type of independence and freedom movement would have to come before and not after the final reign of the tyrant(s). In fact, it could be said to correspond to the democracy cum anarchy that is situated between oligarchy and tyranny in the Platonic model, and to the transition period between the king-despots and the actual tyrants in the narrations from the Prophet and the Imams.

The period preceding the final tyranny is referred to in the narrations in a number of different ways. It is sometimes referred to as the *fatarah*, or the intervening period of a "lapse" from the prophetically aligned sacred rule of his inheritors the Imams. Speaking of the Mahdi, Imam Ṣādiq ('a) says:

³ *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, no. 18430, on the authority of al-Tirmidhī; *Musnad Abi Ya'la*, and Ibn Hibbān. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-sagħīr*, no. 3341.

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الذي يملأها عدلا كما ملئت ظلما و جورا لعلی فترة من الأئمة

He will be the one who will fill it with justice just as it was full of oppression and injustice during the time of a lapse from the Imams.

It is also referred to as a time in which constraints, restrictions, and protections are set aside. For instance, Imam Ṣādiq (‘a) was asked when the deliverance will come for the believers. A part of his reply included the following phrase:

إذا ... خَلَعَتِ الْعَرَبُ أَعْنَتَهَا وَ رَفَعَ كُلُّ ذِي صِيصِيَّةٍ صِيصِيَّتَهُ

When ... the Arabs throw off their reins [or constraints] and every fortified strongman abolishes his stronghold.

In this time the government will not be based on the truth, nor will it be vivified by the spirit of jihad. The following phrase is used in a narration to describe this government:

دَوْلَةُ الْبَاطِلِ وَ حَالِ الْهُدْنَةِ

Government based on falsehood and the state of peace [or truce].

Under such a liberal and profane government, moral vices will abound, but with regards to the groups and classes that will have the upper hand, Imam ‘Alī (‘a) foretells the following:

إِذَا تَسَلَّطْنَ النِّسَاءُ وَ سَلَّطْنَ الْإِمَاءَ وَ أَمَرَ الصَّبِيَّانُ

When women are ascendant, slave-girls are put in charge, and the youth are made to rule.

While such things are in and of themselves considered as calamities, the language used to describe the final tribulations are of another order. In one narration, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) prophesies:

يحل بامتي في آخر الزمان بلاء شديد من سلطانهم لم يسمع بلاء

أشد منه حتى لا يجد الرجل ملجاء

In the latter days a severe tribulation will befall my Ummah at the hands of their ruler-despot—such that no tribulation more severe than it has ever been heard of before and a person will not find any refuge.

But of course the flow of history is not simply and simplistically linear. All religions point to the cyclical nature of time, which is essentially qualitative and not quantitative. The Qur'ān repeatedly reminds man about the immutable nature of the paradigm of God (*sunnat Allāh*) and how it continuously manifests itself on the plane of history as a rhythmic reminder to mankind. One of the persistent refrains in the overall linear decline—also foretold of by the Messenger of Allah—is the periodic reality of revival.⁴ Every so many generations, a pious Islamic scholar—in his capacity as the inheritor of the Prophet—will emulate the example of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to such a degree and intensity that his very being gives rise to an Islamic movement that is able to either arrest the decline or even temporarily reverse it in some part of the Muslim world.

There is no doubt that in our age it was Imam Khumaynī (r) who pre-eminently revived Islam, primarily in Iran, but also, to some extent, in the Muslim world at large. It also stands to reason that any other movement in this same age that seeks to be Islamic, unless it is headed by another such stellar figure, must invariably identify with this existing revival so as to be a part of it in an integral and authentic fashion.

This revival is a divine solution and ark of salvation for all those sincere Muslims who are embroiled in the seditions (*fitan*) of our time. If any Muslim individual or movement is not a part of the solution, he or it inevitably is a part of the problem. Hence the insistence of the successor of Imam Khumaynī, Ayatullah Khamenei, in calling the recent uprisings in the Muslim world an “Islamic awakening” should be seen not as a statement of facts on the ground but more as a prescription cum warning to the movements and their would-be leaders about the quintessential importance of Islam and the existing Islamic Revolution in Iran to their success. Lacking their own Islamic leadership and imam, these movements, if they are to be saved from the demonic ruses of secular-liberalism and its nefarious Empire, must recognize and identify with a standing imam. At present, this would be none other than the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei.

⁴ إن الله يبعث لهذه الأمة على رأس كل مائة سنة من يجدد لها دينها

It is crucial to note that like the revival, the “end” is also cyclic and periodic, each end being a degree and approximation of the final end; hence the undesirability, by virtue of faith and reason, of using correspondences to both predict events and to foster a self-fulfilling psychology of apocalyptic messianism based on sentiment.

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Direct allusions to the above can be found in a letter that Imam ‘Alī (‘a) wrote to Mālik al-Ashtar, the then governor of Egypt, in which he warned of the consequences of the political authority of the Muslims falling into the hands of persons who are not principally Islamic:

وَلَكِنِّي أَسَى أَنْ يَلِيَ أَمْرَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ سَفَهَاؤُهَا وَفُجَّارُهَا فَيَتَّخِذُوا مَالَ
اللَّهِ دُولًا وَعِبَادَهُ خَوْلًا وَالصَّالِحِينَ حَرْبًا وَالْفَاسِقِينَ حِزْبًا

But I fear that the authority of this Ummah will fall into the hands of the simpletons and the libertines, hence they will take: the endowment of God as a private circulation, His servants as pawns, the virtuous as enemies, and the sinners as their party.⁵

But unfortunately there remain many impediments that would hinder the uprisings in the Muslim world from identifying with the example and leadership of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the most important of which is the sectarian divide. Despite the valiant attempts of Imam Khumaynī throughout his mission to abolish this divide by asking both Sunnis and Shias, equally, to overcome their penchants for *madhhabī* chauvinism, the problem remains. The vast majority of both Sunni and Shia intellectuals and ‘*ulamā*’ hold the position that their respective *madhhab*, in all of its pedantic details, is the ultimate truth. They naturally conclude that anything that differs from their *madhhab* must be a form of falsehood. By so doing, they actually defile the “upright religion” (*dīn al-qayyim*)⁶ and limit the Infinite Truth of God.

A case in point is the Dār al-Taqrīb organization that was founded by Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Qummī in Cairo, Egypt in the 1940’s. Some of its founders included the likes of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad al-Subkī, a member of the Hay’at Kibār al-‘Ulamā (Council of Senior ‘Ulamā) in Egypt, and it had the support of Grand Ayatullah Burūjirdī of Qum, as well as Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt of Al-Azhar. In its heyday the Dār al-Taqrīb held many important meetings and seminars and published some valuable books as well as a journal, the *Risalat al-Islam*. But it was only a matter of years before these activities dwindled and the Dār al-Taqrīb became defunct, mainly due to the parochial attitudes of some of the Shia ‘*ulamā*’ involved and their itch to proselytize the Shia *madhhab* in a majority Sunni nation that held amicable opinions of the Ahl al-Bayt. One posi-

⁵ Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 62.

⁶ See the Editorial of Al-Taqrīb Journal number 7 for further exposition.

tive and tangible outcome of the whole experiment was the famous fatwa of Shaykh Shaltūt wherein he legitimized the *fiqh* of the Twelver Shias as a fifth school of Islamic jurisprudence that any Muslim was free to choose. The Shias at that time, if they had been more astute, could have reciprocated by highlighting the fact that in the Ja‘fari *fiqh* there is an established principle called the Rule of Necessitation (*qā‘idat al-ilzām*) which effectively legitimizes the major Sunni schools of jurisprudence and makes it binding upon Sunni Muslims to follow their own *fiqh*.⁷

Another case in point pertains to the present day situation in Bahrain. In this Muslim nation the spectre of sectarian conflict is being used to overcome the popular uprising of its peoples and their attempts to identify with the greater Islamic cause at hand. But this is a red herring and was clearly identified as such by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran during the course of a speech he delivered on the Iranian New Year wherein he emphatically stated that, “this is **not** a Shia-Sunni issue. They are making spiteful and malevolent efforts to present the issue of Bahrain as a Shia-Sunni issue.” But he then continued with an even more astute and incisive observation—one that could only be made by a true ‘*alim* who stands above the parochial and sees the higher principles at play:

Unfortunately some people who do not have any evil motives fell into this trap. If there are benevolent people involved in this issue, I would like to tell them, “Do not make this a Shia-Sunni issue.” [If you do,] this would be the greatest service to America. This would be the greatest service to the enemies of the Islamic Ummah who are trying to present the anti-tyranny movement of a nation as a Shia-Sunni conflict. This is not a Shia-Sunni conflict.⁸

The “benevolent people” that the Supreme Leader spoke of are precisely those well-meaning Shias who see the whole world from their *madhhabī* spectacles. They see everybody who does not carry the label of “Shia” as being “out to get them.” Such a paranoid view of the world ultimately leads to intellectual blindness and social torpidity. A higher and more principled view of the truth affords both a wider and a deeper comprehension of reality as such. It is only this higher view that can bring about any semblance of

⁷ Some traditions used to support the Rule of Necessitation are as follows:

الزموهم بما الزموا انفسهم — من دان بدين قوم لزمه حكمه — لكل قوم نكاح

⁸ http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1434&Itemid=4

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unity or conciliation and it is only an upright religion that can provide the pure metaphysics that leads to the ultimate Truth.

The well-meaning, albeit sectarian Shias, can take inspiration from the words of another *'ālim* of great vision and intellect, Āyatullāh Jawādi Āmulī, who in aiming at the higher truth of religion alludes to the fact that the term “Shia” is not always used in a partisan sense and can actually be expanded in scope to include all Muslims:

...but as for the prayers made [by the Imams] for the Shias—showing how much really they cared about us—there is another luminous prayer of Imam Sadiq (*'a*) in the *Ṣaḥīfah Ṣādiqiyyah* which—you gentlemen should join me as I read it out shortly—is not only for Iran, but for all Muslims; for they are in reality the Shias of Imam Ṣādiq, and it is just that a lot of people did not allow them to understand/recognize this Family; but they are really Shias because they are the followers of truth and the truth belongs to this Family, and the fact that others did not allow them to understand/recognize is another matter. “O Allah, enliven our Shias who are in [the way of] our government.” This is not specific to Iran. It is the same in Egypt, the same in Tunisia, the same in Algeria, the same in Jordan, the same in Yemen.⁹

A timely example that clearly shows how aiming at lower “truths” does not only not help in creating substantial unity but can actually—given the nature of our times—further divide people has to do with two “springs.” The first is what is being called the “Arab Spring” and refers to the recent uprisings in Muslim lands, the second is the New Year spring festival of Nowruz that is associated with the Persian people and can be referred to as the “Persian Spring.”

“Arab Spring” is a term that was first used in March 2005 by many Western media commentators to suggest that a consequence of the American invasion of Iraq would be the flowering of Western-friendly democracies in the Middle East. But following the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian elections—the “wrong” outcome in Western eyes—the term was conveniently phased out until its revival following the revolts of 2010-2011. In both the years, 2005 and 2011, there was and is a conscious effort to emphasise the racial and ethnic nature of the movements. This, more than being a description of the facts on the ground, is a prescriptive usage fostered by wishful thinking. The fact is that Arab nationalism be-

⁹ This is a comment that he made at the end of his *fiqh* lesson on 23 February, 2011.

came impotent many decades ago and no amount of Western political-viagra can make it rise once again. Arab Muslims are not blind to the other glaring fact that it was Persian Shia Muslims who most earnestly supported Hamas—Arab Sunnis—and continue to do so. Nor is it lost on these Arabs that the first governments to officially reach out to post-revolutionary Egypt were Iran and Turkey, with the Turk Abdullah Gul, the President of the latter, being the first head of state to visit Egypt after Mubarak’s ouster. Moreover, the demonstrations and rallies in support of the current uprisings span the entire globe with Muslims of all races and nationalities taking active part. The Western pundits’ efforts at spinning these facts and trying to portray them as sheer political opportunism on the part of the non-Arab parties involved are yet another sign of either their misinformation or their artful disinformation.

Turning now to the “Persian Spring,” or “Nowruz,” it is an elaborate and symbolic New Year’s ritual and is one of the oldest celebrations, predating Islam, venerated by all people living within the proximity of the Iranian Plateau, irrespective of their ethnic, racial, political and religious differences. It coincides with the vernal equinox and the first day of spring for those in the northern hemisphere. As of late, especially after the UN in 2009 inscribed Nowruz on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, certain factions within Iran have made much ado about the “international” nature of the celebration. For instance, during the course of official speeches and statements, Mohammad Khazaei, Iran’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has stressed that Nowruz celebrations play an important role in fostering unity among nations. Saying that the “tradition is endeared by Islam, which is the religion of passion, friendship and appreciation of nature,” he has gone on to make the claim that:

Although Nowruz is an inseparable part of the common culture of an important part of the world’s geography, it has the capacity to become the ground base for in-depth cultural links and as an advocate of shared human values amongst all nations.... It is a source of jubilation to see, due to a collective effort by the countries celebrating Nowruz, this tradition became global when the United Nations General Assembly, the UNESCO and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) took note and approved utilizing its cultural and spiritual capacities...¹⁰

¹⁰ http://www.iran-un.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=930:

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The fact is that Nowruz is limited to firstly, the northern hemisphere, and secondly, to only a small number of countries in this hemisphere, viz. Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. To make official claims of Nowruz's "role in fostering unity among nations" or it becoming "the ground base for in-depth cultural links... amongst **all** nations" is either to have delusions of grandeur, or to be complicit in a secular agenda of religious cum cultural reductionism.

While it is true that many important events in the religious and Islamic calendars correspond to this solar date signified by Nowruz and the vernal equinox, Islam did not emphasize this correspondence, and in fact disregarded the solar calendar as a whole. While we can only guess at the wisdom behind this providential act, we can say for certain that to aggrandize an event in the solar calendar—however important and symbolic—purely for cultural and ethnic reasons, is to go against this wisdom.

But Iran is not the only one using ethnic considerations for a political purpose.¹¹ In order to destabilize the Muslim world, intelligence agencies of the Empire are betting in many respects on the "ethnic card." Not only are they trying to divide the Ummah along the Persian-Arab fault line, but in fact they are trying to do the same thing within Iran itself. This is because numerous representatives of various nations reside in Iran, including Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, and others. To destabilize the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Empire is bent on driving a wedge between these peoples and the Persians. Certainly countering these stratagems of discord and divisiveness cannot be accomplished by using another stratagem of the same type and level—this is not a case of fighting fire with fire. What is called for is to use as a principle of unity something that is universal and essential to the human condition. Such a principle, based on the most inner and essential nature of man, is propounded by religion and religion alone.¹²

The argument that lower forms of unity that are based on a common race, language, ethnicity, or lineage are valid because they are a form of realism in which the existing limits of understanding of the masses is taken into account is faulty on two counts. First, the age in which these lower

statement-by-he-mr-mohammad-khazae-ambassador-and-permanent-representative-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-to-the-united-nations-at-the-official-commemorative-ceremony-of-qthe-international-day-of-nowruzq-21-march-2011-new-york&catid=41:general-assembly&Itemid=54

¹¹ The newly coined catch-phrase to denote this idea is "Nowruz Diplomacy."

¹² Cf. Al-Taqrīb Journal, no. 3, p. 43.

realities could properly and effectively do this was one in which the lower was hierarchically linked to the higher, and the lower classifications of race, language, ethnicity,... were contextualized within the greater framework and ethos of the presiding religion. On the whole, this is no longer the case and the effects of the Fall of man have led to an ambient secularism that denies the hierarchical relation that religion has with all things that lie below it. To the degree that any Muslim community re-instills the ethos of Islam in their culture, giving it due ascendancy, they can still effectively use some of the lower forms of unity with some semblance of validity. In this regard the use of the reality of Nowruz within the borders of Islamic Iran can be cited as an example; as is evidenced by the insistence and effort of a great many Iranians to be present in some holy shrine or holy place at the exact time of Nowruz.

The second fault with the above mentioned argument has to do with the fact that regional issues are no longer purely regional and the advances in modern methods of communication have meant that we are all residing in a “global village.” In fact, one of the consequences of Globalisation is to create uniformity on the global level. This is an idea that is ultimately demonic and contrary to the unity preached by religion, but alas it is the reality that we are faced with. To flout this uniformity by emphasizing a particular regional, racial, ethnic or linguistic issue without making reference to the true unity that binds them all together is both an exercise in futility, and can even lead to antagonism and further discord. The true and most essential unity for man can only be found by focussing on the Alpha and Omega of man’s terrestrial sojourn; as it is only this unicity common Origin and End that can resolve the fractional multiplicity of interim human society and life. God, speaking in the First Person and directly to man about this reality says:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَّجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۤىِٕلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوْۤا ۗ اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰنَكُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may mutually know [one another]. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-conscious among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware. (49:13)

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In his tafsir *al-Fawātiḥ al-ilābiyyah*, Shaykh Ni‘matullāh Nakhjawānī, an ‘arīf of the tenth century hijri, comments on this verse and sheds further light on the phrase *you may mutually know one another* by writing: “*lita‘ārafū*, means some of you knowing others; such that this mutual knowledge is tantamount to a merging at the origin.”¹³ This common origin, horizontally and on the plane of history—as the beginning of the verse clearly mentions—is to be identified with Adam and Eve, the common ancestors of all of humanity. Vertically the origin is God, who is the Origin of all being and hence the nexus of all knowledge. That the knowledge of “one another” can and must lead to the knowledge of the ultimate (and Only) object of knowledge, that is God, is evidenced by both metaphysical insight as well as traditions from religious authorities. Hence the traditions from Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (‘a),

لا يدرك مخلوق شيئاً إلا بالله

Created beings do not comprehend anything but by [way of] God.

الْعِبَادُ يُعْرَفُونَ بِاللَّهِ

[God’s] servants are known by [way of] God.

immediately imply the quintessential necessity of reference to religion and the divine in any inter-ethnic or inter-national affair striving for unity and conciliation. This intellectual principle is reflected on the plane of the will and is known in Qur’ānic terminology as the “cord of Allah.” Given the present turmoil in the Muslim world and conditions of the modern world, as well as the possibility of further decline, it is imperative that all Muslims, irrespective of their race, colour, or creed, hold on to this cord—and none else—by any and all means necessary.

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Hold fast, all together, to Allah’s cord, and do not be divided.

(3:103)

Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1432/ March 2011

¹³ Ni‘matullāh ibn Maḥmūd Nakhjawānī, *al-Fawātiḥ al-ilābiyyah wa al-mafātiḥ al-ghaybiyyah*, (Cairo: Dār al-Rikābī Lilnashr, 1999), vol. 2, p. 343.

AL-TAQRIB

Unity through the Prism of the Heart^{*}

Saeed Malik

Abstract

Spirituality is the proverbial fifth-element of religion, and as such, it opens up a path that leads to God. This path is anchored in the earnest orthodoxy of religious practice. The orthodoxy of a religion is the rich soil that nurtures the tree of the spirit. Though there are many Holy Scriptures and many Holy messengers, signifying that the spiritual highway has many lanes, they are all rooted in a common essential core. While ordered to recognize all other prophets and religions, the prophet Muhammad and therefore his followers are commanded to remain anchored in the certainty of the final message and be fully immersed in its Truth. But being the ultimate religion, and by providential design, Islam has a natural disposition for religious tolerance. The followers of Islam must zealously guard this Divine gift. It is a gift not to be merely acknowledged. It must be conscientiously honored. The Qur'an inspires us to such a supra-awareness and, being directed to the heart that recites it, calls the multiple and fractured nature of man to the abode of true Peace and Unity.

Keywords: Unity of religions, orthodoxy, tolerance, sincerity, Islam.

In the backdrop of the age of information and the age of disinformation; The age of reason and the age of disregard; The age of science and the age of sound-bites; The age of disbelief and the age of fanaticism; The age of connectivity and the age of disconnection; The age of satiation and the age of emptiness; The age of mega-cities and the age of loneliness—The age on the brink

FIRST AND FOREMOST

It is customary in Islamic practice that the Divine messengers be mentioned with respect and reverence. Texts written by Muslims customarily attach the abbreviation "PBUH", meaning "may peace be upon him" every

^{*} From the Prologue of *A Perspective on the Signs of al-Qur'an: Through the prism of the heart* by Saeed Malik and reproduced here with the author's permission. The book is available at www.amazon.com.

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time any Divine Prophet's name is mentioned. Prophets as God's chosen are first and foremost amongst God's creatures in rank and proximity to God. To know and respect the proper place and rank of anything and everything is part of spiritual conscientiousness. By offering our respects and our prayer of peace for God's own emissaries we are imploring God to unlock the doors to our own guidance. Praise belongs only to God and blessings belong to those who have earned proximity to Divine Glory and Majesty. We gain no worth except by discernment. We can gain no peace except by first wishing it for the deserving. We also acknowledge that those who have lived in full alignment to the Divine Will never "die". These, the purest of the human spirits are the "truly successful", bestowed and blessed with Divine peace. May God accept that every reference to a Prophet in this manuscript is preceded and followed by an imploration of peace upon the Prophet. May we thus join the Chorus of Truth.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Limitless in His Glory is thy Sustainer, the Lord of almightiness, [exalted] above anything that men may devise by way of definition! And peace be upon all His message bearers. All praise is due to God alone—The Sustainer of the worlds. (37:180-182)¹

May there come a time when this prayer becomes the earnest expression of a heart filled with gratitude towards the Divine and towards all those who bore His Message.

THE STRUGGLE OF THE SOUL

This article is about spirituality from the Islamic view-point. It is not about religion. Spirituality and religion are inseparable but they are not synonymous. Spirituality is an extra dimension of religion. This dimension is the path to God anchored in the earnest orthodoxy of religious practice. The orthodoxy of a religion is the rich soil that nurtures the tree of spirituality. Under the shade of this tree is the repose of life. The tree itself mani-

¹ As interpreted by Muhammad Asad in *The Message of the Qur'an*.

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festes the consciousness of the soul. Frithjof Schuon, the Sufi Scholar of the 20th century and an advocate for the “transcendent unity of religions”, lays out, in his inimitable precision, the struggle facing the soul: .

What are the great troubles of the soul?
A false life; a false death; a false activity; a false rest.
A false life: passion which engenders suffering;
A false death: egoism which hardens the heart and separates it from God and His mercy;
A false activity: dissipation, which casts the soul into an insatiable vortex and makes it forget God, who is Peace;
A false rest or a false passivity: the weakness and laziness which deliver up the soul without resistance to the countless solicitations of the world.²

Islamic Spirituality, as we shall see is about Sincerity (*ikhlās*)—Sincerity of thought, sincerity of purpose and sincerity of action. Sincerity eases the struggle that Frithjof Schuon defines.

ALL SINCERE PATHS LEAD TO GOD

There are many Holy Scriptures as there are many Holy messengers. It follows therefore that the spiritual highway has many lanes. To quibble with this, from within the perspective of any one religion is to be sanctimonious rather than spiritual. Within this sanctimony lies the danger of constricting the “heart” and thereby missing the Truth. Yes, within religions there are human innovations and resultant “half-truths” and sadly some of these innovations were for the benefit of those who invented them. Yet the word of God is discernible as it is living and immutable, be it as “Divine Word-made-flesh”³ in the case of Jesus Christ or “Divine Word-made-Book”⁴ in the case of the *last* prophet, Muḥammad. The last Word-made-Book is the Holy Qur’an. The Qur’an does not refute or deny other messengers with a Divine mission; instead it claims and represents culmination and finality to the essential message of all prophets, starting with Adam. “Last” *implies* a “first” and “prior”; the Qur’an is clear and explicit about the spiritual unity of their missions. The multiplicity of religions,

² *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, by Frithjof Schuon. A new translation by P.N. Townsend.

³ Phraseology borrowed from Martin Lings.

⁴ Phraseology borrowed from Martin Lings.

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notwithstanding man's propensity to err, is not man's error. It is God's Will and is repeatedly stated:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولٌ

For every community there is a messenger (10:47)

And

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَا^ء وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً
وَاحِدَةً

For each of you We have appointed a law and traced out a path
and if God had so willed, He would have made you one commu-
nity. (5:48)

True, that the verses preceding this last verse (quoted above) point to a measure of erosion of prior revelations (given the disputes amongst their respective followers), yet there lingers in these messages an essential core, as would be implied by the statement "confirming the truth of whatever truth there still remains of earlier revelations":

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنْ
الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ^ط فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ^ط وَلَا
تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this Divine Writ, setting forth the truth confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelations in accordance with what God has bestowed from upon high and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee (5:48)

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The prophet Muhammad and therefore his followers are commanded to remain anchored in the certainty of the final message and be fully immersed in its Truth. To be immersed is to be no place else.

In another verse, as if to discourage fruitless debate and thereby possibly impugn other messengers (a danger for the novice believer), the Qur'an states that not all the names of all the messengers were disclosed to the Prophet; the "holier than thou" attitude constricts the heart, and handicaps the spiritual quest.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ
مَّن لَّمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ

We have sent messengers before you. About some We have told you, and about some We have not told you. (40:78)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِغُونَ وَالنَّصَارَى مَنَّ
ءَامِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلْ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا
هُم يَحْزَنُونَ

And verily, the faithful, and the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians—Whoever believe in God and the last Day and act piously, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve. (5:69)

Worthy of note also in the preceding surah is the non-definitive classification "Sabians". Though there are some scholars with the view that the Sabians are a group from amongst the Jews, there are others without a definite opinion. If one were to follow the latter view, the Qur'an is telling us that there are others beyond the followers of the three monotheistic religions who shall find God's Peace. Even if the Sabians can be identified, it is quite clear that the test of God-consciousness is to be left with God. The spiritual spark resides in the innermost niche of the heart disqualifying us from questioning another person's spiritual quest. The spiritual-center and the spiritual struggle are within. One's earnest conscientiousness must therefore turn its focus within one's own "Straight and Sincere Path".

SINCERITY FOCUSES INWARDS. OUTWARDLY IT MANIFESTS TOLERANCE

It is a historical fact that each successive monotheistic religion has been more tolerant of its chronological predecessor. The opposite has not been true. Succeeding religions have held within their beliefs the doctrine of “continuity of prophets”. Tolerance has been precious little the other way around. Judaism has considered Christianity an errant religion as has Christianity considered Islam. Many if not most of those who believe that Moses parted the Red Sea to save his people, doubt the virgin-birth of Jesus. And many if not most of those who believe in the blessed virgin Mary doubt the Qur’ān as God’s direct Word and the prophecy of Muhammad. The renewal embodied by Jesus was considered detraction by the day’s “religious establishment”, likewise the renewal embodied by the Qur’ān has met its own resistance. Intolerance of faith is a potential pitfall for any “religious establishment”. The equivalent and likely pitfall for the soul seeking renewal is a relapse, certainly not intolerance. Intolerance is a flaw of the heart likely to attach itself to the mighty, seeking to block any change, rather than to those who want to escape from under the might. The renewer merely seeks to protect and preserve the renewed Message. The establishment and other powers that be, will label such conscientiousness, “exclusivism.” The “religious establishment” of our times, is fond of citing, as evidence of Qur’ānic intolerance and exclusivism, a verse that exhorts the believers to stay anchored in the message of the Qur’ān:

يَتَّأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَرَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ
 أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنَّهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي
 الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

O you, who have renewed your faith, do not take the Jews and the Christians as your allies and patrons (*awliyā*) ... (5:51)

It helps the cause of these dissenters that some poor renderings have translated *awliyā* to “friends”. It cannot be so. The Qur’ān allows the marriage of a Muslim to a Jew or a Christian. How could it then prohibit friendship? Far from forbidding friendship with the Jews and the Christians, the Qur’ān is merely reinforcing the message of reliance on God

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Alone. God and not some other pre-existing human authority is the “*Walī*” (singular of *awliyā*):

وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ نَصِيرًا

Sufficient is God as a patron and protector (*Walī*). Sufficient is God as a Helper. (4:45)

Or take it from Joseph; there can be no better authority than this young man, who was once a little child abandoned in a dark and dank well by his own brothers. Witness Joseph’s gratefulness to his *Walī* upon being finally reunited with his parents, at the end of his long and arduous ordeal:

رَبِّ قَدْ ءَاتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمَلِكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّّـَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا
وَالْحَقِّنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

“O my Sustainer! You have indeed bestowed on me some aspect of power, and taught me some aspects of interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my Protector (*Walī*) in this world and in the Hereafter, Let my return (in death) be of a soul in submission and join me with the righteous.” (12:101)

Having said so, it must be clearly understood by the believer and the nonbeliever (who cares to understand) that the Qur’ān reminds the Muslim that God and His Prophet take precedence over any other relationship, including the relationships of blood. Many muslims, including Noah and Abraham and Lot had to endure the pain of leaving a loved-one behind in the way of God. A Muslim after all places God, His Message and the Messenger at the very center of his core. They who “fight the believers for their beliefs and expel them from their homes or support their expulsion” are to be avoided:

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لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ
 اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ
 عَشِيرَتَهُمْ ۗ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ
 وَوَدَّ خَلَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ
 اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ۗ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ
 الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Thou will not find folk who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who oppose God and His messenger: even though they be their fathers, or their sons or their brothers, or their clan. As for such, He has written faith upon their hearts and has strengthened them with a Spirit from Him, and He will bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to abide forever.

God is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him. They are God's party. Surely! Is it not God's party who are the successful? (58:22)

This too is a test of faith. Abraham sums up the pain of a dutiful and submitted heart when he leaves his father:

إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ وَمَا أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ
 شَيْءٍ

Except that Abraham said to his father: "Certainly I shall ask forgiveness for thee but I have no power to do aught for thee against God." (60:4)

Robert Frager, Ph.D, relates an incisive incident related to his spiritual guide, Sheikh Muzaffar, who was once invited to perform Islamic Prayers in a Paris Cathedral. After having performed the prayers the Sheikh turned down a request for a reciprocal gesture. "Absolutely Not", was the Sheikh's

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response. Explaining further to his hosts who must have been rather befuddled, no doubt, he said: “I have a right to pray in your cathedral because I love Jesus. But you cannot pray in our mosque because you do not love Muhammad”.⁵

Islam honors the prophetic chain. Islam also respects those whose practice differs from theirs. In Madinah when around sixty delegates of the Najran-Christians were visiting the Prophet in the Mosque of Madinah, the guests were allowed to pray in the Mosque, notwithstanding the fact that they faced East during their services. Through providential design, as the last of the major messages, Islam has a natural disposition for religious tolerance. The followers of Islam must zealously guard this Divine gift. It is a gift not to be merely acknowledged. It must be conscientiously honored. God is *Al-Muqaddim*, the One who determines the sequence and precedence of objects and events and beings. Jesus renewed and realigned the message of Moses and his predecessors. Muhammad renewed and realigned the message of Jesus and Jesus’ predecessors. A “muslim” (and the Muslim)⁶ cannot but honor each and every prophet in the prophetic caravan. The Truth is that each new cycle of revelation is meant to open new doors. Spiritual doors do not close, they lead to new vistas. Sincerity is an unfolding quest. To love Muhammad is to love Jesus and Moses too. Rumi reminds us all:

There are those who accept the law of Moses and not the grace and
love of Jesus,
Like the Jewish King who killed Christians.
This is not right. Moses is inside the soul of Jesus as Jesus is in the
soul of Moses.
One era belonged to one; then it was the other’s turn, but they are
one being⁷

SINCERE APPROACH TO THE QUR’ĀN

The Qur’ān is meant to be guidance for those who are spiritually hungry and sincere, the “*muttaqīn*”, and who are open to Faith, believing in “*ghayb*”

⁵ *Heart, Self and Soul*, Robert Frager, Ph.D, pg 14, Theosophical Publishing House 2006.

⁶ I use ‘muslim’ with a lower-case ‘m’ to refer to the spiritual muslim, anyone who submits to God. I use ‘Muslim’ with upper-case ‘M’ to refer to the social-muslim who declares by way of the *Kalima* to be a ‘Muslim.’

⁷ *The Soul of Rumi* by Coleman Barks. Published by Harper Collins 2002.

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(the reality beyond human grasp and therefore embraceable only by the “heart”), who beseech their Lord, share their wealth with others and apart from believing in the Qur’ān, believe as well in other Divine revelations bestowed before the Qur’ān itself. Says the Qur’ān in attestation of the messenger who bore it, and those who were his close companions:

ءَامَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ ۚ
وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۚ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

The messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from His Lord, and (so do) the believers; they all believe in God and His angels and His books and His messengers; [And they say:] “We make no difference between any of His messengers” ...
(2:285)

For the believer the Arabic Qur’ān is the purest form of Holy Scripture. It is the un-altered word of God. In the word of God is Certainty, Truth, Grace and the immutability of a living message, ripe with relevance to a person’s time and condition. It bears a message that is adaptable across the diversity of culture as it is across the chasm of time:

كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ تُؤْتِي
أُكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا

A good word is as a good tree. Its root is firm; its branches are in Heaven. It gives forth its fruit at all times, by the permission of its Lord. (14:24-25)

The believers also hold that just as Muhammad validated the prophethood of his predecessors, (many of them being mentioned in the Qur’ān itself), his predecessors made a corollary testament of those who would in turn follow them. Divine guidance is based on spiritual continuity through a preordained brotherhood between the prophets. The prophets are committed to this brotherhood:

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وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ
ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِءَ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ^ج
قَالَ أَأَقْرَضْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَيَّ ذَلِكُمْ إِيصْرِي^ط قَالُوا أَأَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ
فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

And, Lo, God accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: “If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succor him.” “Do you” - said He - “acknowledge and accept My bond on this condition?” They answered: “We do acknowledge it.” Said He: “Then bear witness [thereto], and I shall be your witness.” (3:81)⁸

Martin Lings, an enlightened Islamic Sufi, who rested in Islam after his spiritual journey within and into Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism, cites the following text in St. John, XVI, 12-15 as Christ’s prophesy of Prophet Muhammad:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things so ever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come.

The Qur’an is the last Word of God, revealed to the last prophet. Those who quibble with this belief must contend with the historical absence of another book or credible prophet since the advent of Islam. Indeed speaking to those who doubt the Qur’an, the Qur’an itself lays open the challenge to produce an equivalent book.

⁸ As interpreted by Muhammad Asad in *The Message of the Qur’an*.

قُلْ لِّئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا
الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

Say: "Verily, though mankind and the jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another." (17:88)

The equivalency to the Qur'ān does not mean another book equivalent in words or verses or chapters, or rhythm or grammar. It must meet the equivalency of beauty, inspiration, living relevance, and a million other intangibles. It must make grown men break down and cry, make violent men drop their swords, make young and old women want to cover their heads and kiss it, and it must make you want to wash your hands and rinse your soul before you touch it. The equivalent book must transform hearts and change the world as the Qur'ān did, is doing, and will continue to do. The equivalent book must be miraculously committed to the heart of its unlettered reciter and it must inspire other words and books and deeds until the seven seas, and then some more, if they were ink, could bear no more. The *Mathnawī* of Rumi, the world's best known inspired book by the best known ancient-poet of the modern world, is inspired by the Qur'ān. It is called by some as the Persian Qur'ān. But make no mistake; the Qur'ān is not of it. The *Mathnawī is of the Qur'ān*. The Qur'ān inspired the *Mathnawī*. The *Mathnawī* cannot inspire a Qur'ān-equivalent. Rumi would be the first one to say that. The Truth of the Qur'ānic verse about the inimitability of the Qur'ān could be better understood by the non-Muslim western mind if the challenge was made to produce the like of Prophet Jesus: "If all mankind and *Jinn* should attempt they could not produce the like of Jesus". This should bring home another point unique to the Qur'ān. If Jesus were amongst us today, he, Jesus, would be the prime if not singular source of spiritual renewal for his followers. Today, in his stead, is the church and the clergy. It cannot but be a poor substitute. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, is amongst us today and to a Muslim it is the prime and supreme source of spiritual renewal. It does not warrant, nor does it allow for a substitution.

THE QUR'ĀN IS A LIVING COMPANION OF THE SINCERE

The Qur'ān has both an exoteric and an esoteric content. Says the Qur'ān of itself:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ
 الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا
 تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا
 اللَّهُ

He it is who has bestowed upon thee from on high this Divine Writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves and these are the essence of the Divine Writ- as well as others that are allegorical. Now those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the Divine Writ which has been expressed in allegory, seeking out [what is bound to create] confusion and seeking [to arrive at] its final meaning [in an arbitrary manner]; But none save God knows its final meaning. (3:7-8)

The exoteric content holds plain and unambiguous guidance. This guidance establishes the principles of ethics and conduct. There are five basic principles, often called the five pillars of the conduct of Faith: Testament of Faith in One God and the Seal of his prophets, Muhammad, Daily prayers and prostrations, fasting, sharing of wealth, and based on affordability, a once-in-a life-time pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah*. The sincere believer, trying to live within the matrix of the “clear message”, will find in the esoteric content an invitation to reflection and contemplation. Contemplation is the food of the spirit. It changes the person from the inside out. For those who embrace the Qur'ān in its totality, anchored in its “unambiguous guidance”, the contemplative ground is fertile as it is limitless, because “But none save God knows its final meaning.” These verses of the Qur'ān are *not without* meaning. It is quite the opposite. These verses have a depth and richness of meaning. The meaning is limited by the capacity and sincerity of the seeker and therefore has a personal and indigenous characteristic. It cannot and must not be boxed into a dogma.

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وَإِن مِّن شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ

And whatever there is, its storehouses are with Us; And We only distribute it in allotted measures. (15:21)

* * *

THE QUR'ĀN SPEAKS TO THE MANY WITHIN ONE SOUL

There are terms used by the Qur'ān to make a distinction between humans based on the state of their heart or the level of their spiritual consciousness. Terms such as “*zālimīn*”, “*kāfirīn*”, “*muslimīn*”, “*mu'minīn*” have no similar English synonyms and neither should they. The rich symbolism of these terms can only conform to the receptacle of understanding. The form and color of a liquid conforms to the form and color of the vessel. A translated equivalent not only limits the symbolism but is also molded in the shape of the vessel. The term *zālimīn* for example is used in the story of Adam

وَيَتَأَدُّمُ أَسْكُنَ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا

تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

O Adam dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat both of you, whatever you may wish, but do not approach this tree, lest you become *zālimīn*. (7:19)

Zālimīn has been variously translated as “wrong doers”, “transgressors” and “unjust” by Yousuf Ali, Pickthall, and M. H. Shakir respectively. Neither of these words truly captures the breadth of the symbolism here. The root word for *zālimīn* is *zulm*. The latter implies putting something in other than its proper place, to be in darkness, lacking vision and clarity, thereby engendering the propensity to transgress, be unjust and do wrong. Eating the forbidden fruit would lead to a transformation of consciousness, mirroring the transplantation from Paradise. Adam and Eve would enter the state of *zulm*, separated from their proper place with God in Paradise, disengaged from the Truth, and entangled in the illusory. It is a state where the new “self” is disconnected from the only “Self”. The illusion of the self masks the true Self.

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Similarly *kāfirīn* has been translated as “Atheists”, “Disbelievers”, “Unbelievers”, “Deniers of Truth” and rarely (and thankfully only rarely by Muslim scholars) as “infidels”. The early Qur’ānic surah delivers a message to the Prophet’s early tormenters:

قُلْ يَتَّيِبُهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ
عَبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَبِدُونَ مَا
أَعْبُدُ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينٌ

Say: “O you who deny the truth (*kāfirīn*), I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship! I will not worship that which you have [ever] worshipped, and neither will you [ever] worship that which I worship. Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!” (109:1-6)

A prophet conveys a Divine message and speaks to all. On his lips the surah has a proclamatory value. The follower on the other hand must internalize the message as it speaks to the reader’s self. The residual experience from the recitation of the surah is one of affirmation of one’s own faith as opposed to the obsession with another’s divergence. The call of the “*Ma’būd*” (the Master, the One who is served, the One who is worthy of all the devotion, the One who draws adulation) has been heard by the “*abd*” (an adoring slave, one who serves, one who is devoted, one who adulates). The *abd* is purposefully committed to follow the way (*dīn*) shown by the *Ma’būd*. It has a hymnic quality for a purposeful lover, putting all distraction aside, undertaking the journey to his or her Master, if not yet Beloved.

Kāfir is a person in the state of *kufir*. To be in *kufir* is to be misaligned with God. Nominally, it is to be outside His message, un-heedful of final accountability. Yes, the state becomes deeper with callousness, doubt, rejection and hostility, but even a “Muslim” can and is likely to find his or her self in the un-heedful state. To hoard wealth, to be dishonest, unjust or unkind—any of these conditions—reflect misalignment with God and His revelations, and expose the person’s un-heedfulness of final accountability. A person is not defined by a label but by the person’s own state of consciousness and conscientiousness. The state of *kufir* is known to God as it is a state *known* to the *kāfir*. There is therefore, from the perspective of the

non-prophet, no purpose served as there is no grace in looking for *kufir* outside of one's self. It has been attributed to 'Umar, son of Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph of Madinah, and a companion of the Prophet that every verse revealing the torment awaiting the *kāfir* has a relevance to the disobedient "Muslim".

An uninspired translation of this Surah risks rendering the Surah to be about the Atheist instead of being about the reader and his *Ma'būd*. This Surah as any other Surah must be directed inwards. When contemplating the Qur'an the Muslim must direct the message (both the promise of deliverance and the admonition) inwards, notwithstanding its relevance to some-one else.

There are similar considerations associated with the terms *muslimīn* (typically substituted as "muslims") and *mu'minīn* (typically substituted as the "believers" or the "faithful"). The term "muslim", derived from root verb "*aslama*", meaning "he surrendered himself", has a spiritual as well as a social connotation. From the spiritual perspective *anyone* and everyone who surrenders to God, is a *muslim* ("muslim" with a lower-case "m"). *All* prophets are in this fold. This is the Qur'an's declaration. The spiritual patriarch Abraham is amongst the best of muslims. This too is the Qur'an's declaration. From the social perspective a *Muslim* ("Muslim" with a capital "M") is one who professes belief in God, the Qur'an, and therefore the prophethood of Muḥammad and all preceding prophets. It is a personal declaration made in the form of the *Kalima*, admitting the individual to the local or at-large community (*umma*). The declaration however does not by itself amount to surrender to God. Surrender to God is an attained and demonstrated state achieved by a growing inner consciousness and a persistent outward scrupulousness. The action and the preceding intent determine the state. The *state* defines the person. The Qur'an speaks to the states of doubt (*kufir*), ignorance (*zulm*), surrender (*islām*) and faith (*īmān*). These are states people find themselves in. More significantly though, these are states *within* the searching heart. The searching heart must confront itself through a personal and persistent introspection until it is conditioned to test and align every thought towards surrender. This is the process by which the heart burnishes faith and itself. The heart is faith. The Qur'an is not the standard by which we must judge others; judgment is Divine. The Qur'an is the inspiration by which we must move and lift ourselves. It is directed to the heart that recites it, calling the many *within it* (and of course each one of us) to the Abode of True Peace and Unity.

Rational Mysticism: The Pristine Mysticism of Islam as Exemplified in the Life and Ethos of the Prophet

Muḥammad Jawād Rūdgar *

Translated by D.D. Sodagar

Abstract

Mysticism is one of the paths to divine knowledge that may be attained through leading a spiritual life and practicing spiritual exercises approved by reason and sanctioned by religion. The principal source on which this mode of knowledge relies is the spiritual purification and catharsis of the heart. Practically, this involves various levels and stations of a spiritual journey to the final station of union with the Lord and becoming God-like in character. Mysticism so defined—which encompasses the journey from the self to God, from multiplicity to unity—is exemplified by the tradition of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his ethos, in its practical as well as its theoretical capacities. A defining element of mysticism as practiced by the Prophet, however, is its conformity to reason and rationality. In the mysticism of the Prophet, reason (*'aql*) and love (*'ishq*), intelligence (*fahm*) and intuition (*shuhūd*), ratiocination (*burhān*) and gnosis (*'irfān*), intellectual cogitation (*sulūk-i fikrī*) and spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk-i 'amālī*) are compatible, for each is assigned its rightful place in the corresponding level of existence. The fruit of such a mysticism is that reason is enriched by intuition and intuition is reinforced by reason. It reconciles spiritual practice with social participation, esoteric spirituality with political leadership, and the pursuit of divine knowledge with the concern for social justice.

Keywords: Mysticism (*'irfān*), ethos of the Prophet (*sīrah-yi nabawī*), rationalism (*khirad gara'ī*), perfect human being (*insān-i kāmil*), reason (*'aql*), heart (*dil*), divine authority (*wiālyat-i ilābī*).

* Assistant professor, Islamic Azad University of Karaj

INTRODUCTION

Mysticism is a distinct mode of knowledge that obtains by means of intuition (*shuhūd*) and becoming (*shudan*), existential poverty (*faqr*) and annihilation (*fanā*), comprehension (*shinākht*) and passion (*sbiydāʿī*), wayfaring (*sulūk*) and union (*wuṣūl*). It is the introvertive path of grasping (*yāfīan*) that pertains to the inner sanctum of the soul and not the extrovertive path pertaining to the external world. Mysticism belongs to the category of experience, whose realization is consequent on freeing one's existence and substance from materiality. The locus of mysticism is the heart; its means of attainment is spiritual purification; its final end is proximity to and union with God. The central subjects of mysticism are divine unity and divine authority or, in other words, God and the perfect human being. It is acquired by becoming indifferent to the material and physical world and aspiring toward the spiritual and supernatural realm by observing the path of religion (*sharīʿat*) and committing oneself to obedience to God (*ʿubūdīyat*). Mysticism involves fathoming the mysteries, progressing from *knowing* to *possessing*, from *ʿilm al-yaqīn* (lit., “knowledge of certainty”) to *ʿayn al-yaqīn* (lit., “certainty itself”) and, subsequently, to *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (lit., “reality of certainty”) and, ultimately, to *bard al-yaqīn* (lit., “frost of certainty”). It is only by traversing the divine pathway (*tariqat*), ascending the spiritual levels (*maqāmāt*), and progressing through the wayfaring stations (*manāzil*) that mysticism can be comprehended.

Thus, mysticism consists in experiencing and conveying this experience—the former of which is designated as practical mysticism and the latter as theoretical mysticism. In this light, theoretical mysticism offers a spiritual account of the cosmos, a mystical worldview. Practical mysticism, however, is the introvertive, unitive, and innate experience itself. “Is” and “is not” constitute the subject-matter of theoretical mysticism, whereas the “ought” and “ought not” of spiritual wayfaring determine the manner and method of progressing through the stations of spiritual perfection in practical mysticism for the purpose of achieving the “unseen victories” (*futūḥāt-i ghaybī*) so as to arrive at the noble summit of “pure and utter unity” (*tawḥīd-i nāb wa kāmīl*). As such, the purpose of the “pristine mysticism” is to establish order in the relationship between God and the human being, to offer directions for “that which is direction-less” in an effort to see the Beloved, and it is this effort that is termed spiritual wayfaring.

In defining mysticism, the great mystics have said, “The mystic is he who witnesses God, His Essence, Attributes, and Acts. So mysticism is the

state by means of which this act of witnessing is expressed” (Kāshānī, 1370, vol. 2, p. 104). That is, the mystics are those invited and summoned by God to witness the Names of His Essence, Its Attributes, and Its Actions. Furthermore, mysticism is an experiential—rather than discursive—mode of knowledge. Mysticism is being consumed by the fire (*sūkhtan*), being aflame (*gudākhtan*); it is beholding (*mushāhadah*) and coming into contact (*muwājahah*). It is not constructing (*sākhtan*), not uttering words (*guftan*), not grasping by the mind (*shinākhtan*), not conversation (*mushāfahah*).

Shaykh al-Ra’īs Abū ‘Alī Sīnā thus defines a mystic:

He who turns his thought to the sanctity of Divine Majesty (*quds al-jabarūt*), constantly seeking the rays of the light of the Truth in his inner sanctum (*sirrih*), is designated as a mystic. (See Abū ‘Alī Sīnā, 1374, p. 400; Muṭahhari, 1380, vol. 2, pp. 143-172; and Ḥasanzādiḥ Āmulī, 1379, pp. 243-245.)

Elsewhere, in view of the mystical stages of advancement, he asserts,

Mysticism begins with separation (*tafrīq*), denunciation (*naqd*), abandonment (*tark*), and rejection (*rafḍ*). It is then enriched by multiplicity (*jam*)—the multiplicity of the attributes of reality that belong to the Essence of the only true Agent (*dhāt al-murīd bi al-ḥaqq*)—thereafter leading to unity. Afterwards, it is cessation (*wuqūf*). (Abū ‘Alī Sīnā, *ibid.*, p. 419)

Therefore, we may come up with this concise description of mysticism: mysticism is to ascend toward the Realm of Divine Sanctity (*‘ālam-i quds*), expose oneself to the Source of Absolute Light, undergo a substantial shift from oneself to God, thus plunging into the Sea of Unity, being annihilated in God (*fanā’-i fi-llāh*) and thereafter subsisting in Him (*baqā’-i bi-llāh*).

But despite the various insightful and profound descriptions of mysticism offered by the great and eminent mystics, we are introduced to a sweeter and more satisfying mysticism—the “pristine mysticism”—on studying the teachings of the Prophet and his tradition and ethos. Mysticism viewed from the perspective of the Prophet—the perfect human being who is also the medium through which perfection is granted to others—is to confess one’s inability in comprehending the reality of God and His Divine Names of Beauty (*asmā’-i jamāl*) and Grandeur (*asmā’-i jalāl*) and in worshipping and obeying Him—the One who alone is worthy of worship and love—as He truly deserves. As such, mysticism in its theoretical capacity consists in the admission of the mystic that “We do not know You according as You are” (Majlisī, 1363, vol. 8, p. 146 and vol. 68, p. 23) and in its

practical capacity it involves his admission that “We do not worship You according as You deserve.” For, the identity (*huwāyyah*) of the Absolute Unqualified Existence (*muṭlaq-i lā bi shart-i maqsamī*) is the ‘*anqā*’¹ whose capture eludes the theologian, the philosopher, and the mystic alike. ‘Alī (peace be upon him) says, “The heights of resolve cannot reach Him and the depths of intelligence cannot fathom Him” (ibid.). This profound truth is acknowledged by the mystics as well: “But as for the Divine Essence, bewildered are therein all of the prophets and the friends of God” (Qayṣarī, 1416, pp. 69-70).

As such, mysticism is to view the world in a unitive light, to become one with existence; it is to see the cosmos and the human being from the vantage point of unity of divine manifestation (*waḥdat-i tajjalī*), unity of unveiling (*waḥdat-i shuhūd*), and unity of existence (*waḥdat-i wujūd*), which is the way in which the true mystics view the world. The end of mysticism is to apprehend “absolute unity and unity absolute” (*maḥd-i tawīd wa tawḥīd-i maḥd*), which is so eloquently expressed in this prayer by the Prophet: “O God, the blackness in my eye [the pupil], my imagination, and the whiteness in my eye [sclera] adore You.” In this succinct prayer is expressed the wayfarer’s utter annihilation in God—his actions, his character, and his essence all being subsumed in this annihilation. Muḥaqqiq Ṭūsī thus elaborates on this topic: “*Tawḥīd* is to attest to unity and to act according to it. The former is a requirement of faith, the latter of the highest level of knowledge” (ibid.). In the words of Qayṣarī, “You ought to know—may God help you—that reaching God is in two ways: theoretical and practical. The practical is contingent on the theoretical” (Qayṣarī, 1357, p. 35). That is, the mystic must first attain—in a gradual manner and by advancing through the spiritual stages—to a point where he sees naught but God, or, as expressed in these profound words by ‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī, “Mysticism is the journey to God, in thought and in practice” (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr tasnīm*, 1379, vol. 1, p. 487).

¹ ‘*Anqā* is another name for *sīmurgh*, the mythic Persian bird, which is characterized as a mammoth bird possessing colorful plumes and a shy demeanor. It is said to nest atop Mount *Qāf*, the highest peak in Persian and mystic legend, which is beyond the reach of any human. [Tr.]

RATIONAL MYSTICISM

From what has been said in the above, it should be sufficiently clear why the title of the present article is “rational mysticism.” For, first, the pristine mysticism of Islam, far from being averse to reason and in defiance of it, espouses all of the rational perfections, both in its theoretical and practical capacities. In accordance with the general rule that the more perfect subsumes within itself the less perfect, true mysticism incorporates “perfected reason.” As such reason and mysticism are not mutually exclusive: reason is present—in a simple form that is immune to multiplicity—in mysticism and the spiritual knowledge of the heart. To divest mysticism of reason and rational reasoning is tantamount to renouncing mysticism. Rationality and mysticism are two lights granted by God to the human being: the light of reason and rationality is reflected in mysticism and the spiritual knowledge of the heart. Light cannot contradict light; they, rather, reaffirm and support one another. Fundamentally speaking, the way of mysticism passes through reason.

The spiritual knowledge of the heart is reason perfected, reason that has gained direct contact with the Active Intellect, the Logos. The tradition of the Prophet acknowledges reason as the highest authority, and so pristine mysticism must necessarily conform to reason. Mundane, coarse reason is invited to participate in the spiritual feast of mysticism and intuition so that in this divine and revelatory feast it may grow to maturity, leaving the juvenile state of hylic and potential reason (*‘aql hayūlānī, bi-l-quwwah*) behind so as to advance to the stage of “acquired reason” (*‘aql bi-l-mustafād*) and from there—by ascending through the levels of the “hidden mystery” (*sirr-i khafī*) and the “most hidden mystery” (*sirr-i akhfā*)—to the level of “immediate reason” (*‘aql shuhūdī*). In other words, one must free oneself of the “narrow reason” (*‘aql juzwī*), whose sole function is to make calculations and plans for the improvement of the material life, so as to obtain the luminous, immaterial, and unitive intellect. This is the same truth that is expressed in this line of verse:

These utterances of “we” and “I” are on account of the intellect (*‘aql*)
and the shackle (*iqāl*);
In the solitude of the intoxicated, there is no “we” and “I.” (Ibid.)

“Philosophical reason,” though possessed of significant value from an epistemological point of view, is incapable of entering into the “chamber of intuition” and the “feast of existence” on its own account. For this, it must

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seek the assistance of mysticism in order to acquire the status of “immediate reason.” For,

He is eternally the absolute king,
Settled in his abode of dignity.
Thence he cannot condescend to enter the mind;
How may the intellect of creatures reach where he is? (‘Aṭṭār
Nayshābūri)

The second reason for which it is important to speak of rational mysticism is that from the viewpoint of the tradition of the Prophet, the spirituality that is at odds with the sound, innate, and perfected intellect, thus lacking a rational basis, is null and void. For, that which is higher and superior cannot refute that which is lower and inferior. As such, true mysticism cannot denounce and discredit reason. A mystical interpretation of existence, God, and the human being is necessarily acceptable to the intellect. The “is” and “ought” of “pristine mysticism,” which is consequent on spiritual wayfaring, though on a higher plane than that of “immediate reason,” is nevertheless in accord with it, without their being any contradiction between the two modes of knowledge that would require to negate the intellect and its cognitive faculties. It is, on the contrary, the function of mysticism to compel the intellect to elevate its efforts to attain to a higher level of knowledge.

The pristine mysticism exemplified by Prophet Muḥammad (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household) possesses features that are approved by the mature and unbiased intellect, for it is free of any extremist tendencies and instead is rich with knowledge and justice. Furthermore, the interpretive and formal language of pristine mysticism is rationalistic, and it is for this reason that the language of philosophy has come to serve as the conduit for the expression of the signs, visions, and intuitions of mysticism. And it is in this light that mysticism functions as a source for opening new horizons and introducing new questions for theosophic metaphysics. This truth accounts for the close affinity that rational reasoning and mysticism achieved in Mullā Ṣadrā’s “metaphilosophy” (*ḥikmat-i muta‘ālīyah*), which successfully demonstrated the inseparability of the two modes of knowledge when viewed from the vantage of the sacred

knowledge derived from the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet's legitimate heir (*'itrat*).²

Pristine mysticism as exemplified by the Prophet is not vulnerable to the harms posed by reason-evading and jurisprudence-averse tendencies. As such, the theoretical and practical errors that characterize the false mysticisms, which oppose the judgments of reason and prescribe practices that violate the principle of moderation, are not to be found in the context of the pristine mysticism of Islam. Mysticism as exemplified by the Prophet embraces reason rather than opposing it; it praises reason rather than vilifying it. The message of Islamic mysticism is,

I granted the intellect a provision of wine,
Then did I set it in motion on the highway of existence (Ḥāfiẓ
Shirāzi, ghazal no. 143);
Take this immature intellect to the tavern,
That red wine should bring its blood to a boil (ibid., ghazal no. 120).

It is reported that the Noble Prophet thus advised Imām 'Alī:

O 'Alī, when God's slaves strive to draw near to Him by means of
righteous deeds, you should strive to draw near to Him by means of
reason, that you may surpass them. (Ṭabrisī, 1411, p. 251)

At this point, I shall specify a number of the elements that are characteristic of rational mysticism as exemplified by the Prophet, in both its theoretical and practical aspects. An exhaustive enumeration of these elements is, of course, beyond the scope of the present article, and so only the most important will be treated herein.

THE ELEMENTS OF RATIONAL MYSTICISM

i. The Two Confessions

As explained above, the Prophet identified true mysticism with two confessions of inability. One pertains to the aspect of the true knowledge of God, in respect to which the highest achievement of the human being aspir-

² *'Itrab* literally denotes the male offspring of a man. In the context at hand, it designates the male progeny of the Prophet descending from his daughter, Fāṭimah, the wife of 'Alī. According to the Shia faith, the legitimate successors of the Prophet as appointed by him were 'Alī, his son-in-law, and thereafter those of 'Alī's male progeny that were appointed by the preceding successor. [Tr.]

ing to know God is to realize his inability in appropriately comprehending the Divine Essence and the Names and Attributes of Grandeur and Beauty of the Absolute Transcendent Person (*ḥaḍrat-i ghayb-i muṭlaq*), acquiring knowledge of whom is impossible (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Sarchishmih-yi andīshih*, vol. 5, pp. 65-66 and *Taḥrīr tambīd al-qawā'id*, pp. 42-45). To reach this level of understanding, however, is a great feat and is possible only for those who remain steadfast on the path of spiritual wayfaring. This confession of incompetence should not be construed as contradicting what is said of the greatest mystics—namely, that they succeed in immediately comprehending the truth of the Absolute Unqualified Existence—for this latter comprehension belongs to the Plane of Unicity (*maqām-i aḥadīyyat*), not to the Plane of the Essence (*maqām-i dhāt*), which bewilders all and eludes any attempt at its comprehension (Jawādī Āmulī, *Taḥrīr tambīd al-qawā'id*, pp. 386-394).

The second confession of inability concerns the aspect of obedience and submission to God, for no one can claim to be able to worship God as He deserves. Of course, it must be pointed out that this ultimate level of comprehension, which consists in truly grasping one's inability in knowing and worshipping God, is a blessing granted by the grace of God to the aspirant who desires to know and worship Him. But alas! Contingent and finite being cannot comprehend necessary and infinite existence and the aspirant who seeks to know and worship God cannot apprehend He who is truly deserving of being known and worshipped, for it is impossible that the encompassed (*muhāt*; i.e., the human being) should comprehend the Encompassor (*muhīt*; i.e., God), whether this be in point of knowledge or of worship. Hence, the possessor of the most perfect intellect, the guide of the path, he who is the embodiment of the Straight Path, Prophet Muḥammad (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) proclaimed, "We know You not according as You are and worship You not according as You deserve" (*Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 98, p. 23), thus dispelling the delusion one may harbor in believing that gaining knowledge of the Divine Essence (*kunh-i dhāt-i ilāhī*) and worshipping the Truth of Truths (*ḥaqīqat-ul-ḥaqā'iq*) is possible, for where the Absolute Light shines, there is naught but that vanishes into obscurity and nothingness.

This is one of the possible meanings of the mystical term "awakening" (*yaqzab*), which extends from the commencement of the spiritual journey to the end of divine unveiling, which dawns on the illuminated, insightful, and discerning wayfarer, revealing to him his innate inability in knowing and worshipping God. In the same light, certain mystics interpret the fa-

mous saying by the Prophet, “Indeed desire overpowers my heart and I beseech God for forgiveness seventy times a day” (Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 25, p. 204), as indicating the inevitable awareness of multiplicity that is consequent on remaining in this world of illusion, the rending of the seventy thousand veils of light, and the realization of the said truth—namely, that compared to the Worshipped, the worshipper is utter nothingness and that in comparison to His Glory, the knowledge he gains and the worship he performs is not even so much as a drop in the ocean. This is, of course, notwithstanding the opinion that accounts for the Prophet’s pleading forgiveness as pertaining to a preemptive prevention rather than consequent remission (Jawādī Amulī, *Tafsīr maṣṣūṭi qur’ān majīd*, vol. 11, pp. 159-160). And it is possible that the prayer which the Prophet is reported as having uttered—“O my Lord, increase me in bewilderment in You”—was a plea for attaining existential expansion (*tawṣī‘ih-yi wujūdī*) by means of arriving at the Station of Bewilderment (*ḥayrah*). This bewilderment is, however, identical with knowledge and awareness (rather than being the lack thereof), and thus the Prophet speaks of *increasing*, which signifies intensification and expansion in existence. For, as the wayfarer attains union with the Divine Essence, he is overwhelmed by love, joy, and intellective and intuitive bewilderment as a consequence of experiencing the Lordly epiphanies.

Pronouncing his incapability in adequately praising God, the Noble Prophet (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household) says, “I cannot offer a praise that becomes You; You are as You praise Yourself” (Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 68, p. 23).

Elaborating on this topic, Āqā ‘Alī Mudarris Zunūzī states that the human being can be obligated to seek knowledge of God only in so far as the scope of human comprehension allows. As such, he understands the above-mentioned assertion by the Prophet—“We know You not as You are” (*mā ‘arafnāka ḥaqqā ma‘rifatik*)—as indicating that to know God adequately is to acknowledge that knowing Him is impossible (Mudarris Zunūzī, 1376, p. 37). Offering a grammatical analysis of Mudarris Zunūzī’s interpretation of the said Prophetic phrase, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī explains that based on the common interpretation, the literal meaning is, “We cannot apprehend an adequate knowledge of You,” whereas based on Mudarris Zunūzī’s point of view, a more accurate translation of the phrase would be, “[To acknowledge that] we cannot know You is the most adequate knowledge of You that we can apprehend” (Jawādī Āmulī, *Adab-i fanā-yi muqarrabān*, vol. 2, p. 134).

The conclusion we may draw based on what has been said in the above is that the existential level of the Divine Essence—that is, Absolute Existence—is beyond the ken of the philosopher’s rational enquiry as well as the reach of the mystic’s intuition. Likewise, the entitative Divine Attributes, at their most sublime level, where they are identical with the Divine Essence, are eternally incomprehensible and so neither rational reasoning nor mystical intuition can hope to fathom them (*ibid.*, p. 135). This conclusion is supported by the Prophet’s assertion concerning the incomprehensibility of the Divine Essence to the angels and the prophets alike:

Verily God is concealed from the comprehension of the intellects just as He is concealed from the perception of the eyes, and verily the Supernal Elite (*al-mala’ al-a’lā*) seek Him just as you seek Him.” (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, pp. 78 and 149)

The following verse aptly expresses this truth:

How can perception discern You as You are?
It is only to the extent of his discernment that every perceiver comprehends You.

Thus, the highest degree of knowledge that the mystic who has attained union can possess is to acknowledge his lack of knowledge of God, and the ultimate end of the slave’s worship is to acknowledge his failure in truly worshipping Him.

2. Awakening and Insight

In the pristine mysticism exemplified by the Prophet, the first step on the spiritual path is that the intellect should achieve awakening and the heart acquire insight. The human being must seize the opportunities he is afforded. As such, the mystic who is cognizant of the passing and knowledge-laden moments of spiritual wayfaring knows that he must place himself in the way of the Breeze of Divine Intimacy (*nasīm-i uns*), inhale the Sacred Fragrance (*nāfīḥ-yi qudsī*), and seize the Moments of Divine Mercy (*waqt-i raḥmānī*). The Master of All the Worlds (Prophet Muḥammad) has said, “Indeed there are breezes that flow from your Lord in your lifetimes. Lo! place yourself in their way” (Majlisī, *op. cit.*, vol. 68, p. 23 and vol. 66, p. 292). The following line by the mystic poet, Ḥāfiẓ Shirāzī, can be read as a succinct interpretation of the latter phrase:

The fragrance that the eastern wind carries from that forelock,
The curls of his black tress—what pain has it inflicted on the hearts.

RATIONAL MYSTICISM IN THE PROPHETIC ETHOS

The primary fabric of the human being was woven from the Divine Spirit—“So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down in prostration before him” (Qur’an 15:29). He came into being from nothingness and he progresses toward his end by means of spiritual labor—“O human being, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will meet Him” (Qur’an 84:6). The paragon of human perfection, Prophet Muḥammad, warned humankind that if it desires to attain union with the Beloved, it must practice virtue and thereby arrive at the Station of Unity (*maqām-i taḥwīd*), advancing from the negative state of perfection to the positive—

Say ‘I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One God. So whoever anticipates meeting his Lord must act righteously and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.’ (Qur’an 18:110)

The negative and the positive aspects of faith constitute the essential substance of the message brought by the King of the World, the Seal of Prophethood, Muḥammad; he announced, “Say, ‘There is no god save God,’ that you may be felicitous.” This sacred attestation of unity is the distillation of Islam.

The awakening of the intellect and the insight of the heart enable one to sense and to be swayed by the divine allures (*jadhabāt*) and epiphanies (*jalawāt*). The gravitation toward these allures and epiphanies lead the enamored wayfarer (whether he was enamored after embarking on the spiritual journey, which would make him a *sālik-i majdhūb*, or was enamored and then took to the spiritual journey, which would make him a *majdhūb-i sālik*) to the ocean of Divine Beauty and Grandeur, whereby he sees the secrets of the earthly and the supernal realms (*mulk* and *malakūt*), for “When God desires to bless His slave, He opens the eye of his heart.” Divine grace (*‘ināyat-i ilāhī*) will then operate as a constant attraction, stimulating him to advance through the stages of the spiritual journey, culminating in the stage “that no eye has perceived and no ear has heard from and that has not occurred to a human heart” (see Qummī, 1416, under the entry “*sh-b-d*”).

The awakened human being sets off on the journey from the state of earthly attachment (*ta‘alluq*) to achieve intellection (*ta‘aqqul*), from the realm of differentiation (*ta‘ayyun*) to that of devotion (*ta‘abbud*). He soars as high as his resolve takes him. Prophet Muḥammad (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household) has said, “Man flies by means of his resolve just as the bird flies by means of its wings.” The way-

faring mystic who succeeds in completing the spiritual journey identifies everything with Him and seeks everything for His sake, for he is no longer with his *self* but is now with God; he has moved beyond “I” and has attained union with “Him.” Thus, filled with ecstasy, he chants, “He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden” (Qur’an 57:3). He constantly sings,

For beholding Your Countenance, a spirit-perceiving eye is needed,
For how can this come of my world-perceiving eye. (Ḥāfīz, ghazal no.
40)

3. Voluntary Death (*mawt-i ikhtiyārī*)

Among the sacred teachings of the Prophet is *voluntary death*. Voluntary death is the fountainhead of the spring of immortal life, for unless the human being experiences death, he cannot set off on the spiritual path, and unless he experiences mortality, he cannot know immortality. The mystic on the quest to divine union is constantly experiencing death; he dies and dies again. The dichotomies of life beleaguer him incessantly: “I” vs. “He,” the material vs. the spiritual, the self vs. God.

Such dichotomies affect every moment and aspect of his life, the trivial as well as the significant. He is constantly faced with problems arising from these dichotomies, and it is in the strife and conflict posed by these dichotomies that he senses true life. As such, while on the spiritual path, the wayfarer is perpetually on the verge of death, the conflict of the evil-inciting (*ammārah*) and deceiving (*musawwilah*) self with the intellective (*‘āqilah*), virtue-inspiring (*mulhimah*), and assured (*muṭma’innah*) self consumes him until he tastes death. The bitter pangs of this voluntary death result in a spiritual intoxication and swoon that in turn beget the sweetness of theophany and a sobriety (*ṣabḥw*) that is consequent on the thoroughness of the primordial intoxication (*ṣabbā-yi alast*).

The Greatest of Prophets (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household) said, “Die before you die” (Ḥasanzādiḥ Āmulī, *Shrḥ ‘uyūn masāyil nafs*, vol. 2, p. 362). That is, the natural and inevitable death will sooner or later befall us, so we must prepare for it and welcome it. In one supplication, the Prophet addresses God in these words:

O my God, enable me to distance myself from the world of delusion [i.e., the material world], to turn to the Abode of Eternity, and to prepare for death before I perish.

In this supplication, the Prophet teaches us that we must endeavor to flee from the realm of multiplicity to that of unity, from the transient material abode to the abode of permanence. We must welcome death, for death is to behold the Beloved rather than the *self*. Prior to death and the preparation for it, we are in essence dead, and it is only at death that we awaken: “People are asleep; when they die, they gain consciousness” (*Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 5, p. 134).

However, “true death,” which is the most perfect manifestation of eternal life, is not easily accomplished. It requires that one should undertake spiritual exercises (*riāḍat*) and embark on the path of spiritual struggle (*mujāhadat*). Or, in the words of the mystics, one must transcend oneself and become annihilated in God (*fanā-yi fī-llāh*) so as to realize death (Imām Khumaynī, 1373, pp. 623-625). The Qur’an affirms, “Whosoever leaves his house, journeying toward God and His Prophet, and is then overtaken by death—his reward shall fall on God” (Qur’an 4:100). And the reward of voluntary death is immortality, for this death is in fact a rebirth, a sublime rebirth, which involves completing the journey on the Arc of Ascent following the completion of the journey on the Arc of Descent. Shaykh Shabistari describes this journey as “the journey that is the reverse of the first” (Shabistari, 1368, p. 25).

Mystics classify death into four types: 1. the red death, which consists in the wayfarer’s battle with his evil-inciting self; 2. the white death, which involves enduring hunger, thereby obtaining luminosity of soul and “whiteness” of the heart; 3. the green death, which is to lead a humble lifestyle and to wear menial clothing; 4. the black death, which is consequent on bearing the reproach of the ignorant and the difficulties of the spiritual quest (Ḥasanzādih Āmulī, *Sharḥ ‘uyūn masāyil nafs*, p. 154). The realization of voluntary death—which is to attain immateriality (*tajarrud*) and identification (*tawahḥud*) and to transcend the material realm to arrive at the spiritual, to rise above the corporeal realm (*nāsūt*) and attain to the Supernal Majesty of God (*jabarūt*)—rests on the fulfillment of the above deaths. In the words of ‘Allāmah Ḥasanzādih Āmulī, “Voluntary death is the true life: you cannot know this unless you taste it” (Ḥasanzādih Āmulī, *Hizār-u yik nuktib*, p. 248).

Imām ‘Alī (peace be upon him) is reported as having said, “Die before you die, and remove yourselves from your bodies before you are removed [against your will]” (*Nahj al-balāghah*, speech no. 143). Voluntary death is a resurrection that takes place within the wayfarer’s soul, turning his attention away from the exterior of the world and the exoteric aspect to the inte-

rior of the world and its esoteric aspect in order that he may behold the Beloved and actualize the latent potentials of his existence. By undergoing this death, one removes the veils from before one's soul, thus perceiving all that was previously hidden.

4. Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization

One of the prominent elements of the Noble Prophet's mystical teachings is self-knowledge, which is the necessary preliminary for acquiring knowledge of God. One may even say that self-knowledge is identical with knowledge of God, for the human being who acquires self-knowledge has ipso facto acquired knowledge of God. To liberate oneself from one's *self* is tantamount to union with God: "Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord" (Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 61, p. 99). Until he succeeds in apprehending his true *self* by dispelling his illusory self-conception, which is the product of the imagination, the human being remains in a state of unawareness (*ghaf-lat*). Once he distinguishes his *true* self from his *false* self, the state of awakening obtains and—in the words of the martyred scholar, Murtaḍā Muṭahhari—"his soul is set afire, thereby becoming acquainted with the pain [of divine love]" (Muṭahhari, *Majmū'ih āthār*, p. 304). Self-knowledge (*khudshināsī*) and self-building (*khudsāzī*) constitute the foundation of true mysticism.

There are, however, two types of self-knowledge: theoretical and practical. The theoretical is realized either discursively or intuitively. To succeed in realizing the latter mode of theoretical self-knowledge means that the wayfarer is no longer aware of himself; the way, too, gradually recedes into oblivion; and thus the only entity that remains is the Destination. This is the stage whereat the wayfarer is utterly overwhelmed by the unity of Divine Actions, Attributes, and Essence, thus perceiving exclusively the Beloved, acknowledging immediately that He is the First and the Last. This stage is also referred to as vanishment (*maḥw*), eradication (*tams*), or abolishment (*maḥq*) (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr ma'wḍū'ī qur'ān majīd*, vol. 4, p. 281 and *Tafsīr tasnīm*, vol. 5, pp. 472-482; see also Ḥasanzādhī Āmulī, *Sharḥ 'uyūn masāyil naḥs*, vol. 2, pp. 356-357).

One who accomplishes self-knowledge and self-building transcends the realms of matter (*māddih*), imagination (*mithāl*), and intellection (*'aql*) and arrives at a level whereat one is "with the Lord" (*'ind-a-rrabb*). This exalted state is attained when the human being intuitively comprehends his existential destitution (*faqr-i wujūdī*) in light of self-knowledge. And it is the purpose of the Prophet's tradition to make the human being aware of his

true self. Thus, the Qur'an asserts, "O believers, take heed of your own souls" (Qur'an 5:105). The reason for this command is that the human heart is the existential tablet in which the perfective substantial motion (*ḥarakat-i ishtidādī-yi jawharī*)—which is the motion stimulated by the love of and passion for God inherent in the human essence—is ingrained. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, "Self-knowledge is the mother of wisdom and the source of all virtues" (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ hidāyah ibn athīr*, p. 7); or as expressed by 'Allāmah Ḥasanzādiḥ Āmulī, "Indeed self-knowledge is the key to all supernal vaults" (Ḥasanzādiḥ Āmulī, *Hiẓār-u yik nuktib*, No. 709); and 'Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī states, "Self-knowledge is the mother of virtues and the source of all knowledge" (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr tasnīm*, vol. 3, p. 148).

The Prophet's instructions on proceeding on the spiritual path are beautifully articulated in the following dialogue between him and one Mujāshī:

Mujāshī: "What is the path to knowledge of God?"

The Prophet: "Self-knowledge."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to comply with God?"

The Prophet: "To defy the self."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to securing God's pleasure?"

The Prophet: "The displeasure of the self."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to union with God?"

The Prophet: "To leave the self behind."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to obedience to God?"

The Prophet: "To disobey the self."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to the remembrance of God?"

The Prophet: "To neglect the self."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to attaining proximity to God?"

The Prophet: "To distance oneself from the self."

Mujāshī: "What is the path to becoming intimate with God?"

The Prophet: "To disown the self."

Mujāshī: "And how can all this be accomplished?"

The Prophet: "To invoke God's succor against the self." (See Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 72 and Nūrī, 1404, vol. 11, p. 128)

This dialogue illustrates all the more clearly that to realize the truth of "and I breathed into him of My Spirit" (Qur'an 15:29)—that is, to comprehend the emanative (*isbrāqī*) and ennobling (*tashrīfī*) relation between God and the human being—and to recollect the "reed-bed" is the preliminary step for the return of the human from this Abode of Deficiency (*'aybistān*) to the Abode of Transcendence (*'ghaybistān*) and for the return of the reed-

flute to the reed-bed whence it came.³ This realization is necessary should the human being aspire to answer God's eternal invitation: "Thus enter among My slaves and enter into My paradise" (Qur'an 89:29-30), so as relinquish this Fleeting Realm (*dār al-fanā*'), to gain entry into the Tavern of Divine Presence (*miykbānib-yi shuhūd*), the Abode of Permanence (*dār al-baqā*'), and to attain union with the Beloved. 'Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī thus elaborates:

In the light of self-knowledge, the human being can perceive his inner existence as well as the outer world and see God's microcosmic as well as His macrocosmic signs, thus reinforcing his unitive worldview. (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī qur'ān karīm*, vol. 9, p. 357)

5. The Judgment of the People of the Heart (*ahl-i dil*)

From the standpoint of the pristine mysticism exemplified in the Prophet's ethos, the mystic's foremost concern is to preserve his divine essence in its pristine state of infallibility and his God-given heart in the sound state in which God bestowed it upon him. Furthermore, he guards the unerring knowledge he has come into possession of from being adulterated and his righteous deeds from being rendered ineffectual. As such, the enlightened mystic looks introspectively into his divine essence and luminous soul for determining what is good and what is bad for his existence and spiritual journey. When assailed by doubt, he turns to his heart to distinguish right from wrong, that which is conducive to spiritual beauty from that which entails spiritual ugliness, and virtue from vice (*ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 188-189). The Greatest of Prophets (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) confirmed this approach in his answer to Wābiṣah.

It is reported that one Wābiṣah ibn Ma'bad Asadī determined to see the Prophet to enquire into vice and virtue. On meeting the Prophet, Wābiṣah was thus addressed by him: "Would you prefer to mention your question or

³ "the return of the reed-flute to the reed-bed whence it came": This is an allusion to the allegorical poem by Rumi that opens his *Mathnawī*. The first three lines read,
 Listen to this reed-flute as it complains,
 Recounting its story of separation:
 "Ever since I was cut from the reed-bed,
 Men and women have moaned in unison with my lament."
 "I desire a bosom torn asunder by the pain of separation,
 To divulge the story of the pain of passion." [Tr.]

should I say it myself,” and he agreed that the Prophet should say the question before he even told him. So the Prophet continued, “You are here to enquire concerning vice and virtue.” Wābiṣah nodded in agreement. The Prophet then pointed to his chest with his hand and said,

Virtue is that on account of which one finds tranquility; it is that on account of which the bosom finds peace. And vice is that which causes uncertainty in the bosom and afflicts the heart with doubt even though others and even I may approve of and condone it.⁴
(Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, 1414, vol. 27, p. 166)

In light of this assertion by the Noble Prophet (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household), the sound and unsullied heart can serve as the authority in settling one’s theoretical as well as practical matters. Should one turn from the outside to the inside, liberating the mind from all external thoughts and the heart from all external concerns, one will find one’s true, lofty, and divine self, which will then serve as an inner and unfailing guide on the path of spiritual perfection. But in order to realize this true self, it is necessary that one should endeavor to read and understand one’s inner self, constantly guarding oneself against evil deeds and holding oneself to account. To this end, one must safeguard the innate spiritual capacities bestowed by God, prevent the light of one’s divine essence from being extinguished by sin, and maintain the divine mirror of one’s heart in its pristine and unmarred state, having recourse to the Qur’an and to the remembrance of God and the Resurrection for cleansing the heart of the sins that accrue thereon in order to prepare it for receiving the rays of Divine Light.

The wayfarer’s overriding concern should be to safeguard his existential capacities and to endeavor to actualize them and bring them to fruition. In those matters concerning which he is in doubt, he must appeal to his certainties to function as the judge and arbiter, and these certainties he must ascertain by invoking the authority of the Most Certain of All Certainties, that is, the perfect human being, the ultimate exemplar. These measures are

⁴ “even though others and even I may approve of and condone it”: That is, if your heart tells you something is wrong, you must heed the call of your heart and disregard what others may say, even if they be prominent personages. We should, of course, be careful not to misconstrue this saying as a blank approval of one’s “hunch,” so to speak. The true meaning, rather, is that when confronted by sin, one can usually sense the spiritually unwholesome air that comes with, although one may at the same time be stimulated by his base self to pursue it. [Tr.]

necessary if the wayfarer wishes to continue on the Straight Path and prevent his going astray. And the preliminary for implementing these measures is self-purification: “Indeed he who purifies the self is felicitous” (Qur’an 91:9).

Self-purification enables the wayfarer to advance, gives him the impetus to progress, and the resolution to remain steadfast. By purifying his self, the wayfarer expands his existential capacity and attains inner loftiness; he transcends the finite “I” to arrive at the infinite “I,” thus acquiring a cosmic perception of the world that encompasses the higher stages of existence. One so purified is no longer imprisoned by the narrow and dark confines of the “I” that is captive to this inferior and unstable world but has rather procured his liberation and nobility, thus perceiving humankind, the world, and the society from the vantage of “God’s Eye,” for he is possessed of a purified soul and a broadened heart, of insight and patience. And there is no wealth more valuable than these existential and spiritual capacities that obtain through the operation of God’s universal (*hidāyat-i ‘āmmih*) and special guidance (*hidāyat-i khāṣṣih*).

In this relation, ‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī states,

These existential capacities of the human being constitute his Greatest Name (*ism-i a‘zam*). Just as God has “Great Names” and a “Greatest Name,” the former of which must be unlocked by invoking the latter, so the human being, who is God’s viceroy (*khālīfah*), is possessed of certain “great names” and one “greatest name,” the former of which must be realized in the light of the latter. Should we succeed in correctly determining the key elements of our existence, we shall be able to transfer our concerns from the outside world to our inner existence, whereby many of our problems shall be resolved. (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr insān bi insān*, p. 280)

Therefore, in the spiritual path of Prophet Muḥammad, that which is possessed of primary significance is the human being’s divine essence (*fiṭrat*), the pure and purified soul that functions as the rational and the virtue-inspiring element in one’s nature. The illuminated and perceptive human being realizes that it is in his inner sanctum that he can receive the existential truths and the spiritual graces and perfections: The malady and the remedy are both present within his “purified heart.” Aware of this truth, not only does he strive to retain his innate, existential innocence, but he also endeavors to render it even more purified and luminous, which is possible by means of the guidance of religion (*hidāyat-i sharī‘at*) and the grace of God’s viceroy (*ināyat-i wilāyat*), the perfect human being.

6. Mystical Experience

In the modern age, one of the factors associated with mysticism is spiritual experience, variously referred to as the unitive experience, the inner experience, the intuitive experience, the religious experience, or the mystical experience. Such experience has been a topic of debate—both from an epistemological and an ontological point of view—among the philosophers. “Religious experience” is, of course, a modern concept, introduced into cultural and philosophical discussions in the nineteenth century. It is a topic of discourse in such disciplines as philosophy of religion, mysticism, and psychology of mysticism. A number of prominent figures of philosophy, mysticism, and philosophy of religion have included this concept in the discussion on the nature of religion and of revelation, going so far as to equate its significance with that of revelation—a worthy question for consideration but which is beside the scope of the present article.

But as far as mysticism is concerned, the “unitive, mystical experience” is characterized by a number of qualities: a unitive tendency, ineffability, and mysteriousness. The possibility of this experience—which can variously be described as introvertive (*bāṭinī*), intuitive (*shuhūdī*), illuminative (*ishrāqī*), or spontaneous (*dhawqī*)—is presupposed in the context of mystical spirituality. Such experience is the culminating manifestation of the mystic’s advancement through the stages of the spiritual path, and therefore the wayfarer—who is the possessor of knowledge, suffused with divine love and motivated by obedience to God—undergoes mystical experience in accordance with his peculiar spiritual stage.

The mystics, however, identify two types of spiritual experience: correct, real, and true experience or incorrect, false, and impaired experience. And since Islamic mysticism is possessed of a definite methodology, it sets certain epistemological factors for distinguishing false from true experience. These are (1) the Qur’an, (2) the disclosure of an infallible or perfect human being, (3) sound rational reasoning. ‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī explains,

The experience of those who are neither a prophet nor infallible—whether this experience be an intuition (*kashf* or *shuhūd*), a dream (*ru’yā*), or the sensation of an entity attached to or detached from the soul or body—needs to be verified with recourse to a criterion so as to determine its truth or falsity and its value. (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr maṣṣūṭi qur’ān majīd*, vol. 3, p. 95).

If as a result of obedience to God, the mystic undergoes a mystical and intuitive experience, he must preserve a state of constant vigilance so as to

protect his spiritual experiences. For, first, in order to be qualified to have a mystical experience, spiritual purification, servility before God the Glorified, and love of Him are necessary. Second, to maintain and ensure the continuance of these experiences and to merit better and stronger experiences, spiritual purity and existential elevation are necessary.

The Noble Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) expresses the means for the initiation and continuation of mystical experience in straightforward terms: "Maintain purity and God shall perpetuate His sustenance unto you" (Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 105, p. 16). The purity mentioned in this report may be read to encompass the "lesser purification" (*ṭahārat-i ṣuḡhrā*), which consists in bodily or external purification, the "middle purification" (*ṭahārat-i wuṣṭā*), which is to purge one's soul of vice and evil dispositions, and the "greater purification" (*ṭahārat-i kubrā*), which is to purify the soul from its comprehension of multiplicity and all other than God.

The great prophet of Islam (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) identified obedience and servility before God as the substance of religious and mystical experience. As such, in the account relating to the spiritual vision experienced by a certain ascetic Muslim (variously identified as Ḥārithah ibn Mālik and Zayd ibn Mālik), whereby he saw heaven and hell and their occupants—the spiritual stage designated by the mystics as the station of certainty (*maqām-i yaqīn*) or that of virtue (*maqām-i iḥsān*)—(see Ḥasanzādih Āmulī, *Hiżār-u yik nuktib*, p. 247 and Jawādī Āmulī, *op. cit.*, p. 105), the Prophet is reported as having described him in these words, "This is a *slave* whose heart God has illuminated by the light of faith" (Kulaynī, 1401, vol. 1, p. 54). Furthermore, it is reported that the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) would address every morning those of his companions to whom he administered spiritual guidance, asking them what they had gained on the previous night: "Verily the Prophet of God would in the morning ask his companions, 'Any good news?' by which he intended dreams" (Majlisī, *op. cit.*, vol. 61, p. 177).

The Noble Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) offered an epistemological and ontological criterion for assessing the dreams that one sees when asleep. He accounted for the veracity of dreams in the context of the difference between the "detached imagination" (*kbīāl-i munfaṣīl*) and the "attached imagination" (*kbīāl-i muttaṣīl*). As explained by the Prophet, all dreams, true and false alike, derive from the Luminous Repository of Divine Knowledge. But as they descend through

the successive existential levels, they are contaminated and turned into “confused dreams” (*adghāth ahlām*).⁵ The Prophet said,

O ‘Alī, there is no slave but that when he sleeps his soul is lifted up to the Lord of the Worlds. What he sees while in the presence of the Lord of the Worlds is truth. But when God—the Mighty, the Domineering—commands that his soul should return to his body, the soul descends from the heaven to the earth, and it is therein that he sees confused dreams.⁶ (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 58, p. 158)

Elaborating on this subject, Qayṣarī states,

All visions are initially from the Lord, the Truth. But they are besieged by the alterations and manipulations of the soul that divest them of their veracity, whereby they are transformed into forgeries of the soul or insinuations of the demons. (Qayṣarī, op. cit., p. 537)

It is thus demonstrated that there needs to be a criterion for the verification of the spiritual experiences of the mystics.

We may summarize what has been said in the above in the following points:

1. mystical, spiritual, and immediate experience is an indubitable reality;
2. the way to effecting such experience is obedience to God and purification of the heart and mind;
3. the introvertive experience of the mystic—whether it be in the dream-state or while awake—is corruptible and susceptible of error;
4. the only definitive authorities that can serve as the criterion for verifying mystical experience are the Qur’an and the infallible human being, whose own mystical experience is the touchstone of the spiritual experience of all others.

The late ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī (may God be pleased with him) posits self-knowledge, self-inspection (*muḥāsabah-yi nafs*), and self-vigilance (*murāqabah-yi nafs*) as the principal factors in attaining mystical experience (Ṭabāṭab’ī, 1412, vol. 5, p. 256 and vol. 6, p. 170), adding that the observance of the religious injunctions—such as prayer, supplication, remembrance of God, avoidance of sin—provides the necessary means for this purpose (Jawādī Āmulī, *Dinshināsī*, pp. 244-253). ‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī has the following to say as regards this subject:

⁵ This is an allusion to Qur’an 12:44 and 21:5. [Tr.]

⁶ That is, dreams that are meaningless due to their vagueness and confusion.

Of course, should the mystics adhere to Islamic law (*shari'at*) and the authority of the Prophet's house (*ahl-ul-bayt*) in traversing the genuine spiritual path, they shall then be eligible to receive a fraction of the immediate knowledge of the prophets and the divine viceroys—just as their grasp of mediate knowledge is only a fraction of the truth. (Ibid., p. 248)

7. Intuition as Exemplified in Hearing and Seeing

The Greatest of Prophets (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) assured the people of nobility and virtue, of rationality and philanthropy, of righteousness and resolve that they can attain immediate knowledge of God. He has said, "Were it not for your loquaciousness in speech and the confluence [of worldly concerns and evil desires] unto your hearts, you would see what I see and would hear what I hear" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 276). That is, should the believer, God's slave, guard his mouth and heart—or in the words of a certain mystic, "regulate the import and export of his heart"—he shall reach the station of immediate knowledge (*maqām-i shuhūd*), whereat his ears and eyes would serve as the conduit for receiving direct and immediate knowledge. In order to apprehend the "esoteric truths" of the world, one must abstain from unnecessary and idle speech and rein in the vacillations of the heart. Put differently, one must exercise self-vigilance and take control of the reins of one's tongue, preventing it from running wild.

In the same vein, the Prophet is reported as having said, "Were it not that the demons revolve round the hearts of the children of Adam, they would descry the Supernal Kingdom (*malakūt*) of the heavens and the earth" (ibid.). That is, if the human being prohibits his deceiving and evil-inducing archenemy, the demons, from entering the inner sanctum of his heart and revolving round it, he would most certainly be able to view the Supernal Kingdom of the cosmos.

The human being who attains to the level where he sees and hears the Supernal Kingdom of God transcends science (*'ilm*) and thought (*fabm*) to apprehend the world immediately and intuitively, thus witnessing God's Reign over the microcosm and the macrocosm and the annihilation of all things in Him. And one who achieves this realization is endowed with Divine Authority (*wilāyat-i ilāhī*), for Divine Authority is a status to which all humankind can aspire.

The human being endowed with Divine Authority hears the creatures as they glorify God. He sees the inner truth and the Supernal Kingdom of the

world, and he derives pleasure from the comprehension of these supernatural truths. This pleasure is of course the result of excruciating spiritual struggles and exercises. The Muslim mystic following in the mystical tradition of the Prophet views these spiritual experiences as blessings granted by God, for from his point of view Divine Unity is the ultimate truth that pervades the entire cosmos. He does not seek the inferior or mundane benefits that the spiritual path yields but rather pursues the ultimate aspiration of all mystics—beholding the Essence of God and the Grace of the Lord, the highest spiritual aspiration for which the hearts of mystics yearn. The most cherished desire of the mystic who views the Prophet as the exemplar to be followed is to arrive at the spiritual pinnacle that the Qur'an describes in this verse: "in the presence of their Lord are they nourished" (Qur'an 3:169). As such, his sole aspiration is to get a glimpse of the Countenance of the Beloved and to relish His epiphanies, preferring this spiritual bliss to all the fleeting pleasures that the world and human company can offer. He sacrifices the transient as well as the eternal world so as to be with God.

Based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household), beholding the Supernal Kingdom of God is a blessing granted only to those believers who are steadfast in their faith, whose hearts and spirits are unfaltering, whose eyes and tongues take their orders from the heart, and who keep guard of the heart—which is the sacred sanctuary of God—to prevent the infiltration of His enemies. Imām 'Alī (may God bless him) reports that the Prophet said, "The faith of the slave of God is not sound unless his heart is sound and his heart is not sound unless his tongue is sound" (Qummī, op. cit., p. 150 and *Nahj al-balāghah*, speech no. 174, p. 567).

The heart of the mystic is the repository and fortress of God-wariness (*taqwā*), a disposition that is the natural extension of knowledge of and obedience to God, for "For everything there is a repository, and the repository of God-wariness is the heart of the mystic" (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, vol. 8, p. 3590, no. 12280). A certain companion once asked the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household), "Teach me some deed for which God would love me." The Prophet replied, "If you wish to be loved by God, you must fear and be wary of Him" (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 70, p. 312, no. 14). Therefore, the mystics who complete the spiritual journey are suffused with God-wariness, for that is the pinnacle of wisdom: the Prophet of God is reported as having said, "The pinnacle of wisdom is fear of God" (ibid., vol. 21, p. 218). And one in whom fear of God is realized can fear none other—for "He who fears God, God shall

make all else to fear him” (Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 114)—and shall receive such knowledge as is free of falsehood—for “If you fear God according as He deserves, you shall be taught knowledge unblemished by ignorance” (Hindī, vol. 3, p. 142).

8. Love of God

The teachings of the Prophet in connection with mysticism can bring about numerous results, some of which are direct and some indirect. But one of the most prominent results of his teachings is love of God. The mystic, possessing immediate knowledge of God, necessarily loves Him. This love is what provokes him to seek God, to supplicate Him, and to speak with Him. Since he loves God, the mystic also loves to adore and worship Him, and he can never feel to have exhausted this need for worship. On the contrary, as he advances on the spiritual path and ascends to more perfect levels of spirituality, his devotion to religious law and worship intensifies. Thus, he weeps, repents, and supplicates more often. This is confirmed by the following words from the Noble Prophet (may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and his household):

The best of people is he who loves worship and embraces it; who loves it in his heart and performs it with his body; and who frees himself [from worldly matters] for its sake. He cares not how he fares in the world, whether he is rich or poor. (Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 83)

There are a number of profound points contained in these words. First, one who loves to worship God is among the best of humankind. Second, as worship has an inner and an outer aspect—the outer aspect pertains to the form and the rules of performance and the inner aspect relates to the substance and the secrets—the mystic, who loves worship, must direct his outer existence to satisfy the outer requirements of worship and his inner existence to realize its esoteric essence. This shows that it is wrong to reject the formal aspect of religion with the pretext of seeking its inner gem and substance: The kernel comes with the shell and the latter cannot be discarded for the sake of the former. Thus, the Prophet says that we must love worship in our hearts and perform it with our bodies; that is, the heart as well as the body must engage in worship and obedience to God. It is only when both aspects of the human being’s existence fulfill their function that he is secure against wandering astray into the wilderness of deviation.

The third point to be deduced from the above-quoted statement of the Prophet is that the believer who loves to worship God purges his heart of all else:

The solitude of the heart is no place to converse with outsiders;
As the demon leaves the angel enters.

The love of worship purifies the believer's imagination and intellect and imparts luminosity to the heart and mind, for he dissociates himself from all else in order to undertake worship (Muṭahharī, *Majmū'ih āthār*, vol. 3, p. 318). As such, when engaged in worship of God, he has no concerns weighing down on his mind, his imagination does not digress into other matters, he is filled with awe and servility, and his heart is pure and satisfied. The believer, of course, understands worship in a very broad sense, encompassing such seemingly mundane matters as working to sustain himself and his family, striving to improve the welfare of others, helping his fellow believers in solving their problems, and participating in the dissipation of knowledge through learning and teaching.

The fourth point indicated by the above-quoted statement from the Prophet is that once the believer has savored the pleasure of worship he cannot do without it and consequently he becomes indifferent to his material wellbeing. He is overwhelmed with love of God and so his sole concern is God, and nothing else matters (Muṭahharī, *Ta'lim wa tarbiyat-i islāmī*, pp. 330-343). For the realization of love, there are two necessary elements: that the beloved be possessed of perfection and that the lover be aware of the beloved (Jawādī Āmulī, *Adab-i fanā-yi muqarrabān*, vol. 2, p. 33). The Prophet of Islam (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) would pray to God that He should make His love more pleasing and appealing to him than fresh and pure water: "And make Your love more pleasing to me than cool water" (Fayḍ Kāshānī, op. cit., vol. 8, p. 6). Such love produces numerous effects in the soul both positively and negatively, for it aids in the acquisition of virtues and also in the purgation of vices (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Adab-i fanā-yi muqarrabān*, pp. 340-353).

9. Rational Mysticism

In the mysticism exemplified in the ethos of the Prophet, reason is an integral element, being present alongside intuition, although there are limits to its comprehension. The principal purpose of the ministry of God's prophets was to perfect the intellect, for there is nothing that is more valuable: "God did not appoint a prophet or a messenger unless he had perfect-

ed his reason and until his reason was superior to that of his people” (Kulaynī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 11). The intellect is indispensable: It is necessary prior to, concurrent with, and subsequent to mystical experience. The role of the wisdom of the intellect in relation to intuitive and mystical knowledge is similar to that of logic in relation to conventional discursive knowledge. Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī makes the following observation in his magnum opus concerning this subject:

You must know that the intellect is a correct criterion; its judgments are indubitable and free of falsehood, for it is just and it is impossible that injustice should come of it. (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 2, p. 323)

In the same vein, Ibn Turkah remarks,

We cannot positively affirm that the intellect is utterly incapable of grasping those visions and comprehensions that are on a higher level than the intellect. Yes, there are certain esoteric things which the intellect cannot reach on its own but it can reach them and grasp them by the aid of another faculty that is superior to it. But after it has reached them [by the aid of the faculty of intuition], it can comprehend them just as it comprehends the other objects of its comprehension. The same holds true of the intellect’s grasp of the particular objects of sense, for in order to reach them, it is in need of another faculty that is in this case [as opposed to the case of mystical intuition] inferior to it, but after it has grasped them, it comprehends them just as it comprehends the direct objects of its comprehension. Thus, the other objects of its comprehension [i.e., those that it comprehends by the mediation of another faculty], just as they are grasped [immediately] by that faculty, they are also grasped by the intellect albeit by the aid of that particular faculty. (Ḥasanzādhī Āmulī, *Taṣṣīḥ wa ta’līq tambīd al-qawā’id*, p. 219).

Thus as explained by Ibn Turkah, the intellect does possess the capacity to comprehend the esoteric truths that constitute the scope of intuitive knowledge, the only qualification being that it cannot grasp them immediately but must rely on the higher faculty of the soul, which is that of intuition. And the same truth applies to the intellect’s grasp of the particular objects of sense, only in the former case the immediate cognitive faculty is superior than the intellect whereas in the latter case, the immediate cognitive faculty is inferior.

Of course, the key to the comprehension of mystical visions and intuitions is the purity of the soul’s multiple levels of existence and the balanced

temperance (*i'tidāl-i mizājī*) of both body and soul. Once the soul becomes detached (*mujarrad*), it can then purify and perfect the intellect. The vast wealth of Islamic knowledge and divine wisdom suffice to show that reason can be complemented and enriched by intuition and that intuition can be confirmed and supported by reason (for more on this, see Mullā Ṣadrā, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 234-337; *Futūḥāt makkīyyah*, section 381; and *Majmū'ib muṣannafāt shaykh isbrāq*, vol. 2, p. 216).

Ibn 'Umar relates that after reciting the verse “that He may test you to ascertain which of you are best in conduct” (Qur'an 11:7 and 67:2), he asked the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household), “What is the meaning of that, O Prophet of God?” The Prophet replied, “That He may test to see which of you are best in reason” and continued “and which of you are best in refraining from sin and in obedience to Him” (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, op. cit., vol. 10, p. 185). This answer indicates that the intellect is the instrument for attaining perfection and nobility and it is the criterion in accordance with which “the best in conduct” are distinguished, for to qualify for this exalted status one must possess a perfect character and perform righteous deeds. Therefore, all the factors related to mysticism—spiritual exercises, love, intuition, and the supernatural powers of the mystics and the friends of God—must be weighed on the scale of the intellect—the intellect that is purified through faith and nourished by revelation—so as to determine their truth or falsity, for after all, as affirmed by the above-quoted answer from the Prophet, the intellect is the only authority capable of judging the efficacy or harm of actions in leading one to or away from God.

Now if a self-styled mystic violates the requirements of Islamic morality and ethics, fails to undertake the obvious obligations imposed by Islamic doctrine, engages in frivolous and lewd conversation, and eats without concern for the rules set by Islamic law—is it reasonable to consider him a mystic or, worse yet, a master of mysticism? What does the intellect judge concerning those who flout the most basic religious injunctions decreed by the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household)—such as the impermissibility of obtaining one's wealth through unlawful means, backbiting, slander, calumny, arrogance, faultfinding, and violating the rights of others—and, with the pretext of having gained insight into the esoteric substance of faith and the wisdom transcending the spiritual code of conduct of the mystical path, neglects his religious duties and scoffs at those who take them seriously? Are these so-called mystics to be commended or condemned?

What is to be said of a mysticism that discourages its adherents from participation in the society and politics, from being concerned with the welfare of others, and from striving to better the lives of the needy and instead promotes lethargy, seclusion, and antisocial tendencies? Is this genuine mysticism or is it an antinomian mockery of it?

Is it not true that the Qur'an—the greatest and enduring miracle of the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household)—exhorts the faithful to fight the enemies of God and to struggle in the way of knowledge? Is it not true that it stresses the importance of the esoteric and the exoteric, the inner and the outer, the concern for the pleasure of God and for the wellbeing of humankind, nobility and knowledge, obedience and benevolence simultaneously?

Is it not our belief that the ethos of the Noble Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) exemplified true mysticism in its full and most exalted form? Why is it then that some flaunt a perverted, unrealistic, and unbalanced conception of mysticism, relinquishing the pristine mysticism of Islam? Why is it that people tend to either one extreme or the other: Some championing spirituality at the expense of social participation, others sacrificing spirituality in the name of social activism? Can we agree with these misconstrued and lopsided conceptions of mysticism?

The mysticism practiced by the Prophet was one that extolled knowledge and love, passion and motivation, obedience to God and accountability, struggle and loyalty, sacrifice and selflessness, nobility and determination, dedication and persistence. The mysticism of the Prophet promoted self-sacrifice and peace. It is the mysticism of recluses that shuns society and politics. What is central to mysticism as exemplified in the Prophet's ethos is to stand up for God (*qīām-i li-llāh*) and to seek His pleasure, which is in itself the greatest reward.⁷ In Islam, mysticism is founded on rationality and reason and enriched by spirituality; in Islam logic and love, reason and intuition, faith and science, knowledge and passion, rationality and obedience, mysticism and justice are inextricably intertwined.

In the following report the Prophet offers six instructions, which accommodate the human being's rational and spiritual as well as personal and social aspects. Mu'āwīyah ibn 'Ammār reports that the sixth imām related that one of the passages of the Prophet's advice to Imām 'Alī was as follows:

⁷ This is an allusion to Qur'an 9:72. [Tr.]

RATIONAL MYSTICISM IN THE PROPHETIC ETHOS

O 'Alī, I advise you concerning certain qualities that you must realize in yourself. Take this advice from me (then addressing God, he said, "My God, help him"). (1) The first is honesty (*ṣidq*); never utter a lie. (2) The second is integrity (*wara'*); never commit an act of treachery. (3) The third is fear of God, great is His remembrance, as though you see Him. (4) The fourth is to weep often in awe of God; for every tear there shall be built for you in paradise a thousand houses. (5) The fifth is to give your blood and wealth in the cause of your faith. (6) The sixth is to adhere to my tradition in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As for prayer, [you are to perform] fifty *rak'abs* [daily].⁸ As for fasting, [one must fast] three days in every [lunar] month:⁹ the first Thursday of the month, the Wednesday of the middle of the month, and the last Thursday of the month. As for almsgiving, you should give until you doubt whether you are being wasteful, without actually being wasteful. Perform the mid-night prayer; perform the mid-night prayer; perform the mid-night prayer. Perform the mid-day prayer; perform the mid-day prayer; perform the mid-day prayer. Recite the Qur'an in whatever circumstance you may be. Raise your hands in prayer [when you utter "God is greater"] and let them face the *qiblah*.¹⁰ Brush your teeth every time you make *wuḍū'*.¹¹ I exhort you to practice the moral virtues and to shun the moral vices. Should you fail to abide by these instruction, blame only yourself. (*Rawḍah al-kāfī*, p. 79 and Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 74, p. 68)

This report illustrates that the mysticism exemplified by the Prophet was one that centered on God, the Resurrection, and obedience to Him. The virtues praised in the context of this mysticism are, among others, fear of God, sincerity, piety, personal integrity, adherence to the tradition of the

⁸ In Islamic liturgy, there are two general types of canonic prayer: obligatory and supererogatory. There are five obligatory prayers every day and eight supererogatory. Each prayer consists of two or more *rak'abs* (the morning prayer, for instance, which is the shortest form of prayer has two *rak'abs*), and each *rak'ab* comprises a number of movements, utterances, and postures. Now, of the fifty *rak'abs* mentioned in this report, 17 pertain to the obligatory prayers and the rest constitute the supererogatory prayers. [Tr.]

⁹ The Prophet is of course referring to the supererogatory fast. It is obligatory for Muslims to fast during the entire Month of Ramaḍān. [Tr.]

¹⁰ That is, the direction facing the Kaaba. [Tr.]

¹¹ One of the three forms of ablution in Islam. It is the principal form of ablution that must be performed prior to every prayer, barring certain exceptions, in which case the alternative forms of ablution are to be performed. [Tr.]

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Prophet, persistence in the performance of the obligatory and supererogatory prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, spending the latter part of the night in prayer and supplication, reforming one's character in conformity with the moral virtues, keeping a decent and pleasant appearance while also striving for the purification of one's soul, abiding vigorously by the injunctions of Islamic law, sincere concern for those in need of help, and maintaining one's honor and self-esteem.

It is reported that the Prophet said to Imām 'Alī, "O 'Alī, there are four traits that if present in one, one's faith is complete: honesty (*al-ṣidq*), gratitude (*al-shukr*), modesty (*al-ḥayā'*), and kindness (*ḥusn al-kbulq*)" (Mu'izzī Malāyirī, 1412, vol. 14, p. 285).

It is reported that Abū Dharr al-Ghaffārī requested the Prophet to give him some advice, whereat the Prophet replied, "I advise you to be kind and taciturn, for these two are the lightest virtues on the body but the weightiest on the scale of the Day of Judgment" (Hindī, op. cit., p. 664).

The conclusion that we may draw from the above is that mysticism as defined by the Prophet encompasses a broad scope of values and is possessed of three characteristics: it is inclusive, universal, and eternal. Mysticism thus defined is in conformity with the human nature and acceptable to reason; it accommodates the pursuit of justice in human society and promotes sympathy among humankind; it is concerned with the welfare of humankind; it is balanced and exalted at the same time; it reinforces religious law rather than opposing it; it seeks to advance human perfection; it cultivates dignity and self-esteem, condemning the false mysticisms that posit self-denigration as a virtue. In a word, Islamic mysticism is such as should it be appropriately introduced, it would appeal to the hearts and minds of all people in spite of their differences.

It was this mysticism that the Prophet exemplified in his personal, domestic, and social life, for he was "the greatest exemplar," the most perfect personification of all human virtues, the vessel of spiritual bliss and felicity, and of God's grace and effusion of mercy. In the language of Muslim mystics, the Prophet is the "Complete Muḥammadean Truth," the greatest manifestation of God, who descended to this world to perfect every facet of human life: spiritual, intellectual, social, and political. As such, the mysticism exemplified by the Prophet was not one that opposed science or reason, that shunned the political and social arenas, that promoted seclusion. On the contrary, the pristine mysticism of Prophet Muḥammad denounces eremitism and antisocial tendencies, just as it condemns secularism and spirituality- and religion-averse tendencies. These characteristics make Is-

lamic mysticism the most perfect spiritual model for human life, which, instead of undermining the foundations of social life, imparts spirituality to it, thereby cultivating a social order based on divine unity and authority, on religious law and spirituality.

The Noble Prophet—whom Islamic mysticism reveres as the “Incarnate Reason” (*‘aql-i mumaththal*), the “First Emanation” (*ṣādir-i awwal*), and the “Absolute Nous” (*‘aql-i kull*)—on numerous occasions reminded the Muslims of the important role of reason and its practical and theoretical capacities that ought to be realized. In order to better demonstrate the Islamic perspective on the function of the intellect, it would help to consider a few sayings by the Prophet in this relation:

“For every thing there is a vehicle, and the vehicle of man is the intellect” (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 95);

“For every thing there is a purpose, and the purpose of worship is reason”;

“For every journey there is a tent in which people seek sanctuary, and the tent of the Muslims is reason” (Riyshahrī, 1381, p. 3874, no. 13355).

What we may infer from these sayings is that the intellect is the human being’s vehicle by means of which he can journey towards the Eternal Abode. Reason is the impetus that enables him to proceed on this path, thus ensuring that his advance does not cease. One equipped with a sound intellect progresses ceaselessly in the pursuit of theoretical and practical perfection.

The Prophet of Islam identifies reason as the purpose of worship. In the words of ‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī, “The human being worships so as to become intelligent, for the intellect is in need of worship in its inception as well as its sustenance” (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr mawḍū‘ī qur’ān majīd*, vol. 9, p. 152). That is, the intellect in its fledgling state causes one to be elevated in knowledge, obedience to God, and spiritual development, and these in turn strengthen and reinforce reason, elevating its existential level. Thus, reason is instrumental in every stage of obedience and it is present from the start and to the end.

In his reply to Sham‘ūn ibn Lāwī, the Noble Prophet is reported as having said:

Indeed the intellect (*‘aql*) is the yoke (*‘iqāl*) that keeps ignorance in check, for the soul is like the wildest of animals; if it is not restrained, it shall run amuck. Thus, the intellect is the yoke that restrains ignorance.” (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 117)

‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī enumerates 133 functions for the intellect whose effects reach the theoretical and practical aspects of the entire spectrum of human knowledge and spirituality. He then counts 29 problems that can be caused by the absence of reason (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Adab-i fanāy-i muqarrabān*, vol. 2, pp. 26-70).

Another saying reported from the Prophet concerning the importance of reason is, “Man’s constitution rests on his intellect, and he who lacks reason lacks faith” (*Nahj al-faṣāḥah*, vol. 2, p. 661). Thus, pristine mysticism, which is one of the integral components of the pristine faith, is unrealizable without reason. For, it is only by the aid of reason that the human being can achieve a correct understanding of faith and of how to lead a faithful life. Equipped with this understanding, he carries out his actions in light of the religious insight he has acquired, is careful to safeguard the pure knowledge that proceeds from the profound depths of faith, and holds fast to the genuine morality and spirituality of Islam. In so doing, the believer secures his inner mystical endeavor from deviation and distortion; from being affected by vulgar conceptions of religion that tend to stress its literal, exoteric, and mundane facet to the exclusion of the sublime, esoteric, and profound essence of religion; and from other visible and hidden hazards to which the spiritual life is vulnerable.

Islamic mysticism as exemplified by the Prophet makes its way to perfection through the passageway of reason, having reason all along at its side. As such, Islam sees no contradiction between heart and mind, reason and love, rational knowledge and intuitive insight. It rather views these two poles as complementary. After explaining the three types of holy war (*jihād*)—the “lesser war” (*jihād-i aṣghar*, which is the war that is fought with the outward enemies from among men), the “middle war” (*jihād-i awṣaṭ*, which is the war fought within one’s soul between the armies of vice and virtue, between piety and iniquity, greed and moderation, knowledge and ignorance), and the “greater war” (*jihād-i akbar*, which is, as defined by the mystics, the war between love and reason)—‘Allāmah Jawādī Āmulī remarks,

When the human being attains to the level of love, he realizes that true reason is the sublime reason that he is now possessed of and that the reason that others [those who have not attained to the level of love] speak of is actually an impediment, which they falsely assume to be reason. (Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr maṣṣūṭi qur’ān majīd*, vol. 11, p. 71)

THE PRINCIPAL FACTORS OF SPIRITUAL WAYFARING AS TAUGHT BY THE PROPHET

1. Purification of the Soul and Purgation of the Heart

It is reported that Abū Dharr al-Ghaffārī once asked the Prophet if there were teachings in the Qur'an that also existed in the books of the previous prophets. The Prophet answered positively, adding that the importance and merit of self-purification was a universal and timeless principle pertaining to human nature that every prophet of God had taught and stressed. A well-known saying from the Prophet reads, "Your staunchest enemy is the soul that lies in between your two sides" (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 67, p. 36).

2. The Ways to Attain Divine Authority

The following is an edifying conversation between the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household) and Abū Dharr al-Ghaffārī (may God be pleased with him):

The Prophet: "O Abū Dharr, do you wish to enter paradise?"

Abū Dharr: "Yes, may my father be sacrificed for you."

The Prophet: "Curtail your worldly aspirations, remind yourself constantly of death, fear God according as He deserves."

Abū Dharr: "O Prophet of God, do we not all fear God?"

The Prophet: "That is not fear. To fear God is to never forget the grave and the decay it contains, to be mindful of your belly and what you pour therein, to be cognizant of your head and the thoughts you fill it with. And whosoever wishes to attain God's grace must relinquish the splendor of this world. If you observe these instructions, you will attain divine authority [wilāyah allāh]." (Majlisī, op. cit., vol. 77, p. 83)

The above conversation underscores a number of points as enumerated below:

1. that we must repress our worldly and corporeal aspirations;
2. that we must reflect on death and anticipate the Resurrection on the Day of Judgment;
3. that we must fear God, which requires that we remind ourselves of death and the grave, that we tame our belly and restrain our appetite, that we rein in our thoughts, or, in a word, that we practice self-vigilance (murāqabat-i nafs);

4. that we must liberate ourselves from our attachment to the world and its pleasures;
5. that we can attain divine authority—which is consequent on union with God and annihilation in Him—if we observe the above instructions (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Wilāyat dar qur’ān*, pp. 118-121 and *Tafsīr mawḍū‘ī qur’ān majīd*, vol. 11, pp. 275-289).

3. To Flee Sin

Of the injunctions that must be observed in the context of pristine mysticism, the most central and efficacious is to grasp the true nature of sin, to avoid sin, and, ultimately, to flee sin, or, in the words of the Prophet, the intoxication of sin, for sin intoxicates the intellect and undermines the soul’s spirituality. Hence, the Prophet’s exhortation to Ibn Mas‘ūd: “Beware of the intoxication of sin” (Majlisī, *op. cit.*, vol. 74, p. 92). The ultimate source of sin is self-love, infatuation with the world, and neglect of the remembrance of God. As such, the mystic is ever-attentive to the admonishments of his soul and those of revelation and strives to refrain from sin at every level.

4. Mysticism That Improves Life vs. Mysticism That Quells Life

Islamic mysticism as exemplified in the ethos of the Prophet permeates and enriches every aspect of human life—the personal, the domestic, and the social. The Prophet’s noble and kind treatment of his family and his generous and benevolent interaction with the society aptly illustrate that Islamic mysticism embraces life in all its aspects, including the social aspect. The Prophet infused his unitive worldview and motivation into every facet of human life. Thus, his solitude and social participation, his love of God and sympathy for humankind, his rationality and philanthropy all manifested the same all-encompassing spirituality. That he proclaimed, “He who starts his day and is indifferent to the affairs of his fellow Muslims is not a Muslim” (Majlisī, *op. cit.*, vol. 17, p. 337), is a clear proof that his mysticism was one that embraced the social life and not one that shunned it. This understanding of Islamic mysticism is further reinforced when we consider how the Prophet reprimanded the likes of ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (for taking up eremitic practices that were more severe than what Islam had sanctioned) and how he struggled to establish social justice.

5. Mysticism Centered on Obedience to God

The irradiant center of pristine mysticism as exemplified in the ethos of the Prophet consists of divine unity, in point of theology, and of absolute obedience to God, in point of practice. The latter is a constant and inseparable feature of mysticism, and as such the spiritual wayfarer must observe God's commandments as a means of spiritual perfection as he traverses the path and by way of gratitude once he has completed the journey to God. Having said this, the correct reading of verse 99, Sūrah Ḥijr ("And worship your Lord so that certainty shall come to you"), in light of verse 7, Sūrah Ḥaṣhr ("What the Prophet bring you, you must seize, and what he forbids, you must relinquish"), is that certainty is a privilege that is consequent on worship, not that it is the limit of worship after which worship is no longer necessary (see Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī qur'ān majīd*, pp. 137-138). As such, mystical perfection can never serve as an excuse for the abandonment of one's religious duties.

The Prophet's life and ethos epitomize obedience to God and divine unity in their most complete manifestation. God praises the Prophet as His slave; it was on account of this characteristic that the Prophet was appointed for undertaking the final and loftiest divine ministry; and it was on account of this characteristic that God summoned him and took him on the Nocturnal Ascent (*mi'rāj*), for the Qur'an thus describes this event: "Glorified is He who carried His *slave* by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque" (17:1). Thus, from the vantage of the Muhammadian mysticism, obedience to God is the fulcrum and axis of the human being's mystical ascent to divine union.

CONCLUSION

The pristine mysticism of Islam is an inclusive and all-encompassing spirituality that is in accord with the human being's nature, both in its cognitive and its intuitive capacity. It satisfies the essential needs of the human being and elevates him to the height of human perfection and the summit of absolute divine unity. The mysticism exemplified by the Prophet centers round divine unity and the perfect human being, and for this reason it cultivates spiritual exaltation alongside spiritual equilibrium at every level of the mystical path. Reason constitutes the beginning and end of the spiritual journey if undertaken in accordance with Muḥammadian

mysticism, for reason is the substance of humanity and the inner authority implanted by God in human nature. The final fruit of mysticism and the highest level of spiritual perfection is the attainment of sublime and intuitive reason.

Muḥammadean mysticism is rational at every level, both in the cognitive and the practical capacities. It is a mysticism that champions wisdom at every level of the mystical path: It reconciles the judgments of reason with the teachings of theoretical mysticism and the findings of practical mysticism. Although the distinct province of reason and love is maintained throughout the spiritual ascent and the mystical journey, nevertheless the ultimate end of “annihilation in and subsistence by God” (*fanā-yi fi-llāh wa baqā-yi bi-llāh*) is reaching the most perfect level of reason, which is sublime reason. In this light, Islamic mysticism does not require anything that would be incompatible with reason, much less contradict it. In fine, the determining factors of rational mysticism as exemplified in the life and ethos of the Prophet can be summed up as follows: rationality; promotion of social justice; exaltation and equilibrium; enhancement of human life in the personal, domestic, and social arenas; inclusiveness; universality; timelessness; and the capability to serve as the basis for building a world civilization.

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The Great Prophet (ﷺ) Founder of the Islamic Civilization

Akbar ‘Urūṭī Muwaffaq

Translated by Abuzar Ahmadi

Abstract

Intellectuals have appraised the Islamic civilization from manifold perspectives, writing multifarious books and articles in this regard. Unfortunately though, the fundamental and inimitable role of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) in the establishment of this great civilization has been mostly disregarded. The competent hands of the Prophet (ﷺ) planted the sapling of this mighty tree, and he subsequently consolidated its roots by emigrating to the city of Yathrib (i.e. modern-day Madinah). In this paper, the central parameters of civilization according to various scholars have been examined and the role of the honourable Prophet (ﷺ) in creating peace, security, national solidarity, cooperation, and in engendering ethics, patience, unity, and relative welfare—all influential factors in the formation and development of civilizations—has been elucidated..

Keywords: Civilization, Prophet Muḥammad, knowledge, peace.

Islamic civilization cultivated the greatest of cognitive orders and scientific systems—producing numerous paragons of intellectuality in various fields of knowledge. The rapid development, greatness, perfection, and expansiveness of the Islamic civilization as well as the participation of various social classes from many different nationalities and races in founding and developing this civilization are facts that inspire awe into the hearts of all and sundry. The profundity of this matter has caused many scholars, especially Western ones, to confess to this truth. Even so, I must note that the golden age of Islam—with respect to intensity, vivacity, realization of ideals, manifestation of values, as well as religious and spiritual radiance—was the age of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) and the period of Islamic stability in Madinah. Just as a tree grows from a planted seed with the passage of time by absorbing nutrition from fertile soil, a few centuries after being planted by the blessed hands of the great Prophet (ﷺ), the tree of Islamic civilization has

become prolific with the fruit of culture and art, as well as the traditional, intellectual, and literary sciences.

Utilizing the dictates of divine revelation, and with the help of the holy Prophet (ﷺ), Islamic civilization transcended various stages of maturity and perfection. Swiss scholar Adam Matts termed the fourth century of the Hijrah the 'age of Islamic innovation' (Matts, 1985). Sigrud Hunke considers the growth of Islamic civilization to be twice that of Greek civilization. She has professed that Muslims influenced the Western world more directly and multifariously than Greece. Moreover, Hunke has stated that just as Muslims have transformed the face of the earth in the past, perhaps soon the destinies of the rest of the world will intertwine with that of Muslims (Hunke, 1982).

Thus, the role of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) with regards to those parameters that are instrumental in the formation and development of human civilizations shall be examined.

DEFINITION OF TAMADDUN (LIT. CIVILIZATION)

Literal sense: The word *tamaddun* derives from the Arabic root *madana* meaning 'dwelling' and 'attaining customs of city dwellers'. It has also been defined as individuals of a society becoming accustomed to cooperation in social, economic, religious, political, and similar affairs (Moeen, 1992).

Even though in both Eastern and Western languages, connection with cities and city dwelling is a criterion for civilization, it must be noted that civilization does not necessarily mean 'living in a city.' A civilized human is a person that has entered the city dwelling stage. In fact, living in a city is an effect of civilization, not its cause. According to John Bernal, it can be said that cities are *a part* of civilization, not that cities have *formed* civilization (Bernal, 1966). Will Durant is of the opinion that it is civilization that makes people think of building cities and metropolises. He states that, in a way, civilization merges with the disposition of courtesy and sociability, which in turn, make up the pleasant morals that obtain in civitas.

Terminological definition: Civilization has been variously defined. Will Durant defines it as a social system that facilitates cultural achievement and undertakes innovation and creativity by drawing on thoughts, customs, traditions, and art; a political system that is protected by morals and laws; and an economic system that endures with the continuance of production.

Islamic savants have specific definitions for civilization as well. Ibn Khaldūn considers civilization to be the social state of humans (Khaldūn, 1996). In the opinion of Ibn Khaldūn, a society becomes a 'civilization' if it accepts order through the establishment of authority, forms a governmental infrastructure to supervise the preservation of order, eschews solitary life in favour of city life, and promotes the exaltation of inner virtues such as science and art.

Allāmah Muḥammad Taqī Ja'farī has defined civilization as a 'coordinated institution of humans, living rationally and associating justly, with the communion of all individuals and groups towards advancing the material and spiritual aims of people in every positive area' (Ja'farī, 1980).

As a summation of the above definitions, the following could be said: Civilization is a product of cultural exaltation and acceptance of order. It is a departure from tribal life and treading the path of institutionalized sociality or, in the concise words of Ibn Khaldūn, it is development.

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS IN THE FORMATION AND ASCENDENCY OF CIVILIZATION

Various factors influence the establishment and ascendancy of a civilization. Scholars have presented these factors variously.

Will Durant believes that the emergence of civilization is possible when anarchy and disorder end, since it is only when fear passes that curiosity as well as the need for innovation and invention come into action. Thus, humans surrender to the instinct that naturally propels them toward gaining wisdom and knowledge and procuring provisions with which to improve the quality of life.

Ibn Khaldūn has named seven influential factors in the formation of a civilization, viz. government and leadership, religious or conventional law, ethics, work, industry, population, and wealth. In the view of Ibn Khaldūn, the first three elements are the most important (Radmanesh, 1978).

As a sum-up of various opinions, the following may be considered a list of influences on civilizational formation.

1. peace and security;
2. national solidarity, which is truly the soul of every civilization, a factor that provides the necessary motivation and institutes purposive cooperation;
3. cooperation;
4. ethics;

5. tolerance of dissimilar views (i.e., treating others with understanding not indifference or negligence);
6. preservation of unity and struggle against separatism;
7. religion; and
8. relative welfare.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND SECURITY

The Islamic civilization was set in motion with the Prophet's (ﷺ) calling in Makkah. It secured a foothold with the establishment of government in Madinah, where Islamic administration and city life coalesced. During the initial years when Muslims lived in Makkah, the Quraysh tribe greatly endeavoured to prevent people from accepting Islam. Moreover, the Makkah polytheists spared no effort to torment newly converted Muslims.

The economic blockade of the people of Banī Hāshim in *Shi'b Abī Ṭālib* (Abī Ṭālib Pass), not to mention the deaths of lady Khadijah (ʿa) and Abū Ṭālib, who were among the powerful supporters of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the Muslims, had divested Muslims of peace and security. The Prophet (ﷺ) required a safe and secure base to establish a truly great civilization. Therefore, he travelled to the city of Ṭā'if in search of such a place for the Muslims who were under pressure. Unfortunately, the journey was unfruitful as the personages of Ṭā'if did not respond to his call. They even incited ruffians and ignorant people to drive the Prophet (ﷺ) out of the city (Shahīdī, 1985).

In the same year, the Prophet (ﷺ) met with a group of people from Yathrib. One of the holy Prophet's (ﷺ) methods for inviting people to Islam was to meet with tribes that made pilgrimage to Makkah during the time of Ḥajj. One year, six members of the Khazraj tribe met with the Prophet (ﷺ) and he imparted his message unto them. They welcomed his invitation, which spoke of reconciliation, peace, and virtue, and said they would return to their people and notify them of the new religion. "Perhaps by your blessing," they declared, "battles and altercations will retreat from our city. If you can unify us, you will become the dearest person to us" (Shahīdī, 1985/1364).

Two years later, during the time of Ḥajj in the thirteenth year after the appointment, representatives from Yathrib swore allegiance to the Prophet (ﷺ) and pledged that they would be enemies with his enemies, friends with his friends, and wage war against anyone who would wage war against him. After this pledge, the Prophet (ﷺ) allowed Muslims to immigrate to Yathrib.

In this way, the Prophet's (ﷺ) pains to achieve security and stability came to fruit. The social climate and security of Yathrib presented the Prophet (ﷺ) with an apt environment to solidify the pillars of Islamic rule.

NATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The next step in laying the groundwork for the Islamic civilization was cultivation of a spirit of solidarity. After he entered Yathrib (subsequently named *Madinah al-Nabi*, lit. city of the Prophet, or Madinah), which was full of bloody tribal conflicts at the time, the Prophet (ﷺ) implemented measures that led to uniformity, solidarity, and equality of all in the newly founded Muslim society. Some of these measures were as follows:

Compilation of the first public treaty in Islam

In the first months of his presence in Madinah, the Prophet (ﷺ) concluded a treaty between the Muhājirūn (lit. the immigrants) and Anṣār (lit. the helpers) as well as between the Muslims and Jews of Madinah. In the treaty between Muslim and Jew, the Prophet (ﷺ) allowed the Jews their religion and wealth in line with several conditions. This treaty signifies that the holy Prophet (ﷺ) respected the fundamentals of freedom, order, and justice. Moreover, it shows how the Prophet (ﷺ) formed a unified front against external attack (Subḥānī).

As cited by Ibn Ishāq, the articles of this treaty were as follows:

1. Muslims and Jews shall live in Madinah as a single nation.
2. Muslims and Jews shall be free to carry out their respective religious practices.
3. In the event of a war, each of these parties shall aid the other against the enemy, on the condition that the other party is not the aggressor.
4. In the event of an enemy attack on Madinah, both of these parties shall cooperate in defence of the city.
5. Entering a peace treaty with the enemy may only be concluded through mutual consultation of both parties.
6. Since Madinah is a holy city, both parties must respect it; thus, all manner of bloodshed are prohibited within the city.
7. In the event of a dispute, the final arbitrator shall be the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ).
8. Signers of this treaty shall conduct themselves apropos of each other with goodness and benevolence (Ayātī, 1987/1366).

Pact of brotherhood between the Muhājirūn and Anṣār

Seven Months after the Ḥijrah, the Prophet of God (ﷺ) established bonds of brotherhood between the Immigrants and Helpers (i.e. the original inhabitants of Yathrib who converted to Islam) in order that they aid one another on the path of righteousness and inherit from one another after death. With this action, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) completely united the Muhājirūn and Anṣār. The spirit of equality and brotherhood became so strong that every Muslim preferred his Muslim brother over his own self. It has been written that when the spoils of the ‘Banī Naẓīr’ battle were to be divided, the Prophet (ﷺ) said to the Anṣār, “If you like, we can give the Muhājirūn a share of the spoils, and if not, it is all yours”. The Anṣār replied, “We not only gift the entirety of spoils to our Immigrant brothers, but we make them partners in our assets and homes as well” (Shahīdī, 1985).

In any event, the prudent endeavours of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) to establish solidarity and cohesive identity in the Muslim society had many effects. For instance, during the initial years of the Islamic government, old men would colour their beards black and, like their younger cohorts, depart for the battlefield.

THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

In subsequent steps, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) inspired the spirit of cooperation into the newly established society.

Cooperation in good and worthy deeds is an emphasised commandment in the Holy Qur’ān:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ

...Cooperate in piety and Godwariness, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression... (Surah Mā’idah 5:2)

This verse’s commandment regarding cooperation is a general principle that encompasses all social, legal, ethical, and political issues. As per this principle, Muslims are obligated to cooperate in good deeds. Furthermore, they are absolutely forbidden from cooperating in futile deeds, sin, and oppression even if the perpetrator is a close friend or sibling (Makārīm Shirāzī et al., 1975).

One of the first undertakings of the great Messenger (ﷺ) after his immigration to Madinah was the establishment of a mosque. The great recep-

tion given by the majority of Madinah's people induced the Prophet (ﷺ), before anything else, to build a public centre named *masjid* (lit. place of prostration) or mosque, for learning and edification as well as political and judicial affairs. The land on which the Prophet's (ﷺ) camel sat upon entering Madinah was bought for ten dinars for the building of this mosque. All the Muslims participated in the construction and supply of building materials. Even the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) gathered stones for the mosque like the other Muslims. When Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr saw this, he came forth and said, "O Prophet of Allah! Let me take the stone". The Prophet (ﷺ) answered, "Go bring another" (Subḥānī).

The principle of consultation is also a contributing factor for cooperation. Consultation has been focused upon in several verses in the Holy Qur'an. Most importantly, there is a surah in the Qur'an named 'Shūrā' (lit. consultation). In this surah, consultation is emphasised and encouraged as a most important obligation along with responding to God's invitation, prayer, and charity.

وَالَّذِينَ يَحْتَسِبُونَ كِبِيرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ
يَغْفِرُونَ وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى
بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

Those who avoid major sins and indecencies, and forgive when angered; those who respond to their Lord, maintain the prayer, and their affairs are by counsel among themselves, and they spend out of what We have provided them with... (42:37-38)

Also, in verse 159 of surah Āl 'Imrān, after ordering general pardon, the Qur'an directs the Prophet (ﷺ) to take counsel with Muslims in various affairs and ask them for their opinions in order to give life to their personalities and reinvigorate their minds and souls. In this verse, the word *amr* (lit. affair) embraces all individual and societal affairs, whether economic, political, cultural, or defence-related.

Divine revelation aside, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) was so brilliant that he did not require counsel. However, in order to make Muslims aware of the importance of consultation so they would make it a basic formula in their lives and also to develop thought in people, the Prophet would call consul-

THE PROPHET: FOUNDER OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

tative meetings for administration (as opposed to legislation) of divine laws in general Muslim affairs. He greatly valued opinions of thinkers such that sometimes he would forego his opinion in favour of others (Makārim Shirāzī et al., 1975).

Regarding the decision-making of the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ), Imam Riḍā ('a) has declared:

The Prophet of God would consult with his companions, and then he would make a decision (Dilshād Tehrānī, 1994).

This Narration shows that consultation was an unfaltering tradition of the holy Prophet (ﷺ). There are many cases in the life and leadership of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) in which he consulted with his companions or summoned consultative meetings to make decisions. Below are some of these cases:

- In the battle of Badr, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) consulted with his companions regarding whether to fight, how to fight, and the prisoners of war.
- In the battle of Uḥud, the Prophet (ﷺ) convened a meeting to discuss how to confront the Quraysh army before he made the final decision.
- In the battle of Aḥzāb (otherwise known as Khandaq), the Prophet (ﷺ) put the matter of how to confront the great army of the polytheists to counsel.
- He also consulted with his people about the battles of Banī Qurayzah and Banī Naḍīr with the Jews of Madinah.
- He consulted with his companions on the matter of Ḥudaybiyah, when the polytheists obstructed the Muslim pilgrim caravan on the way to Makkah.
- In the battle of Ṭā'if, he consulted about whether to continue the siege.
- He consulted his companions in the battle of Tabūk as well.
- During the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) took counsel when he heard that Abū Sufyān was coming to his camp (Dilshād Tehrānī, 1994).

In all these cases, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) sought to create a community spirit, a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and teamwork. In the view of the great Prophet (ﷺ), a human society or organization that is administrated on the basis of obstinacy is defunct and does not deserve to survive (Farīd, 2006).

MORALITY

The Prophet (ﷺ) has stated the reason for his appointment to have been culmination of the virtuous ethics [*makārim al-akhlaq*] (Narāqī, 1987/1366):

بعثتُ لأكمل مكارم الاخلاق

I have been appointed to complete the virtuous ethics.

عليكم بمكارم الاخلاق فان ربي بعثنى بها

Heed the virtuous ethics for indeed my Lord has appointed me with them.

The spread of morality is thus a feature of the Islamic civilization. Furthermore, study of God's divine pronouncements in this religion shows the cardinal importance and worth of virtuous ethics in the Islamic community.

According to the following verse, the great Messenger (ﷺ) is an exemplar of the moral system of Islam:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ
وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar, for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah greatly. (33:21)

Two points must be considered in regard to this moral system:

First, the scope of ethical teachings in Islam is so wide that even presenting a complete list of these insightful teachings would be a significant endeavour. A passing glance at the luminous narrations of the great Prophet (ﷺ) and his moral teachings reveals their wide range. One could say with confidence that the Prophet (ﷺ) has not left unsaid even the most miniscule of issues. The most profound and most subtle points in spiritual and moral edification have been stated using short, simple phrases and practical formulas.

Second, the ethical teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ), which have been derived from the Holy Qur'an, are such that everyone can make use of them relative to their level of intellectual and spiritual capacity and perfection. The-

se teachings are such that all individuals in all echelons can benefit from them. Even so, the benefit to the wise and the enlightened of this endless sea of knowledge and truths is much greater.

It is important in every society that education and edification not be exclusive to specific social strata. The educational system must be such that every person may make use of it to the extent of their capacity and abilities (Sadat, 1989).

By institutionalising moral fundamentals among the people and presenting practical exemplars in the areas of research ethics, ethics of criticism and dealing with others' thoughts, ethics of livelihood, social ethics, sexual ethics, political and governmental ethics, and ethics of dialogue, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) provided the groundwork for the emergence of a great civilization.

INSPIRATION OF PATIENCE, TOLERANCE, AND FORBEARANCE

An additional quality that has been cited for the growth and prosperity of civilizations is the spirit of patience and tolerance. The element of 'patience' (*ṣabr*) is a concept that has been greatly emphasised in the Holy Qur'ān. The word *ṣabr* and its derivatives have been repeated in the Holy Qur'ān over one hundred times. In numerous verses the Qur'ān has commanded the Prophet (ﷺ) to have patience and tolerance regarding a diverse range of issues. The following are several examples:

فَاصْبِرْ كَمَا صَبَرَ أُولُو الْعَزْمِ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ وَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلْ لَهُمْ

So be patient just as the resolute among the apostles were patient, and do not seek to hasten [the punishment] for them. (46:35)

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ

...and be patient for the sake of your Lord. (74:7)

أَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ

Be patient over what they say... (38:17)

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْخُوْتِ

So submit patiently to the judgement of your Lord, and do not be like the Man of the Fish... (68:48)

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ

So be patient! Allah's promise is indeed true. (40:77)

The Messenger of God (ﷺ) had the greatest patience in administrating affairs and leading the people. Referring to the statements of historians and scholars, Ibn Shahrashūb has stated, "The Prophet (ﷺ) was the most patient of people" (Dilshād Tehrānī, 1994). The Prophet himself has declared, "I was appointed to be the centre of tolerance, the mine of knowledge, and the abode of patience" (ibid).

EXAMPLES OF THE GREAT PROPHET'S (ﷺ) PATIENCE AND TOLERANCE

In the beginning of his rule in Madinah, the great Prophet (ﷺ) accorded the non-Muslim minorities living in the city with respect. In fact, he even made a covenant with them and treated them peacefully for as long as they were faithful in their pact.

After the battle of Uḥud, several of the Prophet's (ﷺ) companions asked him to curse the Quraysh tribe and the polytheists. He replied, "I have not been appointed to curse or damn but to invite to truth and mercy. O God! Guide my people for they do not know" (Dilshād Tehrānī, 1994).

Regarding the patience and tolerance of the Prophet (ﷺ) concerning Jewish harassment before they conspired against Muslims or took military action, Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has asserted, "When the Prophet emigrated to Madinah and became established there with his Muhājir and Anṣār companions, he did not bear enmity with the Jews or behave badly toward them. He showed considerable tolerance for them and desired that the relations between them would be based on neighbourliness and mutual aid in hardships".

The Prophet's (ﷺ) tolerance of subversive hypocrites, especially 'Abdullāh ibn Ubay, for the sake of Islam continued until his death in the ninth year of the Ḥijrah. It has even been cited that the Prophet performed the ritual prayer of the dead (*ṣalāt mayyit*) for their leader.

PROMOTION OF UNITY

Unity is a further quality that may be influential in the course of civil emergence. This quality has been heeded from the very beginning of the Prophet's (ﷺ) invitation.

In various verses, the Holy Qur'an invites Muslims to unity. By making monotheism (*tawhīdī*) a central issue, the Qur'an invites everyone to adhere to God or 'grasp the rope of Allah':

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided [into sects]. (Surah Āl 'Imrān 3:103)

Through Islam, the holy Prophet (ﷺ) was able to rapidly create peace and tranquillity among tribes that had backgrounds of over one hundred years of dispute, bloodshed, and war. With the unification of these tribes, he created a powerful base in Madinah.

John Davenport, a notable English scholar, has written that Muḥammad (ﷺ), a simple Arab, was able to transform the small, scattered, unclothed and hungry tribes of his country into a consolidated and ordered society. He goes on to say that, the Prophet (ﷺ) reintroduced the Arabs to the world as a people with novel qualities. In Davenport's view, it was this method that overcame the emperor of Constantine, demolished the sultans of Persia, conquered Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, and extended the territories of Islam from the Atlas Ocean to the coasts of the Caspian Sea and the river of Syr Darya (Davenport, 1969).

RELIGION AND CREATING A CIVILIZATION

Religion possesses a special place in the process of civil emergence. It is generally accepted that no culture or civilization can be found among any people without a type of religion. Radhakrishnan considers religion to be the heart of civilization. Radhakrishnan believes that religion is like a soul in the body of social structure (Radmanesh, 1978).

Here, two aspects of the role of religion in formation of civilization are considered:

First, divine guidance works towards the perfection of people using their natural capacities as a base. By creating changes in the thought and soul of humans, it obliterates old, constraining systems and traditions and imbues

a vivacious living order. This inspired revolution results in the improvement of economic life and the development of intellectual, industrial, artistic, and literary potentials.

Moreover, religion lays the foundation for solidarity or, in the words of Ibn Khaldūn, “team spirit (*aṣabiyyah*)”. In the opinion of Ibn Khaldūn, there is a direct relation between team spirit and religion (Radmanesh, 1978).

PROMOTION OF RELATIVE WELFARE

Due to the ecological conditions of Makkah, for as long as they resided there, Muslims were faced with many problems in providing for their basic necessities. Also, the commercial environment in Makkah prevented lower social classes from reaching better professional positions. After the emigration to Madinah, Muslims found themselves in a new environment that offered further possibilities. In Madinah, racial and tribal prejudice, which were causes of vanity and arrogance, were less severe. Light-skinned Persian slaves such as Salman and black Abyssinian slaves such as Bilāl were equal. This equality increased to such an extent that a full-blooded Quraysh Arab did not regard it below himself to pledge brotherhood with a Bedouin Arab such as Abū Ḍarr.

The profusion of water, palm groves, and gardens in Madinah as opposed to Makkah induced the Muhājirūn to become farmers and gardeners. In this way, they could obtain the basic necessities of life. Institution of relative welfare in the society meant that basic necessities were ensured, and this in turn meant that the further development of society could now naturally take place.

The theoretical and practical systems of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) valued work and economic activity as well as workers and labourers (Motahhari, 1983). This was an instrumental factor in economic growth and relative welfare of the first few years of the Muslim presence in Madinah.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To conclude, the organised Islamic society in *Madīnah al-Nabī* possessed all the necessary qualities for commencement of its civilizational movement. Therefore, the presence of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) in Madinah and subsequent formation of government must be considered the next logical measure after his appointment and invitation on the course of shaping an

Islamic civilization. With the favourable reception of the people of Yathrib (modern Madinah), the holy Prophet (ﷺ) founded his civilization on tolerance, generosity, and magnanimity (*sa'at al-ṣadr*) as well as mutual understanding, compassion, peaceful coexistence, and negation of tyranny. The inimitable role of the great Prophet (ﷺ) in the formation and development of Islamic civilization is a significant matter and therefore requires more thorough and in-depth research. Thus, it seems that this great endeavour must be followed up by experts in the field who can fittingly illuminate the multifarious aspects of the great prophet's (ﷺ) role.

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The Voice of Unity – Part IV: The Methods of Obtaining Knowledge and Eradicating Dispute^{*}

Āyatullāh Muḥammad Wāʿiz-Zādeh Khurāsānī
Translated by Hamid Waqar

Abstract:

As the fourth in a series of talks regarding the subject of unity, the present article focuses on differences and disputes. At the outset, two types of differences are mentioned: 1) differences that are condemned 2) those that are considered beneficial, or at the least, tolerated by the faith. This talk focuses on the second of the two. In delving into this second category, the author speaks of the different methods of seeking knowledge. He defines *ijtihād* from the perspective of the Qurʾān and shows how this definition can be used to explain and excuse the apparent differences amongst the Islamic schools of thought and their followers.

Keywords: Islamic unity, Ummah, Muslim brotherhood, division, sectarianism, *ijtihād*, seeking knowledge, derivation.

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

In the previous weeks I spoke about the unity of the Islamic *Ummah* and Islamic brotherhood. It was stated that, unfortunately, due to various factors, Muslims have not protected their unity. Therefore, the roots of dispute must be examined. Coincidentally, the Qurʾān gives importance to this point. If one reviews the number of verses about unity and compares them to the number of verses about dispute, he would find that the verses about dispute are two or three times more than those about unity. In addition to the fact that different people see things in different ways, the substantial reason for this is that man is rebellious and tumultuous by nature.

^{*} This is the fourth of a series of talks delivered in 1991 by Ayatullah Muḥammad Wāʿiz-Zādeh Khurāsānī. The first three were printed in previous issues of the English Al-Taqrīb journal.

AL-TAQRIB

After the initial two lectures that covered the unity of the *Ummah* and Islamic brotherhood, last week I examined the issue of ‘differences’ and ‘dispute’ from the viewpoint of the Qur’ān and Islam.

The conclusion of the previous discussion was that the Qur’ān severely rejected one form of dispute. This was evidenced by a number of verses from the Qur’ān and was discussed under a number of titles. We said that if man continues to dispute after a religious argument is proven for him, he will be completely rejected. The reason for this is that when one continues in dispute after he finds the path of knowledge and authority, it is certain that he does not have positive intentions. The Qur’ān states:

فَمَا اخْتَلَفُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ^ع

But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them,
out of envy among themselves. (45:17)

In one case, division is prohibited as well as disputes that lead to division:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Hold fast, all together, to Allah’s cord, and do not be divided.
(3:103)

Arguing is prohibited in some places:

وَلَا تَنَزَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِجَاكُمْ

And do not dispute, or you will lose heart and your power will be
gone. (8:46)

The Arabic term *tanāzu‘* stems from the root *naza‘a* which means digging and pulling; both sides start to pull at each other during a religious discussion.

This type of dispute, which causes Muslims to divide into sects is rebuked. The Qur’ān states:

فَاخْتَلَفَ الْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَيْنِهِمْ

But the factions differed among themselves. (43:65)

VOICE OF UNITY

Whenever the Qur'an uses the term 'factions' in the plural it is rebuking partisan activity.

Another phrase that is used in a number of verses is:

فَذَرَّهُمْ فِي غَمَرَتِهِمْ

So leave them in their stupor. (23:54)

The Arabic term *taqatta'* means severely tearing. The unified Islamic society and *Ummah* has been, and is being severely torn. The Israelites tore their society apart. These are various phrases used for the division which has been rebuked; the division that the Qur'an forbids.

TWO CATEGORIES OF DISPUTE

There are two categories or types of dispute that are found in the words of Islamic scholars. One of these categories is rebuked and the other is not. The category of dispute that has been rebuked is that which was mentioned. But, there is another category which has not been rebuked; rather we are in need of it and we must accept it.

The following categories have been presented in some articles composed in Cairo (taken from the journal *Message of Islam*):

Religious issues are of two types. One type of religious issues are categorized as 'certainties' while the other are labeled 'not-certain' or 'doubtful.' Religious certainties are just what we had stated was the criterion for the unity of the *Ummah: tawhid*, the hereafter, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong, *jihad* on the path of Allah, positive ethical traits, piety, and refraining from committing sins. The principle of the necessity of leadership and an Islamic government in the general sense, prayer, fasting, *qiblah*, Qur'an, *hajj*, and the *ka'bah* are unanimously agreed upon. They are the criterion of being a Muslim and the scale of Islamic unity. Muslims must protect these commonalities; they must hold fast to them. The Qur'an states:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided.

(3:103)

We stated that the divine cord is composed of these very same certain doctrines of Islam; the doctrines that are unanimously agreed upon.

But there are other issues in religion that are not as clear. Or, if they were clear at the beginning, over time their clarity has been lost and Muslims have disputed over them. The universals of theological and jurisprudential concepts are unanimously agreed upon. But, the particulars are disputed about. *Ijtihād*, as will be stipulated, applies to these non-certain issues.

Jurisprudents and religious authorities (*marāji' taqlīd*) write at the beginning of their books on practical Islamic laws: *taqlīd* is impermissible in the necessities of religion, i.e. in the certainties of religion.

Taqlīd pertains to issues other than these. *Taqlīd* pertains to theoretical issues which are not unanimously accepted and not considered to be of the necessities of Islam.

This matter is in complete congruence with the division that we presented. The differences that Muslims have in issues which are certain or in the universal principles and doctrines of religion are not accepted. For instance, a Muslim who is in the Muslim world [and hence exposed to the fundamentals of Islam] but who does not accept prayer, cannot be considered a Muslim. But, if he accepts prayer and differs in the method of prayer—differs in the particulars, then these differences are not given the same ruling and in fact they cannot be decisively condemned. These latter types of differences do not result in one leaving the fold of Islam.

Now the above division was with regards to religious issues. These issues were divided into issues that are certain and issues that are not certain; issues that are necessities and issues that are not necessities. Differences and dispute is not accepted in the first category while it is accepted in the second. And sometimes there is no choice but to fall into these types of disputes.

The late prominent professor, 'Allamah Ṭabaṭabā'i, provided a different division. He stated that disputes before one obtains knowledge are not problematic; rather positive. But, disputes after one has obtained knowledge are rejected. These categories are in complete congruence with the verses of the Qur'an. Man is naturally in a state of doubt before he reaches knowledge and certainty about a religious issue. In such a state, if he were to speak to others, he would differ with them. These differences must be there because all religious issues are not certain or part of the necessities of religion; hence it is only appropriate that they debated. As long as one has not obtained knowledge, and as long as he is trying to obtain

knowledge, there will be differences of opinions. There is no way around this. But, for a person in such a conundrum, what is important is that he tries to take these disputes to such a place where the opinions could be supported with proofs. While it is possible that those who are searching for the truth will not reach the same conclusions, nevertheless, if their seeking and enquiry is carried out correctly, then their reaching varying conclusions is valid and these differences are accepted by religion. This subject will be discussed at a later time.

SEEKING KNOWLEDGE IS OBLIGATORY

There are people who have not gained knowledge and who are seeking knowledge. First, it must be known that it is obligatory in Islam to seek knowledge. The scholars state that man must obtain religious laws from his own expertise (*ijtihād*) or from following an authority in the field (*taqlīd*). Precaution is a third method that has been mentioned. (Precaution is purely implemented on the plane of action. It is applied to gain certainty of the fact that one has performed his duty, but it is not a method of obtaining the actual ruling. This is because it is not possible to obtain the actual ruling or law without a proper demonstration that leads to certainty).

A famous prophetic tradition states: “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon all Muslims [or upon all Muslim men and Muslim women].”¹ The type of knowledge that for certain falls under this prophetic imperative is religious knowledge. So while the tradition is general and includes other types of knowledge as well, the amount of knowledge which is a basic requirement is religious knowledge; and it is this knowledge which is obligatory to learn. Nobody is an exception to this rule. A person is not permitted to forgo learning about religion. It has been stated in a tradition that when a person performs an action in opposition to the divine code he will be asked: “Why did you do that?” He will respond: “I did not know.” Then it will be asked: “Why didn’t you learn?”

THE METHODS OF SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

Now that it has become clear that seeking knowledge is obligatory, what are the methods that are involved in this search and inquiry? How can one practically remove doubts and differences? I will list a few methods from the Qur’ān:

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, v. 1, p. 177

First Method: Questioning

Who should be asked? In two places the Qur'an states that one should ask the People of the Reminder:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ
الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

We did not send [any apostles] before you except as men to whom
We revealed—ask the People of the Reminder if you do not
know. (16:43)

The People of the Reminder are people who know; they are the scholars. This verse was revealed in Makkah and during that period of history the People of the Reminder might have been the Jewish and Christian scholars, as is indicated in some other verses of the Qur'an. People were commanded to refer to them, as the verse states:

أَوَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ آيَةٌ أَنْ يَعْلَمَهُرُ عُلَمَاءُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

Is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel
recognize it? (26:197)

If we take the general understanding of the verse 'ask the People of the Reminder if you do not know' it would include any form of ignorance that man has. When man does not know something he would have to ask the People of the Reminder or the People of Remembrance.

The People of Remembrance in Shia traditions are considered to be the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). There is no doubt that—par excellence—they are the pinnacle of knowledge, that they are the firmly grounded in knowledge, and that they are the People of Remembrance. But, through the universality of the verse, the Qur'an includes all scholars. Therefore, one way to obtain knowledge is asking knowledgeable people.

Questions are of two types. One type demand practical solutions and precriptions. Another type seek reasons and demand religious precision that would lead to the realities behind the practice. Therefore, questions can be with regards to both *taqlid* and *ijtihad*.

VOICE OF UNITY

There are two verses which point to this in the Qur'an. The first is the verse that was recited from Sūrah Naḥl (i.e. 16:43). The second is a verse from Sūrah Anbiyyā':

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

We did not send [any apostles] before you except as men, to whom We revealed. Ask the People of the Reminder if you do not know. (21:7)

Second Method—Referring to Allah and the Messenger:

If one does not know something he should refer it to Allah. The verse of the Qur'an states:

وَمَا اخْتَلَفْتُمْ فِيهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَحُكْمُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ

Whatever thing you may differ about, its judgement is with Allah.
(42:10)

It is clear that religion was sent by Allah. The legislator is Allah; the judge is Allah. He must be referred to regarding religious obscurities or sectarian differences. Referring to Allah, as explained in traditions, is referring to the book of Allah.

The Messenger of Allah is mentioned in another verse (in one verse, the Prophet alone and those vested with authority are mentioned):

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ
مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle, if you have

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faith in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more favourable in outcome. (4:59)

It has been mentioned in a tradition that referring to Allah means referring to the Qur'an and referring to the Messenger of Allah means referring to his *sunnah*. Therefore, in regards to our belief which states that 'those vested with authority' are only the Imams, referring to the Imams would also be an instance of referring to the Messenger. Effectively this implies that all disputes should be referred to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*—where the *Sunnah* includes the *sunnah* of the Messenger and the Imams. This issue and this verse calls for a long discussion which I do not want to start upon. I only want to state that the Qur'an prophesized that there would be differences and hence one should not feel hopeless. If a scholar's *ijtihad* reaches a final conclusion on an issue [that is different from the conclusions of other scholars] then he must refer it to Allah and the Messenger—that is to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*—in order to obtain its further resolution. This is all a part of [seeking ultimate] truth; it is another form of *ijtihad*. Hence, the meaning of the verse is about the main foundations of *ijtihad*, which are the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. There is a consensus amongst all of the Islamic scholars on this point.

Second verse:

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوْ الْخَوْفِ أَدَّعُوا بِهِ^ط وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى
الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى^آ أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ^ط
وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

When a report of safety or alarm comes to them, they immediately broadcast it; but had they referred it to the Apostle or to those vested with authority among them, those of them who investigate would have ascertained it. And were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy, you would have surely followed Satan, [all] except a few. (4:83)

It is possible that the reason the name of Allah was not mentioned in this verse is that the Messenger of Allah and those vested with authority were sufficient in obtaining a resolution. In the case at hand, the difference

or dispute is not in regards to Allah’s rulings or the Canon Law. Rather, the ambiguity at hand is with regards to a report that must be decided upon after it is brought to the attention of the leader of the Muslims. In other words, in the first verse the differences were regarding Allah [and His will]; they did not [immediately] refer to anything in the material world, and hence they do not concern “contemporary issues.” In the second verse, the doubt is about an issue regarding an event that has taken place. This issue should be solved by the leader, who is the Messenger of Allah, or those vested with authority—those who are aware and have the ability of derivation. At the end of the discussion we will talk about *derivation*.

Third Method—Deep Understanding (*tafaqquh*):

There is another statement in the Qur’ān which is the most famous statement regarding jurisprudence and *ijtihad*. This is the issue of ‘deep understanding,’ or ‘comprehensive learning’ (*tafaqquh*). The Qur’ān states:

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَآفَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ
 مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ
 لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

Yet it is not for the faithful to go forth en masse. But why should not there go forth a group from each of their sections to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware? (9:122)

Since everyone will not be able to leave their cities and villages to meet the Prophet and learn from him, why does not a small group do this? A group should come to the Prophet or Imam to learn from him and ponder deeply over religion. A full discussion of what is meant by “deep understanding” and its role in jurisprudence is beyond the scope of this present study. In general, it can be said that the term *fiqh* is used in the Qur’ān to refer to deep hidden material that man must derive through deep thought and understanding. *Tafaqquh* means thinking very deeply about a matter in order to understand it fully. This is one of the verses which are used to make the argument for the validity of *ijtihad*. (This verse is also used to demonstrate the authority of a singly-transmitted tradition). It is said that a

group from every society must travel to the center of knowledge and *ijtihad* in order to become a jurist in religious matters; religious matters including religious law, beliefs, ethics, and practices. He should not only become a jurist in religious law; rather he should obtain an insight into religion. He should become a religious authority and a person who has a deep understanding of religion. Then he should return to his society and warn them.

Therefore, another method for seeking knowledge that the Qur'an issues a command about is this *tafaqqub* or 'deep understanding.' The idea of reflecting deeply and comprehensively on religion, even if it entails traveling to obtain such knowledge, has also been mentioned in traditions. It is stated: "A person who dies while seeking knowledge is a martyr." A person who leaves his hometown for Qum, Najaf, Mashhad, or any other intellectual center and dies on the way is considered a martyr. In my opinion the actions of this person are very valuable and 'deep understanding' is closer to *ijtihad* than the other methods that were discussed previously. In fact it can be said that it is not only nearer to *ijtihad*, it is exactly what *ijtihad* is. Doing *taqlid*, or emulation, of a jurist is very different from this deep understanding of religion and religious laws. If it can be said to be in any way similar, it is but a very weak level of such penetrating thought.

Fourth Method—Giving Ear to All Opinions and Following the Best One

In our opinion, the best verses of the Qur'an that can be correlated to the issue of *ijtihad*, but are apparently not used by the scholars to prove *ijtihad*, are:

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ
 الْبُشْرَىٰ فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ
 أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْآلِبَابُ

As for those who stay clear of the worship of the Rebel and turn penitently to Allah, there is good news for them. So give good news to My servants who listen to the speech and follow the best of it. They are the ones whom Allah has guided, and it is they who possess intellect. (39:17-18)

Do these verses not state that there are differences of opinion in religion? Do they not state that there are numerous verses and traditions? Do they not state that there are differing opinions? Do they not state that the best opinion must be followed?

The verse says “the best,” but in what way? It refers to the statement that contains the most prosperity; the one whose argument is stronger; the one which benefits people in general, not in particular; the one which benefits the society more; and the one which is easier. Hence it is this “word” or statement that should be chosen, as it is the one which suits the ease of religion better, for it is said: “I have been sent upon a generous, easy divine code.”

What is clear is that these verses present the fact that there are differences of opinion regarding religious issues. For instance, in certain cases, there are three or four traditions about one issue; or sometimes there is only one tradition, but there are three or four opinions about that tradition or issue. Sometimes, the apparent disparity goes back to the Qur’ān and we can note that various verses have been revealed about the “single” issue at hand. The solution that the Qur’ān offers is that the jurists must choose the best opinion when numerous opinions exist.

They must think and ponder; they must decide which opinion has a stronger argument. They must decide which one better correlates with the religion and Islamic principles. They must determine which one further benefits Islam and the Islamic *Ummah*.

The term “better” (*aḥsan*) includes all of these. Therefore, listening to opinions and following the best one is either close to, or exactly the same as, the “*ijtibād*” which is current in Islam. But it must be remembered that the jurists are different from the laymen. According to the traditions and arguments that have been put forward, lay persons must do the *taqlīd* of the jurists. This corresponds on the one hand to the normative actions and common sense of rational beings, such as prescribe that the ignorant must follow the people of knowledge, or on the other, to the issue of “Questioning” which was mentioned in a previous section. Imam ‘Askarī (*‘a*), in a famous tradition, said: “It is incumbent for the laymen to perform *taqlīd* to one of the jurists, who guards himself, who protects his religion, who opposes his carnal desires, and who is obedient to the commands of his Lord.”² This is with regards to the laymen, but what about the jurist? First, the jurist must listen to opposing

² *Al-Iḥtijāj*, v.2, p.264

views, must refer to differing traditions, must review all of the verses about a certain topic. Then, he must weigh the arguments for and against the issue at hand. After doing this, eventually he will issue a verdict using the method of *ijtihād*. But what does this *ijtihād* entail? It involves effort, or “*ijtihād*” in choosing the better argument, and consequently, in issuing a verdict in accordance with the better argument. Therefore the verses about “deep understanding” and following the best opinion both prove the validity, rather than the obligation, of *ijtihād*.

Types of Ijtihād

It is an accepted fact that religious matters are divided into two types, certain and uncertain. The former are matters given to certainty, in which there are no differences of opinion; and if one were to differ regarding them, such a person would be considered outside of the fold of Islam. The latter on the other hand are not certain, and are not considered as the “necessities of religion.” They are theoretical matters which are open to discussion. There can be differences of opinions about these matters. They are supported by various arguments. It was this latter type that the above mentioned methods of obtaining knowledge were concerned about. The methods that were mentioned included: asking the people of remembrance, referring to the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* (referring to Allah and the Messenger), taking counsel, deep and comprehensive understanding of religion, and choosing the best argument. These are all the far-reaching methods of *ijtihād*. Hence, we must accept and confess to the fact that many issues of religion are issues of *ijtihād*. The necessities of religion are mainly comprised of general principles, for instance, Allah is attributed with the attributes of perfection which have been mentioned in the Qur’ān. But, when one delves into the particulars and asks questions such as: are the attributes His essence or something other than His essence? Is divine will an attribute of essence, or an attribute of act? These are matters of *ijtihād*. The laymen do not understand these issues at all; and do not need to understand them. Rather, these are discussions for the specialists. The scholars must think about these issues and provide opinions about them. Since they are not certain issues or the necessities of religion, differences of opinion regarding them, in their affirmation or negation, their acceptance or rejection—with valid reasoning—would not take one outside of the fold of Islam. Having differences of opinion about such matters, and either accepting them or rejecting them, do not form the criterion for Islam and disbelief. That is, they do not cause a group to leave Islam. Such discussions form the main

bulk of the discussions that take place in the field of “proximity or conciliation between the Islamic schools of thought,” and hence they must take place with open minds and much magnanimity.

The Scope of Ijtihād

The “Scope of Ijtihād” is actually an academic and theological discussion which is more properly studied in the classroom. There are many such issues. The majority of discussions pertaining to theology and jurisprudence are of this nature; they are issues which are not certain. The place for them to be discussed is the Islamic seminary and schools, not general gatherings. These are issues that were not raised during the beginning stages of Islam, or if they were, they were raised in a limited and obscure form. They have been raised throughout the centuries as a result of the meticulous approach and the erudition of the scholars. Needless to say, there are differences of opinion regarding these issues.

These types of differences cannot be considered the differences of opinions which are rejected in Islam. If a *mujtahid* intentionally makes a mistake in his derivation and does not refer to a certain verse or authentic tradition, he is at fault and will be punished. But, if he tried his best, studied correctly, met with various religious authorities, studied under various professors in the Islamic seminary, and observed all of the principles found in religion (both principles of his own sect and of other sects) and then made a conclusion on a matter, his conclusion must be accepted. It should be respected. It is authoritative for him and it is authoritative for those who follow him in *taqlīd*. But, the conclusion that the *mujtahid* reaches does not necessarily correspond to reality. It is possible that it is congruent with reality and it is possible that it is not congruent with reality. But, in any case it must be respected. The *mujtahid* is rewarded in either case, even if he made a mistake in his *ijtihād*.

What is clear is that the Qur’ān and Islam ordered Muslims to ponder and think. If it issued such commands, then it must accept their consequences as well. The result of free thought is differences of opinion. It is not necessary for the people who have come from various parts of a city, or a few cities, and who have studied and reached *ijtihād* to all come to the same conclusions. Of course, they must try their best. But, if they do not reach the same conclusion their opinions are sufficient for themselves.

The scholars know about this issue. Others also must know about it to a certain extent. At the beginning of the *marāji’*s manuals of Islamic laws, they write in their own handwriting: “Acting in accordance to this book is

sufficient". This means that one's responsibility will be taken care of. Why do they not state that "this book consists of Allah's laws"? The reason is because the book consists of theoretical issues which are disputed. The jurist tried his best and reached a conclusion on each issue. This conclusion is authoritative for himself and those who follow him. He does not write more than this. He only states that it is sufficient—that if one acted according to his rulings, such a person would have done his duty.

The Issue of Erroneous and Correct Judgements

Now that this is so, another intellectual topic arises. It has become clear that there are differences of opinions amongst the *mujtahids* in matters pertaining to religion, especially in matters pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence. They discuss the issues in accordance to their method of *ijtihad*. Are all of the conclusions that the *mujtahids* reach in accordance with reality? Are they the exact divine Law that corresponds to the will of Allah? This is a famous theological issue. Some *Maṣūbah* scholars state: "Although the verdicts of the *mujtahids* are different, they are all the ruling of Allah. The verdict of such-and-such *mujtahid* is the ruling of Allah and the verdict of another *mujtahid* is also the ruling of Allah. The reason is that Allah does not have a ruling in such issues; that is He does not have a ruling other than that of what the *mujtahids* conclude. The conclusions of the *ijtihad* of the *mujtahids* are the very rulings of Allah. There is also nothing preventing multiple divine rulings on a single issue of *ijtihad*. The ruling of Allah being singular is only compulsory in the necessities of religion."

Other scholars, including the Shia scholars, are called *Mukhta'ah*. They state: "The mistakes that *mujtahids* make are permissible. The *Maṣūbah* scholars state that whatever conclusions *mujtahids* make, even if they are in opposition with each other, are all the rulings of Allah. This is incorrect. Allah has a specific ruling about all issues—a ruling which we do not know." The consensus amongst the Shia scholars is that the *Mukhta'ah* view is the correct one. According to the *Mukhta'ah*, Allah's ruling is in reality only one. If a *mujtahid* happens to find this reality, then so be it, but if he does not find it, he is excused and his opinion is sufficient to form a precept. This group narrates the tradition, "The one who reached the correct opinion gets two rewards and the one who made a mistake gets one reward." Allah will give the erroneous *mujtahid* one reward. But, the *mujtahid* who reached the correct conclusion through his *ijtihad* will receive two rewards.

The late Āyatullāh Burūjardī, our teacher, may Allah be pleased with him, had a novel opinion about the above-mentioned consensus. He said that this consensus was not a legal consensus, but rather it was a theological consensus. Hence this consensus does not have the same ruling as a jurisprudential or legal consensus. So if someone was able to reach a conclusion that was in opposition to it, his conclusion would not be invalidated on the grounds that it goes against the [legal] consensus. This discussion is very detailed. I want to pass over it quickly so that I may reach a conclusion that has bearing on the conciliation and proximity of the Islamic sects and schools of thought. But, these discussions are necessary and help to set the scene for the ways and methodologies of conciliation. These ways should be examined with an open heart; without any sort of tunnel-vision or parochialism. Having an open heart is quintessential to the issue of bringing the sects together. Without an open heart fanaticism cannot be prevented. Without an open heart the two sides of the argument will not reach anywhere; they will not be able to even respect each other's opinions. Justice would not prevail. God-willing we will discuss the issues at hand with an open heart.

I think that I can come to a conclusion from what has been stated. It was concluded that *ijtihād* exists in Islam. One is commanded to think and ponder over each part of religion. Traditions are various and multifarious. Therefore, people's understanding of the traditions and their understanding of which traditions are authentic and which traditions are not authentic are different.

Likewise, there are numerous verses about some issues. Different individuals' usage and method of forging a concurrence between these verses will be various. What is certain is that not everyone will reach the same certain conclusion regarding them. They will reach different conclusions and their opinions are authoritative and binding for themselves and for the people that follow them. Such scholars will be exonerated by Allah if they prescribe something that is contradictory to reality and not in line with the actual will of Allah.

Ijtihād and Derivation

Ijtihād means to put forth strenuous effort. It is formed by the Arabic verbal form which denotes *intensity*. The definition that has been given for it is: *ijtihād* is "to go to the utmost of one's capacity." In the cognitive context, it means that a person uses his intellectual strength to its full ability.

Sometimes the term *derivation* or *investigation* is used for *ijtihad*. The Qur'ān states:

يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ

...those of them who investigate. (4:82)

The Arabic term used for 'derivation,' *istinbāt*, means bringing water up from the bottom of a well. Issues which have differences of opinion— theoretical issues, are similar to water that is found at the bottom of a well. It takes struggle and effort to bring it from the bottom of the well. In conclusion, derivation is the greatest intellectual action. It is almost synonymous with deep thought or understanding (*tafaqquh*). The innovativeness of Islam is seen through the fact that the doors of *ijtihad* are open in order to solve religious problems, correlate religious law to the needs of the time, and as was said, determine the rulings regarding the day-to-day events that take place. In this way, *derivation* means "to determine the day-to-day subjects and events, and to go on to express their rulings." Subjects are variable and change depending on their time and space; therefore their rulings also change. The reason for this is that a ruling is consequent upon the subject. In a lecture that I delivered in Syria, which was attended by about 3,000 people, I said: "*Ijtihad* is one of the doors of mercy." 'Ali ('a) also said: "Jihad is one of the doors of paradise."³ Jihad, in the path of religion, is one of the doors of paradise. The value of *ijtihad* in the path of religion is the same as Jihad in the path of religion. The *mujtahids* and jurists provide the greatest service for the *Ummah* and for Islamic sciences. They use all of their efforts over a 50, 60, or 70 year period, in order to derive religious laws from their sources and to bring them to the level of preponderance (not certainty). Then they go on to present their derived laws to the people, thus eliminating excuses from the sinners and not allowing them to say: "We could not refrain from committing sins because we did not know what the rulings of Allah were."

Now that we know about *ijtihad* and the source of differences in principle, in the following sections we can go on to further investigate these differences. In particular we can pose the question as to whether the differences and disputes that were witnessed at the advent of Islam, or which gradually came to realization after that period, stemmed from *ijtihad*, or from politics?

³ Nahj al-Balāghah, speech 27

The Islamic Perspective on Beauty

Muḥammad ‘Alī Qāsimī

Translated by D.D. Sodagar

Abstract

It is an accepted truth among scholars that certain traits are inherent to human nature. One such inherent trait is the human being's inclination to seek beauty. And since Islam, as the most perfect faith that caters to human being's theoretic as well as practical capacities, puts forth an ideology that accommodates and accords with human nature and the basic human emotions, it is important to examine Islam's point of view on beauty. The present article will—after offering a definition of beauty—consider the manifestations of beauty in existence through the prism of the Qur'ān and the Tradition: Divine beauty, the beauty of the sky and the stars, the beauty in the creation of the earth and the living creatures inhabiting it, and the beauty of the seas, which are all pristine manifestations of beauty. Furthermore, certain deeds and behaviors have been identified as beautiful by the Qur'ān and the Tradition. The Qur'ān defines faith as the beauty of the heart. Islam identifies the beauty in patience and even in separation and urges humankind to seek such beauty. Islam lays great stress on the necessity of attending to the human being's outward and inward beauty. It encourages Muslims to take advantage of the beautiful phenomena of the world by way of ethical and spiritual perfection. Thus, Islam requires that one should worship God wearing one's best clothes. This requirement is in line with the general Islamic perspective, which views the beauty inherent in existence, in human conduct, in the esoteric as well as the exoteric aspects of truth in light of the purpose of creation—that is, obedience to God..

Keywords: Beauty, heart, cosmos, human being, manifestation.

INTRODUCTION

For those with only a cursory understanding of Islam's profound tenets, the beauties of the world are things to stay away from. There is an insurmountable rift between Islam and beauty, and it is in view of this rift that, in their view, Islam commands Muslims to disown the world and all its

manifestations of beauty and wonder. On the other extreme, there are those who, citing the human being's innate desire for beauty, exceed the boundaries of moderation and, with the excuse of there not being any inconsistency between Islam and beauty, indulge in all the worldly luxuries and pleasures, thus granting themselves the discretion to enjoy God's worldly bounties promiscuously. These two mutually exclusive approaches are evident when one studies the attitudes of Muslims towards the world.

So the question we are faced with is this: Is the approach of the first group, which in the spirit of asceticism shuns all the beauties of the world, correct? or is the second approach the proper one to take? Or must we reject both approaches to arrive at a realistic perspective? To answer these questions, we must examine Islam's position vis-à-vis the beautiful aspects and phenomena of life.

The present study aims to offer a reliable analysis of the Islamic perspective regarding the beauties of creation and their connection with the human being in the hope of dispelling the erroneous views that some Muslims have adopted and that have led to a false monasticism on one extreme and to a libertine indulgence in the pleasures and comforts of the world on the other extreme. The Muslim youth need not disown appealing clothing and a presentable look in the name of faith, and so those who care about their appearance should not be ostracized as weak in faith. It is these concerns that have compelled this author to examine Islam's perspective on beauty, the limits it sets on taking advantage of the manifestations of beauty in the world, true and illusory beauty, and the right intentions for availing oneself of objects of beauty.

THE DEFINITION OF BEAUTY

The scholars of lexicon define beauty as "the order and harmony in an object that are enriched by grandeur and purity and that affect the human being's imagination, intellect, and his more exalted inclinations, creating in him a sense of pleasure and vivacity."¹ Or according to another definition,

¹ Muḥammad Mu'īn, *Farhang fārsī* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publications, 1360 AHS (4th edition)), vol. 2, p. 1768. [Please note that "AHS" signifies the *solar* Islamic calendar used mainly in Iran, while "AH" refers to the *lunar* Islamic calendar, prevalent throughout the entire Islamic world. (Translator)]

“beauty consists in the splendor and appeal that attach to images and concepts.”² In short, it is the state present in a beautiful person or thing.

The philosophers define beauty as the characteristic that when present in an object elicits the mental state of satisfaction and gaiety in the human being.³ Avicenna, the world-renowned Muslim philosopher who flourished ten centuries ago, is of the opinion that beauty and splendor in a thing consist in its being as it should be.⁴ Muḥammad Taqī Ja‘farī, the late Muslim philosopher and polymath, describes beauty as the vivid and appealing manifestation of perfection that results when an object is possessed of the necessary and appropriate traits.⁵

From these definitions we may deduce that beauty is an objective characteristic and state that obtains in the ontic world and that is grasped by the human being through the senses of sight and touch and that creates in him the sense of pleasure and gaiety. This resultant state of mind, which is a relational state connected to the mind on the one hand and the beautiful object on the other hand, obtains in the human being by virtue of his perfection-seeking nature.

BEAUTY AS DEPICTED IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS CORPUS

The beauties that the mind perceives in the external world are of two types: those that are present in nature independently of human agency and those that come about by way of human activity. At this point we will examine beauty, of both types, from the standpoint of Islam and then we will try to make out the purpose that Islam defines for its aesthetic outlook. It is important to affirm from the start that Islam attaches great importance to the variety of beauty’s manifestations, the wisdom in its existence, the benefits that it yields, and its effect on human edification.

² Ḥasan Anwarī, *Farhang buzug sukhan* (Tehran: Sukhan Publications, 1381 AHS), vol. 5, p. 3924.

³ Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā et al., *Al-mu‘jam al-wasīf* (Istanbul: Dār al-Da‘wah), p. 136.

⁴ Muḥammad ‘Amārah, *Islām wa hunarhāyi zībā* (translated from Arabic to Farsi by Majīd Aḥmadī; Tehran: Iḥsān Press, 1381 AHS), p. 15.

⁵ Muḥammad Taqī Ja‘farī, *Zībā’i wa hunar az dīdgāh islām* (Tehran: Kirāmat Press, 1375 AHS), p. 248.

i. The Existential Manifestations of Beauty

(i) Divine Beauty

On examining the *ahādīth*⁶ and the supplications reported from the infallible imāms⁷ (peace be upon them) for a description of God's attributes, we repeatedly come across this phrase: "Verily God is beautiful and loves beauty and loves to see the effects of His blessings on His slave."⁸

In one supplication reported from the imāms, we address God in these words: "Glorified is He Who dons splendor and beauty."⁹ In another phrase in this supplication, we are taught to call on God in this manner: "You are Splendid in Your Beauty."¹⁰ "O Magnificent, O Beautiful,"¹¹ is yet another phraseology we have been taught for calling on God.

In another reported supplication, the slave describes himself as being in love with his Lord's beauty: "O God, I have come to Your Court on account of my desire for Your benevolence; I have ventured into Your Presence seeking to lay eyes on Your Beauty."¹²

In the pre-dawn supplication of the month of Ramadhan we celebrate, among others, the following attributes of God: "O my God, I beseech You, invoking the most splendid of Your Splendor, while Your Splendor is all splendid O my God I beseech You, invoking the most beautiful of Your Beauty, while Your Beauty is all beautiful."¹³

As God has created all the beautiful phenomena of the world, human understanding grasps that His Beauty necessarily transcends and excels all

⁶ *Ahādīth* is the plural of *ḥadīth*—a report relating what an infallible religious authority said or did. [Translator]

⁷ The term *imām* (literally, "leader") has special significance in the Shia school. It refers to one of the twelve infallible religious authorities who succeeded the Prophet's role as the leader of the nation of Islam and as God's viceroy (not the Prophet's exclusive ministry in receiving divine revelation in so far as it concerned the establishment of a new religion) one after another by divine ordainment. [Translator]

⁸ Muḥammad Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, *Mizān al-ḥikmah* (Qum: Maktab al-ʿIlām al-Islāmī, 1403 AH), vol. 2, pp. 76-77.

⁹ Shaykh ʿAbbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān* (ʿIlmīyyah Islāmīyyah Publications), "Duʿā ḥaḍrat fāṭimah," p. 71.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., "Duʿā mashlūl," p. 132, "Duʿā mujīr," p. 144, "Duʿā nīmih rajab," p. 259, and "Duʿā shab ʿid fiṭr," p. 426.

¹² Ibid., "Munājāt khamsah ʿashar," Third Supplication, p. 215 and Fifth Supplication, p. 218.

¹³ Ibid., "Duʿā saḥar māh ramadhān."

the sensible and intelligible manifestations of beauty that are perceivable in the macrocosm and the microcosm.

(2) The Manifestations of Beauty in the Cosmos

The phenomena that we perceive in the cosmos can be pleasant and savory—in which case the pleasure that we experience leads us to wish to repeat that perception—or they can prove unsavory and hurtful to our emotions and sensibilities—in which case we try to avoid the repetition of such perceptions. The Noble Qur'an repeatedly recounts the beauties inherent in the cosmos, depicting thereby a vivid and telling picture of them, and states the purpose that we must seek in beholding the beautiful phenomena.

Stellar and Celestial Beauty

In a number of verses, the Qur'an affirms the beauty of the heavens and their being adorned by the stars. God gives the credit for this act of adornment directly to Himself and, by eloquently conveying the relation between the firmament and the stars and offering analogies, urges humankind to behold this beauty and take heed therefrom:

*Indeed We have embellished the lowest heaven with the adornment of the stars;*¹⁴

*And We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and guarded it. That is the ordainment of the Omnipotent, the Omniscient;*¹⁵

*And verily we set mansions in the firmament and adorned them for the beholders;*¹⁶

*Have they not beheld the firmament above them—how We have constructed it and adorned it and how there are no rifts therein.*¹⁷

In the above-quoted verses, God, the Exalted, goads humankind to reflect on the beauty of the sky, especially when the stars are shining like bright lamps. The creation of the sky—unblemished by rifts and adorned with stars—is obviously for the purpose of protection and the other benefits that it yields. But that is not the exclusive purpose in this creation: another purpose, as alluded to by the above-quoted verses, is to evoke in the human being who beholds the sky a sense of pleasure that derives from perceiving the inherent beauty in it, thus compelling him to contemplate its

¹⁴ Qur'an 37:6.

¹⁵ Qur'an 41:12.

¹⁶ Qur'an 15:16.

¹⁷ Qur'an 50:6.

creation, its being “adorned” with “mansions” and “lamps,” which will ultimately guide him to the realization of the Creator.

The Beauty in the Creation of the Human Being

In Surah Tīn, God, after swearing four times (“By the fig and the olive; by Mount Sinai; by this secure town”), proclaims, *We certainly created man in the best constitution.*¹⁸ “The best constitution” encompasses a broad scope of concepts and therefore denotes that God created the human being in a balanced and appropriate fashion. The two principal aspects of the human existence—body and soul—have been forged into a beautiful and balanced creation.¹⁹ The magnificence of this awesome marriage between the physical and the spiritual is so wonderful that no scientist or scholar has to date claimed to have offered an exhaustive study of the infinite array of the human being’s mental activities and psychological complexities.

Elsewhere God affirms, *and He gave you form and perfected your form.*²⁰ Whether we compare the human form to that of other animals or reflect on the perfection of the human form and the conformity there exists between its various parts, we will realize that God has bestowed on humankind the most beautiful form.²¹ If we observe the human nature with a clear sight, we will unambiguously perceive its perfection and overall beauty.

Depicting the Beauty in the Movement of Animals

The Noble Qur’ān offers a comprehensive picture of the benefits that the animals provide us with: They provide us with the fabric for our clothes; they give us meat for nourishment; they carry our burdens, and there are many other benefits that we derive from them.²² But the Qur’ān does not stop at the material gains we derive from animals.

Portraying the beauty in their movements, it states, *There is beauty in them for you, when you bring them home to rest and drive them forth to pasture.*²³

¹⁸ Qur’an 65:4.

¹⁹ See Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-mīzān fī tafsīr al-qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assisah al-‘Alamī li al-Maṭbū‘āt, 1974), vol. 20, p. 319; and Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī et al., *Tafsīr nimūnih* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1379, 23rd edition), vol. 27, p. 144.

²⁰ Qur’an 40:64 and 64:3.

²¹ See Fakhr Rāzī, *Al-tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1420 AH), vol. 20, p. 552.

²² See Qur’an 16:5-7.

²³ Qur’an 16:6.

The beauty we perceive in seeing a flock of sheep going to their pasture and returning to their place of rest as described by this verse is indicative of a psychological state that takes shape in our souls as we watch the sheep move to and fro.

In a following verse God thus reiterates the same point: *and [God created] horses and mules and asses for you to ride them and for adornment, and He creates what you know not.*²⁴ This verse depicts the beauty in these animals when we ride them. This mode of beauty finds manifestation in the social life, for to move from one place to another on the back of a beast of burden is more exciting and is at the same time a more dignified manner of travel.²⁵ The verse ends with a subtle allusion to the beauty of the means of transportation that did not exist at the time of the Prophet and would be created in the future: *and He creates what you know not.*

The Master of the Faithful²⁶ in a sermon reported in *Nahj al-Balāghah* portrays the beauty of the peacock and describes how it is one of the most wonderful birds in creation: "... If you liken it to the vegetation the earth produces, you should say it is a bouquet of flowers collected from fresh spring blossoms...."²⁷

The Earth and Its Beauty

In numerous verses of the Qur'an, mention is made of the beautiful sceneries that the earth reveals. God draws our attention to this beauty, stimulating us to reflect and contemplate.

*[He] sends down for you water from the sky, whereby We [God] grow delightful gardens.*²⁸ In this verse God attributes to himself the manifestations of the natural beauty of the earth as exhibited in the flowers, the forests, the plateaus, and the divers florae that cover the earth and that instill vivacity and gaiety in the hearts of humankind.

Another similar verse reads, *Have you not observed how God sends down water from the sky, whereupon the earth turns green? Indeed God is All-Attentive,*

²⁴ Qur'an 16:8.

²⁵ See Nāṣir Makārīm Shīrāzī et al., op. cit., vol. 11, p. 161.

²⁶ This is the epithet reserved in Shia literature exclusively for Imām 'Alī, the first imām and the immediate successor of the Prophet. [Translator]

²⁷ Muḥammad Dashtī (editor), *Nahj al-balāghah* (Qum: Amīr al-Mu'minīn Institute, 1381 AHS), sermon no. 165, p. 222.

²⁸ Qur'an 27:60.

*All-Aware.*²⁹ The verse describes the sending down of rain and the consequent verdure of the plants as divine acts of grace.

The Master of the Faithful in an eloquent speech thus portrays the adornments of the earth: "... and the earth exults in the adornment of its gardens and flaunts the floral cape it has donned and the ornament that has been hung round her from the lush blossoms...."³⁰

The Qur'an also considers another form of earthly beauty: the castles and mansions people have made and the houses they have hewed in the mountains.³¹ These verses are in effect asserting that people are allowed to create the items considered to be adornments and embellishments. Verse 74, Surah A'rāf, however, stipulates a qualification for this permission: humankind must remember God's blessings and avoid perpetrating unrighteous and wicked deeds, for this would defile the beauty of what they have created.

The Beauty of the Seas

To behold the sea and the beauties the depths of the oceans display compels the beholder to admire them. Islam takes such beauty into account and allows us to enjoy it: *It is He who subjugated the sea, that you may eat from it fresh meat and obtain from it ornaments that you wear.*³² The verse offers two reasons for the subjugation of the seas to human will: eating from the fish and exploiting the material in it that can be used for ornamental purposes. Observing the colossal ships drifting over the sea, while a beautiful scene, humbles us in awe before the infinite power of God. The above verse refers to these benefits as the purpose for which God created the seas and oceans and subjugated them to the will of humankind.

2. Describing Certain Deeds and States of Mind as Beautiful

The Qur'an and the Tradition describe certain deeds and states of mind as beautiful, thereby encouraging the human being to advance beyond the outward manifestations of beauty and opening his eyes to the beauties of the life of the intellect, that he may endeavor to embrace such beauties in his progress toward perfection.

²⁹ Qur'an 22:63.

³⁰ Muḥammad Dashtī, op. cit., sermon no. 91, p. 118.

³¹ See Qur'an 7:74.

³² Qur'an 16:14.

The Beauty of Faith

Numerous verses of the Qurʾān and reports in the corpus of Tradition are concerned with defining faith and articulating its advantageous results and benefits. One of the very important results of faith is the state of beauty and purity that the heart achieves on account of sincerely embracing it. In Surah Ḥujurāt, God says, *But God has endeared faith to you and beautified it in your hearts and God has made unfaith, transgression, and disobedience reprehensible to you.*³³ The “beautification” of faith signifies that God has endowed it with such beauty as attracts towards itself the hearts of the faithful, thus drawing them away from disobedience, unfaith, and iniquity, which constitute the antithesis to faith.³⁴

God possesses infinite wisdom, and it is His will to lead humankind to perfection. Thus, He has prepared the preliminary grounds for the realization of this perfection. That is why He has endeared faith, which is the principal means of perfection, to our hearts. He kindles in the heart the passion for seeking the truth and in this way nurtures the heart in the instructions of Islam.

As such, the human being’s desire for beauty compels him to embrace the beautiful traits and perform the beautiful deeds. To conceive God and His instructions in the light of truth will lead every person whose heart is yet unblemished by worldly negligence to seek Him. On the other hand, to have a correct conception of the nature of iniquity and sin, which are at odds with the human being’s divine nature, elicits in one a sense of repulsion.

The Beauty of Forgiveness

A number of ethical ideals and human values have been specifically underscored in the Noble Qurʾān. As regards the virtue of forgiveness, it states, *The Hour is bound to come, so forgive—a beautiful forgiveness.*³⁵ The verse commands the Prophet—peace be upon him and his house—to show lenience and love in the face of obstinacy and opposition from the people and to forgive them. Forgiveness is “beautiful” when it is not accompanied by reproach and is therefore a pure expression of compassion. In elaborat-

³³ Qurʾan 49:7.

³⁴ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, op. cit., vol. 18, p. 313.

³⁵ Qurʾan 15:85.

ing on what is meant by a “beautiful forgiveness,” Imām Riḍā is reported as having said, “It is forgiveness without rebuke.”³⁶

The Beauty of Patience

The Noble Qur’ān enjoins patience in these words: *So be patient—a beautiful patience*.³⁷ Patience is “beautiful” when we refrain from taking our grievances to other than God and thus prevent others from learning of our hardships.³⁸ Another interpretation defines “beautiful patience” as the patience that one exercises in the face of significant and prolonged hardship without losing hope, complaining, lamenting, or whining.³⁹ ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Taqī Ja’farī offers the following explanation regarding “beautiful patience”:

Although the beauty of patience and forbearance does not have a pictorial, verbal, or physical representation, it is nevertheless of the same beauty that gives meaning and substance to any manifestation of beauty. The patient and forbearing believer is blessed with serenity and insight. He becomes immune to the flux and change that have an adverse effect on the visible manifestations of beauty. It is in this state [i.e., when one is possessed of serenity and insight] that one enjoys the manifestations of beauty in their most supreme form.⁴⁰

To recapitulate the above descriptions, we can claim to be possessed of “beautiful patience” when we are no longer afraid of encountering the adversities of life, when we can withstand the hardships we face without complaining, without whining, and without uttering blasphemous words in despair. The adversities and hardships of life are opportunities for progress and perfection if we are equipped with “beautiful patience.”

Beautiful Separation

When we reach a point in our efforts to guide others that we realize that a person is so corrupt that we cannot change him for the better, we must disown our relationship with him and keep away from him. But in doing

³⁶ ‘Abd ‘Alī ibn Jum‘ah al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyyah), vol. 3, p. 27.

³⁷ Qur’an 70:5.

³⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, *Al-durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi al-ma’tūr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1421 AH), vol. 8, p. 259.

³⁹ Nāṣir Makārīm Shīrāzī et al., op. cit., vol. 25, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad Taqī Ja’farī, op. cit., p. 302.

so, we must be careful not to deviate from the proper and “beautiful” manner, thus adding to our own and the corrupt person’s problems. We must bear in mind that we are severing our ties for the purpose of enlightening that person and maintaining our own spiritual equilibrium. To be heedful of this point endows our soul with beauty—the beauty of keeping within the bounds of human virtue even when we dislike someone and wish to dissociate from him. God thus orders His Prophet: *And bear with patience what they utter and disown them beautifully.*⁴¹

What we said in the above concerning the beauty of separation relates to cases in which life itself drives one to seek separation. But in addition to the general rule posited above, the Qur’ān specifies particular instances of “beautiful separation.” For instance, where a marriage has reached a point at which the husband abuses his authority and oppresses his wife, the Qur’ān commands that he should either treat his wife appropriately or should divorce her respectfully. In verse 49, Surah Aḥzāb, God affirms the following injunction on how to divorce: *and release them beautifully.*

To release “beautifully” is to divorce one’s wife with love and respect and without violence, harassment, or disrespect. That is, when the spouses reach the conclusion that they cannot maintain a successful relationship and therefore decide on divorce, they do not have the right to resort to cruelty, harassment, foul language, or violence, which would make their divorce “ugly.” Just as the relationship must be in peace and with love, the separation must be based on mutual understanding and respect and thus “beautiful.”

One of the results of such a “beautiful” separation that is executed with mutual respect is that it allows for the possibility of the two sides’ coming back together. For, the husband and wife may in the future consider reinstating their marital life. But if they terminate their marriage in a spirit of animosity and disrespect, they would have in effect precluded their chances of reunion, and if they do succeed in their reunion, the emotional and mental conditions would not be as favorable as if they had divorced in peace and with respect.

The Beauty of the “Divine Color”

The Qur’ān invites the adherents of all religions to embrace Islam so that all humankind would unite under its banner, thus accepting one color only—the “color of God”: *the color of God, and who is better than God in col-*

⁴¹ Qur’an 73:10.

or? *And it is He whom we worship.*⁴² This verse exhorts all people to renounce the color of race and the blind loyalties to kinfolk, which entail discord, and to instead take up the “color of God.”

Qur’ānic exegetes report that the above verse’s occasion of revelation was the practice of some Christians who baptized their infants using water they made yellow by adding a certain dye. They were of the conviction that this yellow water purged their children of the Original Sin they inherited from Adam.⁴³ Addressing this belief, the Qur’an affirms that instead of seeking the colors of the physical world, which can only beget discord, we should pursue the “color of God.” That is, the factor that can genuinely cleanse and beautify our souls is to hearken to God and to follow His instructions.

3. Islam and the Injunction to Take Advantage of Worldly Adornments

Islam offers the most perfect body of instructions for humankind in leading its life. Thus, it strongly encourages Muslims to be cognizant of their outward as well as inward beauty. Muslims are prohibited from being indifferent vis-à-vis the manifestations of beauty that pervade the world and the means of beauty and appeal that they offer. They must heed the beauty-seeking impulse of their divine nature, employing it by way of spiritual perfection. The outcome of adhering to this outlook is the renunciation of monasticism, which is a way of life that eschews the manifestations of beauty in the material world.

As opposed to Christian monasticism, Islam, rather than rejecting humankind’s use of ornaments, puts it in the right direction and gives it the appropriate purpose, thus rendering it as a means for the spiritual elevation of the human soul. The Qur’ān’s position on this matter is firm: *Say [O Prophet], “Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has brought forth for His slaves, and the savory things of His provision?”*⁴⁴ We may conclude, then, that studying God’s injunctions in Islam regarding the issue of benefitting from worldly ornaments leads us to the realization that not only does Islam approve of taking advantage of worldly ornaments, it stipulates

⁴² Qur’an 2:138.

⁴³ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 312-313 and al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414 AH), vol. 1, p. 369.

⁴⁴ Qur’an 7:32.

its injunctions such as to conform to the human being's beauty-seeking impulse, for God likes to see His slaves benefitting from His blessings.⁴⁵

Dressing Well and Caring for One's Appearance

Studying the sayings and the lifestyle of the infallible authorities of religion, we arrive at the conclusion that Islam considers wearing neat, nice, and elegant clothing that becomes one's social status and individual bearing as commendable. Moreover, buying multiple dresses and clothes is deemed permissible by Islam and is not condemned as an instance of extravagant spending. The following question-and-answer between Ishāq ibn 'Ammār and Imām Ṣādiq specifically addresses this point:

Ishāq ibn 'Ammār: "Does it become a believer to have ten dresses?"

The Imām: "Yes."

Ishāq: "Twenty dresses?"

The Imām: "Yes."

Ishāq: "Thirty dresses?"

The Imām: "Yes. This is not an instance of wasting. Wasting is to wear your elegant clothes when you should be wearing your casual clothes."⁴⁶

It is reported that Imām Sajjād purchased two summer dresses, each for the price of one hundred and fifty dirhams.⁴⁷

When a group of sanctimonious Muslims disapprovingly asked him, "In the eyes of Muslims, you are the most meritorious, so why are you dressed the way you are?" Ibn 'Abbās replied, "God says in the Qur'ān, *Say [O Prophet], 'Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has brought forth for His slaves, and the savory things of His provision?'*"⁴⁸

In numerous reports, Muslims are encouraged to wear white clothes, and the reason given for this is their more pleasing fragrance and their greater beauty.⁴⁹ Wearing black clothes, on the other hand, has been discouraged as the dress of grief and the inmates of hell.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Al-kāfī* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1362 AHS, 2nd edition), vol. 6, p. 438.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (Historically, two coins were current in the Islamic world: the gold coin or *dīnār* and the silver coin or *dirham*. Ten dirhams were equal to one dīnār. Imām Sajjād purchased each one of his two summer dresses for the price of fifteen gold coins—a considerable sum indeed. [Translator])

⁴⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, p. 442, no. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 445-446.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

Furthermore, great emphasis is laid on being well-dressed and personable when meeting one's friends. In one report, Imām Ṣādiq relates that on one occasion when the Prophet was asked to the door by a companion, he first moistened his hand and tidied his beard and hair with his hands and then checked his appearance, using a bowl of water as a mirror. This surprised the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah. After the Prophet's conversation with the companion was over and he came back in, she asked him why he had groomed himself before going to meet the man. The Prophet replied, "O 'Ā'ishah, verily God desires to see a believer who goes out to see his brother to prepare and groom himself."⁵¹

The Youth and Appealing Clothing

Examining the reports of the sayings and the tradition of the infallible imāms, one is struck by the emphasis with which they spoke to the need for the youth to be well-dressed and presentable. Imām Bāqir reports that during his caliphate, Imām 'Ali went to the bazaar along with Qanbar, his servant, to purchase clothes. He bought two dresses, one for the price of three dirhams and another for two dirhams. He then told his servant to take the three-dirham one. Qanbar told the Imām that it would be better for him to take the more expensive dress as he must make public appearances to speak to the people. Imām 'Ali's reply was, "But you are young and have the desires of the youth. I would be ashamed before my Lord should I prefer myself to you."⁵²

The Imām's conduct teaches us that we must respect the youth's desire for dressing well and appearing personable, which is only a natural inclination. In doing so, the youth satisfy the psychological need they have in this respect, while they should be careful to observe the bounds of moderation.

The Permissibility of Growing Long Hair

As explained above, Islam does not forbid permissible adornments. It even condemns those who forbid such adornments on their own account. Having said this, we should point out that Islam permits men to wear their

⁵¹ Al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī, *Makārim al-akhlāq* (Qum: Mu'assisah al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1416 AH), vol. 1, pp. 84-85.

⁵² Mīrzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* (Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyyah), vol. 1, p. 210.

hair long: “Men are recommended to either shave their head or to grow long hair, in which case they must care for it by washing and combing it.”⁵³

This report clearly shows that men, particularly the youth, are allowed to either keep their hair or shave it, but if they choose to wear it long, they must tend to it, keep it clean and combed. It is, of course, necessary to respect the particular norms of every society, and so if shaving the head is considered disagreeable in a society—that it is a factor to be taken into consideration. In this light, ‘Allāmah Majlisī, considering why the Prophet and the imāms wore their hair long, explains that shaving the head was a dishonorable thing to do among the Arabs of that period, and the Prophet and the imāms had to avoid a behavior that would have harmed their social credibility.⁵⁴ That the Prophet was mindful of the sensibilities of the society is an example that we must follow. But in any case, if we decide to keep long hair, we must observe the requirements; that is, washing it regularly and keeping it combed.

Dressing Well and Grooming Oneself for Prayer

The Qur’ān affirms, *O Children of Adam, put on your adornment on going to a place of prayer.*⁵⁵ This verse could be read either to indicate bodily and outward adornment—wearing clean and nice clothes, combing the hair, using fragrance, etc.—or to include spiritual adornment—conducting oneself in accordance to virtue—as well. The verse was revealed in condemnation of the egregious tradition observed by some pre-Islamic Arabs, who would perform the ritual circumambulation of the Kaaba while naked. The Qur’ān requires that Muslims should refrain from wearing dirty and shabby clothes and instead wear their best and most appealing when they go for prayer.

The Prophet and the imāms strictly followed this instruction. Asked why he would always dress so well when he went to the mosque for prayer, Imām Ḥasan replied, “Indeed God is beautiful and loves beauty. I groom myself for my Lord, for He says, *put on your adornment on going to a place of prayer.*”⁵⁶

⁵³ Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Ḥilyah al-muttaqīn* (Qum: Mu’assisah Intishārāt Hijrat, 1375 AHS, ninth edition), p. 174.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Qur’an 7:31.

⁵⁶ Ḥāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Baḥrānī, *Al-burhān fī tafsīr al-qur’ān* (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1393 AH), vol. 8, p. 10.

Thus, we may conclude that based on numerous reports in the religious corpus, wearing elegant clothing—provided the money used to purchase it has been acquired by lawful means and it conforms to one’s comportment and standing—is sanctioned by Islam and secures God’s satisfaction.

WOMEN AND BEAUTY

The innate impulse for seeking beauty is even stronger in the female nature. As Islam’s precepts and directions are in conformity with human nature, those that pertain to women are different from those that concern the men.

Beauty as a Criterion in Seeking a Wife

Islamic tradition advises men to ask about the beauty of the hair of the woman they seek to marry in addition to asking about her countenance, for hair and countenance are the two elements of beauty.⁵⁷ The Prophet asserted that the most meritorious wives of his nation are those who are the most beautiful and who require only a meager *mabr*.⁵⁸

To take beauty into consideration for the selection of one’s spouse is considered appropriate by the infallible imāms, though, they caution, that it should not be one’s sole concern. Certain groups of beautiful women are in fact condemned, for beauty is a merit only when it is a complement to virtue and religiosity. As such, the Prophet warned his companions, “Beware of plants that grow on putrid soil.” They asked what he meant, and he explained, “A beautiful girl raised in a depraved family.”⁵⁹ Imām Ṣādiq emphasizes that one should not marry a woman merely for her wealth or beauty; piety and virtue should be given priority in the selection of one’s wife.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-shī‘ah* (Tehran: Intishārāt Islāmīyah, 1384 AH), vol. 14, p. 37.

⁵⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 324. (*Mabr* is the property that the man pledges in the marriage contract to grant to his spouse. Following the consummation of marriage, the possession of this property is transferred to the wife, although it is not mandatory for the husband to give it to her unless she asks for it. [Translator])

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 332.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, op. cit., vol. 14, p. 30.

That a Woman Should Make Herself Appealing to Her Husband

Islam instructs women to maintain an attractive appearance for their husbands. By observing this instruction, women would merit heavenly reward, reinforce the conjugal relationship, and perpetuate the bond of love between them and their husbands.

Imām Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) states, "It is not appropriate for a woman to ever lack adornment, even if it should be merely a necklace; and it is not appropriate for her to leave her hand undyed, even if it should be with a little henna and even if she should be old."⁶¹

The Prophet and the imāms repeatedly alluded to how important it was for women to care for their beauty and appeal. The Prophet instructed the men to clip their nails flush with their fingers but told the women to keep theirs somewhat long, for long nails add to a woman's beauty.⁶² Women have been permitted and encouraged to use any type of adornment that enhances their appeal in the eyes of their husbands.⁶³

Using cosmetics and oil and caring for the beauty of the hair are measures strongly recommended by Islamic law to be acted upon in order to increase one's attractiveness. These measures are all the more important for women, for the implementation of these measures by the wife leads to the satiation of the couple's instinctual needs, and this in turn prevents the couple from feeling the need to turn to other men or women. And once the instinctual needs are satisfied, the couple can pursue their spiritual perfection without having to worry about the hindrance these needs can cause.

The Qur'an prohibits women only from displaying their beauty to those men from whom they must cover themselves according to Islamic law:

*And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts and not to display their charms except for what is outward, and let them draw their scarfs over their bosoms and not display their charms except to their husbands or their fathers or their husbands' fathers*⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 410 and vol. 14, p. 163; see also Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, *Rawḍah al-muttaqīn* (Qum: Bunyād Farhang Islāmī), vol. 8, p. 365.

⁶² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 435.

⁶³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 432 and vol. 14, p. 135.

⁶⁴ Qur'an 24:31.

THE PURPOSE OF BEAUTY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ISLAM

A study of the purpose of creation as articulated by Islam yields the conclusion that God created the world in order to develop within its matrix the human being, and thus He has subjugated it to him. But that is not the final purpose envisioned by Islam. The human being has also been endowed with a sacred purpose, and it was for the realization of this purpose that God's prophets strove and toiled.

The Noble Qur'an identifies the purpose of human creation as the attainment to perfection and the realization of obedience to God: *I did not create the jinn and the humankind except that they worship Me.*⁶⁵ But if we consider that God is self-sufficient and that our actions cannot benefit or harm Him, we will understand that the purpose specified in the above-quoted verse is in fact meant to benefit us and to bring about our perfection. The quoted verse attaches great weight to the issue of obedience and unambiguously expresses that it is the purpose of creation of the jinn and humankind.

It should not be objected that certain verses of the Qur'an point to other purpose and ends. One verse, for instance, identifies the purpose of life and death as the divine will that the human being be tested (*He created death and life that He may test you*).⁶⁶ Another verse states that the purpose of the creation of the heavens and the earth is that humankind may realize His omnipotence (*It is God Who 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*).⁶⁷ The purposes set out in the likes of these verses are intermediate ones. That is, they are purposes to be fulfilled on the way to achieving the final purpose, which is none other than obedience to God.

It is the present author's conviction that this final purpose bears on the topic of this article as well. In other words, the three categories of beauty that we identified within the Islamic worldview must be examined in view of this all-encompassing purpose.

⁶⁵ Qur'an 51:56.

⁶⁶ Qur'an 67:2.

⁶⁷ Qur'an 65:12.

The Purpose in the Manifestations of Beauty in the World

We have already explained that the inherence of a beauty-seeking impulse in the human nature is beyond doubt. Due to this innate feature, when the human sense grasps a beautiful phenomenon, it invariably affects the soul, arousing in it a sense of attraction and wonder. Now, since God's beauty transcends sensory perception, it is conveyed through the medium of the sensible phenomena of this world. Seeing the beauty in the phenomena of the human soul and body and in the phenomena of the external world, one is necessarily led to deduce the beauty of the Creator of these phenomena. Thus, the reason why the Qur'ān urges us to reflect on the beauty of the world is this: that we should acquire a sense of the beauty of God. As such, where the Qur'ān draws our attention to the beauty of the world, it also asserts that this beauty is the work of God⁶⁸ and that this realization should serve as a reminder to awaken us from our material slumber.⁶⁹ Elsewhere, the Qur'ān rebukes those who reject the truth, affirming that if they observed with a discerning eye the firmament and its beauty they would not persist in their rejection.⁷⁰

The Qur'ān pursues the same purpose when it articulates the beauty in the human being, in the movements of animals, in the earth, in the seas: It seeks to awaken the human soul and to provoke the human being to see beyond these beautiful phenomena their Creator, that he may strive toward his perfection in light of this comprehension. This purpose is subtly alluded to by the attributes that the Qur'ānic verses in question use in describing God. We come across such divine attributes as "the All-Subtle," "the Omniscient," "the All-Aware." By specifying these attributes in the context of the verses that deal with the manifestations of beauty in the world, the Qur'ān compels us to contemplate the beauty of the phenomena to infer the power and wisdom and presence of God, for the human being is wont to indulge in the beauties of the world, forgetting that they are manifestations of God's beauty.

This is the purpose for which the Qur'ān exhorts humankind to reflect on the beautiful phenomena of the world. In so doing, it compels us to

⁶⁸ *We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and guarded them. That is the ordainment of God, the Omnipotent, the Omniscience* (Qur'an 41:12).

⁶⁹ This latter point is an inference I've drawn from verse 13, Surah Şāffāt.

⁷⁰ *Rather they denied the truth when it came to them, so they are now in a perplexed state of affairs. Have they not then observed the sky above them, how We have built it and adorned it and that there are no cracks in it?* (Qur'an 50:5-6).

enhance our sensibility in perceiving the sensible and spiritual beauty He has endowed nature with, so that we may think and reason, thereby transcending outward beauty to arrive at an understanding of God.

The Purpose in Identifying Certain Human Deeds and States of Mind as Beautiful

The Noble Qur'ān describes faith as the beauty of the soul. It identifies forgiveness, pardon, separation, patience, and "divine color" with beauty. In so doing, it stimulates our innate beauty-seeking impulse to ascend to the plane of intellectual beauty in order to comprehend that true beauty consists in moral virtues and human ideals, as they are possessed of inherent beauty and impart beauty to those who embrace them.

From the evil conduct of a person we may infer the evil and ugliness of his soul and from his righteous conduct we may infer the beauty and virtue of his soul. This inference is based on the premise that the deeds we identify as beautiful are, when weighed by the insight of the heart, those that are most consistent with human nature. Expounding on the soul that commands the body in the most beautiful manner in accordance with divine ordinances and precepts, 'Allamah Muḥammad Taqī Ja'fari states,

Perceiving Ali's conduct in the various arenas of life, in his forgiveness and pardon, his insistence that his assassin be treated with fairness and justice, we descry a noble and magnanimous soul that stimulates our loftiest intuition and sensation of beauty, enrapturing our soul, and leads us to view the world as beautiful for its role in serving as the place wherein such a great soul was raised.⁷¹

Thus, the descriptions we find in the words of God in the Qur'ān and in the words of the infallible religious authorities are meant to convey the beautiful essence of the deeds and states of mind to which they pertain. By means of these descriptions, it is demonstrated that the virtues and ideals described are in harmony with the human being's beauty-seeking impulse and that, therefore, it is only through embracing them that the soul can attain its ultimate beauty.

The Purpose of the Islamic Injunction to Dress Well and Care for One's Beauty

Is it conceivable that God should create the human being with a soul that desires beauty but then forbid it from expressing this desire? To do so

⁷¹ Muḥammad Taqī Ja'fari, op. cit., p. 304.

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would be contrary to divine wisdom. As a general rule, for every inclination and tendency God has embedded in the human nature, He has furnished the path for its fruition and actualization, for otherwise the soul would be susceptible to dangerous aberrations. And furthermore, prohibiting humankind from taking advantage of its inherent beauty-seeking impulse would have disinclined the seekers of truth from embracing Islam. Such a prohibition would go against the essence of Islam as the religion whose tenets and precepts were ordained by God in conformity with the human being's natural inclinations and needs.

As explained above, the Qur'an rebukes those who forbid on their own account what God has pronounced permissible. As such, the Qur'an permits and encourages people to enjoy God's bounties, for after all, God created these bounties for the benefit and pleasure of humankind.

Islam attaches great importance to the social aspect of caring for one's personal appeal. Muslims are strongly recommended to keep their hair combed, to use fragrance frequently, to dress well, and to wash and clean their body regularly so that they would be looked upon as exemplars of the perfect human being and that in so doing they would strengthen the bonds of brotherhood by encouraging greater interaction and affinity among themselves.

Dressing well and grooming oneself in preparation for prayer helps in having a more lively spiritual experience. And by beautifying themselves and caring for their attractiveness in the eyes of their husbands, women play an important role in preventing the men from falling into sin and consequently in preserving the integrity and sanctity of the family, thus imparting warmth and love to life. Hence, it should be evident how following the instructions of Islam as regards the need and ways for caring for one's dress and appearance are effectual in securing mental and psychological tranquility, which in turn prepares the way for attainment to the divine beauties of the spirit.

CONCLUSION

Reminding us of the manifestations of beauty in creation, the verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the infallible authorities of religion invite us to exalt the Creator of beauty and to realize that the beauty of the creation of the human being, of the earth, the sky, the stars, etc., are all signs leading us to Him.

AL-TAQRIB

The Qur'ān and the Tradition lay special emphasis on the beauty of certain practices and deeds so as to inspire us to perform them passionately and enthusiastically, thus leading us from the perception of the outward manifestations of beauty to the comprehension of the more real inward essence of beauty and from our concern for the beauty of our appearance to the realization of the priority of the beauty of the soul.

Furthermore, Islamic Tradition instructs Muslims to attend to their appearance. It requires them to groom themselves and dress well when meeting friends. It advises the youth either to shave their head or to wash their hair, oil it, and comb it regularly if they wish to wear it long. We are told to wear our best clothes when we pray. Islam orders women to display their beauty and adornment for their husbands. All these instructions are meant to perfect the beauty of the soul, to promote love, affection, and intimacy, and finally to keep humankind away from sin, which can only tarnish the soul and impair its beauty.

Āyatullāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh: A Lifetime in the Call for Unity

Zaid Al-Mosawi and Muḥammad Habash^{*}

Abstract

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the death of his eminence Āyatullāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh, this article aims to present the making of a scholar with a legendary stance on Muslim unity. Consisting of two parts, the first part provides the geo and socio-political conditions that contributed to the shaping of his eminence's outlook and provides a contextual stance on unity. The second part presents the perspective of his eminence on Muslim unity from various angles, ranging from the Islamic basis for unity patterned on the Qur'ānic and Prophetic model to the strategic and ethical imperative for unity in light of the contemporary situation.

Keywords: Āyatullāh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh, Muslim unity, Muslim leaders, Lebanon, Shia authority.

IN MEMORIAM: ĀYATULLĀH SAYYID MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAYN FAḌLALLĀH (1935-2010)

قال رسول الله (ص) و موت العالم مصيبة لا تجبر و ثلثة لا تسد وهو

نجم طمس، و موت قبيلة أيسر من موت عالم

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "...and the death of a (righteous) scholar is a tribulation, which can not be avoided or remedied, and it is a hemorrhage, which can not be stopped, for he is a star that has been extinguished, and the death of a tribe is easier than the death of a (righteous) scholar."¹

^{*} This article consists of two parts which were authored by Zaid Al-Mosawi and Muhammad Habash respectively.

¹ Kanz al-'ummāl – no. 28858.

قال الامام علي: اذا مات العالم تلم في الاسلام ثلثة لا يسدها شيء
الى يوم القيامة

Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (‘a) said: “When a scholar dies, a crack appears in the body of Islam that can never be mended until the day of Judgement.”

* * * * *

Certainly this was the case for his eminence, Āyatullāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh (r). Rare is it that you find a personality that arms straight and arms folded prayed for him, and church bells rang for him, as rivers of people poured out to mourn him. The passing away of the Sayyid on July 4, 2010 was felt by the Muslim *Ummah* and was noticed by the world. It was mourned by the movements of emancipation and rejoiced by the movements of enslavement. On July 6, 2010, tens of thousands of mourners converged on Haret Hureik, Beirut’s southern district, to pay their last respects, “to a man that at times of bleak *fitnā* (strife) emerged as a guiding light to millions of Muslims, regardless of their sectarian affiliation. At a time when very few Islamic figures were able to nurture a cross sectarian following, Faḍlallāh did.”²

As we approach his death anniversary, the hadiths above resonate ever more, given the events that have transpired in the Middle East since his passing. His vision of Islamic unity has always shed light on currents affecting the global *Ummah*. In this time of unprecedented upheaval in the heart of the Islamic world, the *Ummah* is deprived of a vision, a voice, and a hand that seeks to heal its internal wounds.

PART I: THE SHAPING OF A SCHOLAR IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Before proceeding to examine Sayyid Faḍlallāh’s stance on unity, we must briefly establish the geo and socio-political context in which the Sayyid operated, to better understand the conditions in which he shaped his *da‘wah*. For ease of examination, the overall context will be separated into three periods: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Revolutionary Iraq, and Lebanon from 1966 onwards.

² “Death of a Legend”, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Faḍlallāh*, http://english.bayynat.org.lb/funeral/funeral_13072010.htm, April 13, 2010

For over 1300 years the Middle East was governed by sacred law: its most recent variation embodied within the Ottoman Empire. The declaration of war by the Ottoman state against the Allies on November 1, 1914 would establish a new political order for the region.³ This new order changed more than political institutions, with far reaching ramifications. Most significantly, the shift in the world view of millions of Muslims across the length and breadth of the *Ummah*: from sacredness to profanity.

Seeing this implication, shortly following the declaration of war, the Shia *'ulamā* of Iraq issued a *fatwā* asserting the duty of Muslims to wage *jihād* in support of the Ottoman Empire. The *'ulamā* viewed the Ottomans as occupying a dual capacity: the final bastion of Islamic governance and a bulwark against non-Islamic European imperialism.⁴ The truth of the *'ulamā*'s view was shown in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided up the Arab Middle East into British and French zones of control. The agreement was later ratified in April 1920 by the San Remo Conference which determined the territorial boundaries and political organization of the former Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire.⁵ The three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra became the modern state of Iraq, which later fell under British control.

During this period, there arose nationalist and Islamist groups conducting anti-British activity to ensure the complete independence of Iraq, culminating in the 1920 Revolt. It is important to note that the Shia *'ulamā* of Najaf played an important role in the uprising. Their role grew in prominence with their opposition to the 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that enshrined British control over Iraq; the *'ulamā* passed a *fatwa* forbidding Muslims to take part in the 1922 elections, which was heeded by the populace. Realizing the important effect of the *'ulamā* on Muslim society, the British embarked on a program to target these activist-*'ulamā* and deport them to Iran. Some were eventually allowed to return, if they pledged to stop all religio-political activities.⁶ This led to the decline of *'ulamā*-led influence in political activities and created a virtual monopoly for nationalist parties, and eventually thoroughly secular parties, in the political arena from the 1930's through to the 1950's.

³ Jamal Sankari, *Faḍlallāh: The Making of a Radical Shi'ite Leader* (London: Saqi Books, 2005), p.21.

⁴ Ibid., p.22.

⁵ Ibid., p.24.

⁶ Ibid., p.32.

Within eight years Iraq experienced the death of a king, the dissolution of eight governments, and several coups. It was in this unstable environment that Sayyid Faḍlallāh was born in Najaf, Iraq on November 16, 1935 and it was in this milieu that he experienced his formative years.⁷ Despite being born in Najaf to a religious scholastic family, his experience was not divorced from events taking place in Iraq and the greater Middle East. Events occurring in Najaf were also reflected by those in the country and the *Ummah* at large. One stark example was the sharp decline of enrolment in Najaf's seminary—well known for its long history in religious scholasticism and traditionally the seat of Shia authority for religious juridical emulation. Prior to 1914, students enrolled in Najaf's seminary were estimated at 10,000.⁸ By 1957 there were fewer than 2,000 students enrolled, of which less than a fifth were Iraqi.⁹ The majority of students had chosen the modern public school system that emerged after the creation of the Iraqi state in 1921. Students were provided with a secular education and opportunities to pursue professional career paths. Of notable mention, however, is that this was not a simple decline of the sacred and the rise of secularity. Some of Najaf's *'ulamā* sought to establish modern schools with an Islamic curriculum, the first of which were founded in mid-1930. This synthesizing response to modernity was reflected in other parts of society, including the political arena, a fact that we will examine later.

Although the Iraqi Revolution took place in the summer of 1958, its roots were in the nationalist and communist ideological developments that took place decades earlier. With the perceived irrelevance of Islam in the modern age and the real lack of temporal authority that the religion faced, the 1930's and 40's saw an increasing number of Iraqis looking to secular ideologies to resolve their socio-economic plights, mainly Communism and variations of pan-Arab national Socialism.

These ideologies were reacting to European imperialism and the blatant socio-economic injustices enacted by the local ruling classes which were beholden to their European guarantors. One such example was the Portsmouth Treaty, ratified on January 15, 1948, which strengthened British influence over Iraq's military and foreign affairs.¹⁰ The timing of this treaty is significant: the outbreak of war in Palestine four months later, and its for-

⁷ Ibid., p.35.

⁸ Ibid., p.41.

⁹ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.50.

eign occupation and settlement, proved to be a deep wound in the Muslim psyche, and a central theme in pan-Islamic and pan-Arab nationalist discourse. Under the leadership of General Abdul Karim Qasim, the Iraqi Free Officers, influenced by the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and the Suez War of 1956, overthrew the Iraqi monarchy on July 14, 1958.¹¹

This period of ideological change saw the formation of Islamist-based modern political parties. It is important to take note that this phenomenon was a response to the quickly changing political landscape. In attempting to keep Islam relevant and responsive to the challenges posed by the West and Modernity, Islamists used a modern vehicle to pursue Islamic ideals. This phenomenon, which began in Egypt in 1928 with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, at its best, can be seen as a necessary compromise of Islamic ideals.

During the first few decades of their development, these groups operated in an environment that can be described as fiercely competitive but generally open and free. The overthrow of General Qasim on February 8, 1963¹², in a coup led by Ba'athist and Nasserite military officers, marked a shift in the domestic conditions for Iraq's Shia community, particularly the Islamists amongst them. The shift changed the political atmosphere so that it went from a generally open environment—in terms of joining state institutions and taking part in political activity—to a more restricted and repressive environment. It was in this increasingly hostile environment, that in early 1966, shortly after gaining the rank of *mujtabid*, Sayyid Faḍlallāh left Iraq for Lebanon, after being invited to shepherd a community in his ancestral home.¹³

Like Iraq, Lebanon had until 1966, shared similar experiences: Ottoman dissolution, Sykes-Picot, the rise of Arab nationalism, and a shift away from religious education to modern professional career planning.¹⁴ What was certainly different was the confessional parliamentary system that was used to share power amongst the different religious sects of Lebanon, but which was dominated by Lebanon's Christian Maronite community.

The Sayyid based himself in the Lebanese capital Beirut, which would turn out to be a focal point for political activity for all of the country's diverse factions. What he found amongst Beirut's Shia, the community he

¹¹ Ibid., p.58.

¹² Ibid., p.110.

¹³ Ibid., p.122.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.123.

was to serve, was a population plagued by social problems: it was divided into different neighborhoods, and lacked social, governmental and religious services.¹⁵ Like their co-religionists in Iraq, many of Lebanon's disenfranchised Shia turned to Lebanese leftist parties and radical Palestinian organizations during the 1960's and 70's.¹⁶

Lebanon's close proximity to Israel also provided for a unique environment, especially after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the 1971 expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from Jordan, which left southern Lebanon as the remaining active military front against Israel.¹⁷ The geo-politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict would inevitably lead to the Lebanese Civil War, which saw 15 years of conflict from April 1975 to October 1990.¹⁸

The civil war initially broke out between the Lebanese government, the right-wing Maronite Phalange, and the PLO, the left-wing Lebanese National Movement and their Muslim allies. The internecine conflict had multiple phases and cease-fires; it saw the creation of Amal in 1975, the 1976 Syrian intervention and eventual patronage, Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982 and subsequent occupation, the involvement of the US-led Multinational Force, and of a more far-reaching impact, the creation of Hizballāh in 1982, which found its inspiration and guidance from the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which we will look at next.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran, under the leadership of Imam Khomeynī (r), altered the political landscape of the Middle East overnight. It shattered what was earlier described as the vague notion that Islam was incapable of addressing the challenge posed by the West and Modernity. It provided Islamists with a figure and a possible path of emulation, which was taken up by Lebanon's Shia *'ulamā* and Islamists with the creation of Hizballāh. Not only has Hizballāh become a dominant player in Lebanon's political system and provided an extensive network of social services for hundreds of thousands of Lebanese citizens, its armed wing, the Islamic Resistance, brought about the unconditional Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, the first of its kind, and a ceasefire in the 2006 July War, in which Israel, the world's 4th largest military could not claim victo-

¹⁵ Ibid., p.132.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.129.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.152.

ry.¹⁹ These tangible facts have bolstered Islamist goals at showing Islam's efficacy in temporal affairs.

The late 1980's and early 90's represented a major setback for Islamists. The eight year Iran-Iraq War that ended in 1988, coupled with the death of Imam Khumaynī in 1989, meant that the Islamic Revolution—for all practical purposes—was limited to Iran and South Lebanon. This understanding was reflected by the shift in Hizbullāh's domestic *modus operandi*, most apparent in their involvement in the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections. The dissolution of the USSR and the Gulf War in 1991 saw much of world politics shift towards the interests of the US. The significance of this event that led to a "unipolar" world cannot be overstated: before year's end the world saw the renunciation of armed resistance to Israel by Arab states, including the PLO at the Madrid Conference, and eventually witnessed the de facto surrender of Palestinian leadership at the Oslo Accords of 1993.

Given that the issue of Palestine has been a rallying point for Islamists and a principle of Islamic unity, this would certainly have been seen as a defeat. Despite these difficulties, and with Islamic militancy coming under further scrutiny by the US, Islamists operated with relative ease before the events of September 11, 2001, which brought the full weight of world powers on Islamic militancy and provided the US with the political capital to aggressively continue the modernization and Westernization of the Middle East. This policy of aggression was clearly present in both the 2002 Afghan War and the 2003 Iraq War—the conclusions to which are yet to be seen.

The 20th and early 21st centuries represent a period of extraordinary social and political crisis within the Middle East. One is witness to the general decline of Islam, with pockets and periods of limited revival. With the rate of change forced by modernity increasing exponentially, it appears that the Muslims are in the constant predicament of 'playing catch-up.' It is to this need for revival that Sayyid Faḍlallāh dedicated his life, while maintaining his role as a Shia *'alim*. He tried to conserve the best he had received from his teachers, while attempting to address the challenges of the West, Modernity, and the fragmentation and disintegration of traditionalist Muslim culture. By maintaining his role as a Shia *'alim*—embodied in his *ijtihād*, *fatāwā*, *khiṭāb*, and commentary—and by cultivating a vision of Islam *qua* Islam, he addressed not only his community, but the Muslims as a whole. In doing so, he was careful to not crystallize this vision into a specific theology or ideology that had theoretical overtones. Rather, by maintain-

¹⁹ Ibid., p.268.

ing this perspective and realizing it on the practical realm, he was seen as a source of Islamic cohesion and unity.

PART II: PERSPECTIVES ON MUSLIM UNITY

Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh was an impassioned and authoritative voice for the plight of the oppressed, whose predicament formed a central concern of his, as he was the fulcrum of resistance to regional despotism and international imperialism. It was consequent to this that the theme of unity took root as one of the undercurrents of his intellectual and practical endeavors.

Not a single day would pass in which he did not concern himself with the affairs of the *Ummah*. Nor would a week go by when he did not explicitly or implicitly address, at minimum in his Friday sermons, the subject of unity while at the same time demonstrating an impressive awareness of current affairs. A common refrain of his was, “O Muslims: The Shias are not the Sunnis’ problem and the Sunnis are not the Shias’ problem. It is international arrogance, which tries to incite internal strife among them, that is the problem to both, as well as to Islam and Muslims.”²⁰ He would also constantly urge that, “we should not be immersed in our sectarianism, partisanships and sensitivities while Islam is being attacked.” As relayed by one of his closest associates, Ayatullāh Sayyid ‘Abdullāh al-Ghurā’ifī, who announced and eulogized his death, Sayyid Faḍlallāh’s, “most essential advice for the Muslims before his demise was to preserve Islam and the unity of the Muslim *Ummah*, for he believed that the (forces of international) arrogance would not be defeated unless the Muslims unite and support one another.” This was a spiritual leader, a moral authority, a wise scholar, and a compassionate father whose life’s concern was for the preservation and advancement of the *Ummah*.

²⁰ This part of the article summarizes the perspectives of his eminence on Muslim unity as translated and published on *Bayyinat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh* (www.bayyinat.org). All quotes are from this extensive source - consisting of his Friday *khutbas*, *fatawa*, statements and communiqués, press releases on meetings, interviews, insights, etc. – and can be found using a search of the bayyinat.org internet domain. Due to the transient nature of web architecture, the specific addresses are not included here.

Islam as Basis of Unity

According to Sayyid Faḍlallāh, the most elementary basis for the unity of Muslims, despite all of their differences—sectarian, racial, or political—is their adherence to Islam. Allah has commanded:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۗ وَادْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it, thus does Allah make clear to you His communications that you may follow the right way. (3:103)

Unity in Islam, the Sayyid explains, is pivoted on the axiomatic proclamations of the *shahādātayn*. Bearing witness to the testimonies of ‘No gods but God’ and ‘Muḥammad is the Messenger of God’ is what constitutes being Muslim and as such, anyone who testifies to the *shahādātayn* cannot be accused of disbelief. Hence, all differences, whether theological or political, must be resolved according to the Qur’ānic injunction that stipulates the believer to resign the ‘final word’ to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) through the Qur’ān and Sunnah:

فَإِن تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle, if you have faith in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more favourable in outcome. (4:59)

Thus, *taqwā* (God-consciousness) is a key ingredient to unity that regulates a Muslim's conduct in their personal, domestic and social arenas. It is also through *taqwā* that one is endeared towards fellow Muslims who are united in their belief in Allah, His Messenger (ﷺ), His Books, His angels and the Last Day²¹. Once again, any differences between brethren in interpretation should be referred back to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) through the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Therefore, the Sayyid warns, "Those who undermine Islamic unity betray Allah and betray Islam" and "whosoever knits seditions amongst Muslims, aiming to rip apart the unity of Muslims and their (common) word, is a traitor to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), even if he fasts and prays."

However, Sayyid Faḍlallāh also espouses the position that unity does not require uniformity or the sacrificing of one's beliefs; that is, for a Shia to become a Sunni or vice-versa. Rather, unity is, "to meet on the basis of the Glorious Book and the Prophetic traditions; that is, on the basis of Islam." Moreover, the Sayyid adds, if Allah has instructed Muslims to call towards 'a common word'²² of agreement with the People of the Book and to argue with them in the best of manners, than obviously Muslims should at the very least do the same with fellow Muslims.

The Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa): Champions of Unity

Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh also placed great emphasis on the position of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) in respect to Muslim unity. This is because they constitute, alongside the Qur'an, the second of the two weighty things that Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) had instructed Muslims to follow. Following the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa), the Sayyid often insists, requires adopting all of their stances and positions in life.

Imam ʿAlī (ʿa), himself a unifying personality in Islam who is considered as the pre-eminent spiritual figure after the Prophet (ﷺ), was a staunch advocate of unity even at his own personal expense. Sayyid Faḍlallāh suggests that, "if the basis of the Shia-Sunni differences is the Imamate, then let us look at how Imam ʿAlī (ʿa), the champion of Muslim unity, dealt with this issue." He whom the Prophet (ﷺ) declared during his farewell pilgrimage as having more authority on the believers than they have on themselves, upon being denied the position of succession and leadership, was patient and refrained from fighting to claim his right. Rather, he said: "*I will re-*

²¹ Qur'an, 4:136.

²² Qur'an, 3:64.

main peaceful as long as the Muslims' affairs are secured and the only injustice committed is against me." His sole concern was that of safeguarding the interest of Islam and maintaining the state of peace amongst Muslims, preventing the internal strife that the enemies and conspirators against Islam were eagerly hoping for. Imam 'Alī ('a) is also quoted by the Sayyid as saying, "I was shocked when I heard the people pledging allegiance to so and so... But when I heard that there were people who wished to destroy Islam, I was afraid that if I did not support Islam, even if denied my rights, there would be a catastrophe that is far greater than assuming the post of ruling, which is something very trivial that will last for a few days and then disappear like clouds. I had to act until the falsehood was defeated..."

Thus, for the sake of Islamic unity he assisted, advised, and protected those with whom he differed because, asserts Sayyid Faḍlallāh, "the issue was not personal, but that of the Message." His concern was not that of post or prestige. "He believed that the unity of Muslims is the weapon that safeguards their strength and dignity".

"This is the line of Ali ('a). How far are we from this line, when we incite sectarian differences at a time when we are faced by grave threats." Here Sayyid Faḍlallāh presents the lesson that Imam 'Alī ('a) gives to all Muslims—Shia and Sunni alike: "When there are outside threats, the leadership and the whole *Ummah* should freeze their differences and unite in preserving Islam and the Muslims. Therefore, all those who incite sectarian strife are in reality acting against Ali, because his principles, teachings and practice have always called for preventing the arrogant and disbelievers from exploiting our sectarian, religious and national differences in order to destroy Islam."

Moreover, when revolts of opposition were taking place during his own *khilāfah*, his policy was to refrain from using force. With respect to the *khawārij*, "He did not kill them or even cut their allocations, but he sought to talk to them. He only fought them when they began to threaten the well-being of the *Ummah*." Even Talha and Zubayr, the Prophet's (ﷺ) companions who fought the Imam ('a), were approached by him in dialogue, and when they were killed, he attended their funeral and asked Allah to have mercy on them.

Therefore, cautions the Sayyid, "all Muslims who try to undermine this unity in the name of Ali ('a), we say that you are taking a position against Ali ('a) who was the champion of the cause of Islamic unity. If you support Ali ('a), you ought to uphold this unity." Furthermore, "If we want to be among his followers, we have to safeguard this unity and protect Islam, es-

pecially in these critical times where the forces of arrogance and disbelief are waging an all-out attack.” In summary, “Ali (‘a) was always on the alert to confront anything that threatens Islam and Muslims. Embracing the line of Ali (‘a) means that we should be concerned with all challenges that face the Muslims in the light of the prophetic tradition that says: *‘Who is not concerned with the affairs of Muslim is not a Muslim’.*”

Another Imam of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) whose struggle is often painted with sectarian hues is that of Imam Ḥusayn (‘a). Even western orientalist and journalists have erroneously portrayed the conflict in Karbala as a clash that originated the division between the Shias and Sunnis. Although he makes note of this, Sayyid Faḍlallāh does not devote much energy to refuting these false assertions. Instead, his concern turns towards the causes of these misperceptions lurking within the *Ummah* itself. In particular, the Sayyid observes, the Ḥusaynī movement has largely been confined to a particular group as opposed to presenting it as, “a model of an Islamic movement that seeks to consolidate the Islamic reality.” Imam Ḥusayn (‘a), emphasizes the Sayyid, “was the Imam of all Muslims and not for a specific party. He will remain the cresset of all the freemen in the world. Thus, whoever tries to present the Ḥusaynī movement in a sectarian context or attribute it to a specific party will be wronging this movement and neglecting the Islamic and sublime missionary principles that Imam Ḥusayn (‘a) started his movement with.” Therefore, as opposed to an occasion that highlights differences, ‘Āshūrā should be transformed into a platform of Islamic unity and Imam Ḥusayn (‘a) should be raised as its symbol, “since the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) sought most to unify Muslims and rejected all contrivances that may divide them.”

Yet another member of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) whose name is associated with the school of thought of the majority of Shias is Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (‘a). Like his forefathers, he was a champion of unity and would receive all people without sectarian discrimination. To the extent that the Imam (‘a) had received and taught about four thousand students who quoted his narrations, including those considered as eminent Muslim jurists and forbearers of the schools of thought associated with their names, namely Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu‘mān and Mālik ibn Anas. Sayyid Faḍlallāh observes that Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), “used to open up to all people, for he wanted Islam to enter the hearts of all people. He (even) used to receive those with opinions that differed with his own, instructing his companions to conduct dialogue with them in his presence.” Abū Ḥanīfah, who was his student for two years, has famously stated, “*Were it not for these two years, I would have been*

doomed". In another incident, Abū Ḥanīfah was reported to have prepared, upon the demand of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, a large number of difficult questions for Imam Ja'far (‘a). Faced by these questions, the Imam (‘a) would share the prevailing opinions in the various centres of Islamic thought such as Madina and Kufa, followed by his own response. In reaction to this, Abū Ḥanīfah exclaims, “*Is not the most learned the one who knows best all the different opinions of people?*”

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), notes the Sayyid, “made every possible effort to strengthen Islamic unity in the community,” and urged Muslims to live as integrated members of the same community where everyone would care for the other. Concerning their Sunni brethren, he instructed his followers to, “Pray with them, visit their sick, and attend their funerals, so that people may say, ‘*May Allah have mercy on Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, he has taught his followers good conduct.*’” And so, the followers of the Imam (‘a) should be as he wished them to be: “*Be an honour to us and not a disgrace for us.*”

Noteworthy it is that Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh shied away from labelling the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as Ja'farī, as he argues, “Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) did not found his own school of thought in jurisprudence similar to that of the other Islamic sects, for there is no Ja'farī sect in the way there is a Ḥanafī, Maliki, Shāfi'ī, or Ḥanbalī school of thought.” He continues, “Rather, the speech of Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is the speech of the Messenger of Allah (ṣ), as evident in his statement: ‘*My traditions are my father's traditions; my father's traditions are my grandfather's traditions; my grandfather's traditions are the traditions of al-Ḥusayn; al-Ḥusayn's traditions are the traditions of al-Ḥasan; al-Ḥasan's traditions are the traditions of the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ‘Alī]; the traditions of the Commander of the Faithful are the traditions of the Messenger of Allah (ṣ); and the traditions of the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) are the exact words of Allah, the Almighty and the Most High.*’”

Additionally, Sayyid Faḍlallāh stresses that the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), “wanted us to be committed to the Qur'ān and to adopt the traditions that do not violate it by being exaggerations.” For, the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) themselves have stated, “*Consider what agrees with Allah's Book and accept it and whatever contradicts Allah's book reject it.*”

Therefore, there is no discrepancy between the position of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and that of the Qur'ān or the Messenger of Allah (ṣ), for they are the walking and speaking Qur'ān and heirs of the prophetic substance. The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) had declared in his final pilgrimage, “*I am leaving for you two precious and weighty symbols (al-Thaqalayn) that if you adhere to both of them you shall not go astray after me. They are the Book of Allah and my progeny,*

that is my Ahl al-Bayt. The Merciful has informed me that these two shall not separate from each other till they come to me by the Pool of al-Kawthar."

Sayyid Faḍlallāh reserves strong criticism for those who claim to love the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), yet do not follow in their footsteps, especially given that the cause of Islam and Muslim unity was a principle concern of theirs, which they ardently championed and patiently bore all tribulations to preserve. He finds it ironic that some people expend great effort and resources to travel and visit the shrines of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) while disobeying their explicit instructions to their followers, such as that of Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) who has said, “*Tell them to be close to one another and exchange visits*” and “*Tell them not to be preoccupied with fragmenting one another*”. The Sayyid suggests to such individuals, “save your money and pay your tribute to Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) from where you live. It is far more important to act according to his teaching.”

Spiritual Meetings: Rites that Advance Unity

Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Faḍlallāh held the belief that Muslims have far more in common than that in which they differ. He urged all Muslims to focus on their spiritual bond in light of their attraction to Allah. Amongst the spiritual rites that Muslims perform, the Sayyid places great emphasis on those that bring Muslims together for the sake of Allah, such as the congregational prayer, particularly *Jumu’ah*, and the *Ḥajj*. He berates the contemporary situation that is characterized by sectarian attitudes running so deeply such that these spiritual rites are performed in segregation, as in separate ‘Sunni’ or ‘Shia’ *masājid*. It is no wonder then that Muslims are so susceptible to fratricide amongst each other.

Using these spiritual rites to argue for the sacredness of the Muslim, Sayyid Faḍlallāh uses the example of *Ḥajj*, quoting the sermon of Minā that prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) delivered in his farewell pilgrimage where he asked the believers, “*What country is this?*” They said: “*The sacred country.*” Then, he asked: “*What day is this?*” They said: “*The sacred day.*” Again he asked them: “*What month is this?*” They said: “*The sacred month.*” He then said: “*O people, your blood, property and honour are sacred to you till you meet your Lord, as sacred as this very city, this very day and this very month*”.

The Sayyid comments on this narration, saying that the Messenger of Allah (ṣ), “called for instituting a Muslim nation in which every Muslim respects the property, blood, honour and security of the others; a nation that will stand as a strong force against all those who plot against Islam. This is what Allah wants the nation to adhere to in every time and place.”

He then quotes the Prophetic traditions, “*the Muslim is the one whom people are safe from his hand and tongue*”, and, “*the believer is the one with whom people entrust their property and honour.*”

Unequivocal Condemnation of Takfir

In light of the above-cited prophetic tradition, one can understand why Sayyid Faḍlallāh had unequivocally condemned the practice of *takfir*—the labelling by certain groups of other Muslims as unbelievers and legitimizing the spilling of their blood. He counters these *fatāwā* with his own: “The blood of the innocent Sunni and that of the innocent Shia is *ḥarām* (prohibited) and whoever deems it lawful to kill them deserves God’s punishment. Moreover, those who encourage killing the innocent or remain silent are partners in these crimes.”

The Sayyid frequently laments the degenerative condition of the *Ummah*, wherein the practice of *takfir* has increasingly become more commonplace; to the extent that it has become all too easy to label another who professes to be a Muslim as an unbeliever, “without even determining what the concept of disbelief in Islam is.” He points towards the arbitrariness of the definition of *kufir* that has resulted in the concept losing its meaning with, “each group (having) its own concept of disbelief and deviation.”

According to Sayyid Faḍlallāh, the phenomenon of *takfir* is a natural side effect of the division of the *Ummah* into sects and parties, where the ‘other’ is considered an enemy. He refers to the Prophetic and Qur’anic tradition, stating that: “If a Muslim says to his brother you are my enemy, then one of them is accusing the other of disbelief. Allah says in the Glorious Qur’ān that all Muslims are brothers, and when a Muslim says to another Muslim something different than what Allah says, he himself will be in the position of disbelief.”

Moreover, argues Sayyid Faḍlallāh, the practice of *takfir* is a tool in the arsenal of the enemies of Islam who employ the strategy of divide and conquer, manipulating the Sunnis and the Shias to label one another as non-Muslims (this even takes place within a particular group). It reaches to such an extent that a non-Muslim is viewed more favourably than a Muslim of another school. “It is really shameful,” remonstrates the Sayyid, that at a time when there is a visceral campaign against Islam, “a fanatic *takfirī* group from within the *Ummah* continues its war on Muslims inside their mosques, armed with an alienating sectarian mindset and a murderous mentality that violates the sacredness of mosques, and eventually ending up

in killing groups of believers and worshippers in a brutal and criminal manner that has nothing to do with Islam and its principles.”

He condemns all those who cause *fitnah* (strife) within the Muslim *Ummah* as callous and irresponsible, often denouncing the communiqués originating from various Muslim countries whether issued by so-called Sunnis or so-called Shias. In the same breath he calls upon the *‘ulamā* to, “exert every effort to circumvent this complicated phenomenon, by issuing more courageous religious stands that are able to thwart the enemy and whosoever considers destroying the *Ummah* and demolishing its unity through his cruel terrorist methods.”

A Rejection of the Practice of Cursing

In a similar vein, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh calls for consolidating Muslim unity by discouraging Sunnis and Shias from cursing and insulting one another, an act that can only further aggravate issues and sow the seeds of hatred and enmity instead of solving differences. Differences, as was the Sayyid’s constant refrain, need to be referred to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ).

If cursing one another enflames sensitivities, sows the seeds of discord, and widens the chasm between Muslims, what then can be said of cursing the wives or companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) who are venerated by a great many Muslims? Realizing this to be a key impediment to unity and a festering sore affecting Muslim relations, Sayyid Faḍlallāh issued a *fatwah* forbidding this practice: “We forbid cursing, slandering, and abusing the mothers of believers and deem such acts as contradicting the genuine Islamic line, considering that such acts contradict the course taken by the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) that necessitates giving priority to the supreme Islamic interest over any personal or secondary interests.” The Sayyid also adds, “As for the issue of cursing, I have always deemed it forbidden for any Muslim, and I state in all the relevant religious inquiries I receive that it is forbidden to curse and slander any companion including the Caliphs.”

He often repeats this position in his Friday *khutbahs*, frequently citing the following traditions:

- On the way to battle Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abū Sufyān at Ṣiffīn, Imam ‘Alī (‘a) heard some of his followers in Iraq cursing the people of Damascus to which he responded, “*I dislike you starting to abuse them, but if you were to describe their deeds and recount their situation that would be a better mode of speaking and a more convincing way of arguing. Instead*

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of abusing them you should say, 'O Allah! Save our blood and their blood, bring forth reconciliation between us and them, and lead them out of their misguidance so that he who is ignorant of the truth may know it, and he who inclines towards rebellion and revolt may turn away from it.'

- Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (‘a) instructed his companions to open up to other Muslims and instructed them against hurting others and cursing that which they hold sacred by saying, “It is easy to gain people’s hearts: just do not talk bad about them.”

Sayyid Faḍlallāh would also frequently cite the following verses of the Qur’ān:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۗ وَجِدِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner. (16:125)

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۗ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah out of ignorance. Thus have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did. (6:108)

فِيمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۗ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَأَنفَضُوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

AL-TAQRIB

It is part of the Mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them. Were thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee. (3:159)

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ
إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا

Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best: for Satan doth sow dissensions among them: For Satan is to man an avowed enemy. (17: 53)

وَلَا تَسْتَوِ الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا
الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate. (41:34)

Commenting on these verses, the Sayyid indicates that it is possible to make people friends without compromising on principles. “Our problem [is] that we are decreasing our friends instead of increasing them. Imam ‘Alī (‘a) said: *‘The unfortunate is the one who cannot make friends, and even more unfortunate is the one who cannot keep his friends.’*” In order to win hearts and enter minds, one needs to speak with others in a kind and respectful manner. “This is the legacy of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and this is their moral system. They wanted to attract people through wisdom and using the best means of dialogue. One of our Imams said: *‘Keep our memory alive, May Allah have mercy on those who do so’*. Asked how this is to be done, he said: *‘Relate to them our sayings. They will learn about our supreme morals, and thus they will love us.’*”

Opening Windows into Intellectual and Social Ghettos

Given these entrenched issues, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh finds it self-evident that, “the complicated history which Muslims have lived, of bloody problems and backward methods, cannot be cancelled by some rhetorical speech or swift action. Indeed, the residues left deep in the

souls, such as feelings, thoughts and complexes, create a psychological barrier vis-à-vis the 'other,' and change the person's way of thinking, making him abandon the model of interpretive judgments in understanding religious laws and beliefs (in a manner) that leaves space for a different interpretation, and considers different perspectives in comprehending the same issue. Adopted (instead) is the model which insists on accusing the other party of having no relation with Islam. Accordingly, the sect turns into a distinct religion that is independent from any other religion."

Sayyid Faḍlallāh attributes these sectarian attitudes to group thinking and inherited outlooks that stem from an upbringing in narrow communities in which a sectarian mentality is cultivated from a young age, and the individual brought up in this environment, in turn, reiterates this drum beat of sectarianism. Such an environment inhibits one's ability to acknowledge that, "there is in the Islamic environment other parties that do not think the way we do, or do not adopt the same principles that we adopt. Consequently, the conclusions of these parties might be different from ours. For that reason, we should admit and respect these differences and be understanding towards them. We should discuss them while observing mutual respect towards one another, since the followers of every sect see that they represent a point of view in understanding Islam just like others."

The Sayyid's constant refrain was for people to exercise their intellects in the pursuit of conviction instead of blindly following peers or predecessors. He says, "people might submit to a certain intellectual school of thought due to forces which control their reality, imposing it on life without any role for life to produce it as an outcome of development." Elsewhere, he laments, "We, I am sorry to say, inherit our emotions. We love those whom our fathers loved and hate whom they hated without knowing the reasons behind this love or hate. You do not choose whom you love or hate...you are told to do so by the family, the party, the sect. You love by decree while love is a matter of the heart. Who could tell my heart whom to love?"

Of the impediments to Islamic unity, "the most dangerous is when the Shias and the Sunnis live in closed communities. As a result, we have started to feel estranged whenever one of us tries to open a window through which to view opinions different from those ideological and political ones current within our own sphere." Hence, the Sayyid believes that there is a need to go beyond just intellectual discourse with others, and that it is necessary to engage socially and at an interpersonal level in order to open these windows in an atmosphere where, "every party has closed the doors on itself and claimed that it is the one that represents the truth."

His assessment of the contemporary situation of the *Ummah* is that it is lagging behind in understanding Islam as a way of life and as a solution to life's challenges. Instead, attempts are made to isolate Islam to the prisons of each group, who guard it under lock and key. Often this behaviour is the output of a false sense of conviction and a misguided fear that seeks to preserve the authenticity of Islam. In reality, this is not conviction but the "fanaticism of the sectarian ego," which can only result in suffocation and has no "spirit, taste or smell of Islam." Sayyid Faḍlallāh, in attempting to tone down the apprehensiveness of each group, suggests, "Do not fear for Islam when it enters the field of struggle because, armed with the elements of its inherent strengths, it is capable of protecting itself in its movement of thought or from its followers when they misunderstand it and defy its authenticity." He also states that, "no party can claim that it is the only party that has the right to monopolize the Islamic representation and the call for Islam or even to monopolize the right of defending Islam."

Fear, according to the Sayyid, is what pushes people towards their confessional positions with great over-zealousness, "exactly like a baby rushing to the lap of his mother seeking refuge from the frightening and ambiguous reality surrounding his existence. This actually strengthens the spirit of division even more." Further adding fuel to the fire are those who accuse others of working towards achieving Islamic unity, "of deviating from the path of religion because they are pursuing unity, as if unity was a crime that meant deviation."

Unfortunately, the condition of the *Ummah* is such, that Muslims have become increasingly narrower in their partisanship and that there now exists an "addiction to the culture of partition," where people continue to create further sub-divisions. We have now arrived at a state where, "the problem is no more in how to unite Muslims, but how to unite the Sunnis within themselves and the Shias within themselves." What is needed is for Muslims to, "follow the pattern of the Prophet who worked for the benefit of all people without exception, abandoning narrow affiliations and appealing to a broader notion of human values."

Unity as a Strategic Imperative

In addition to the spiritual and moral reasons for unity, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh also argues for the strategic imperative for unity, for, "we have reached the time that the Messenger (ﷺ) has described when he spoke about the time all nations will fight you." "We are living in a world that wants to divide and control us. It wants to exploit our differ-

ences so that it can dominate us”, he adds. These are times when, “Muslims are no longer in control of their own affairs, rather the arrogant and those who cover the truth are the ones who tell them what to do.”

In these times then, urges Sayyid Faḍlallāh, it is necessary to resist all strife between Muslims and to unify, “*in ranks, as if they were a compact structure*.”²³ It is only then that the Muslims can fortify their position, defend their honour and dignity, safeguard their lands, attain independence and freedom from hegemony, and confront all forms of oppression. For Allah, “wants us to be strong politically, economically, socially and militarily.”

It is unity that allows Muslims to attain a position of strength and power as opposed to weakness and subjugation: “Muslims in the world are over one billion in number, and they possess vast resources that will enable them to be a super power in this world, but they have to enhance their unity, and learn how to not let their unity be affected by their differences.”

Muslims should also be aware that their divisions only serve the interests of their enemy who exploit existing differences or create new ones in order to drive Muslims to fight and weaken one another. “We know that the current differences between Muslims, whether sectarian (Shia-Sunni) or ethnic (e.g. Arabs, Persians and Kurds), have enabled the arrogant countries—with America leading them—to dominate over the Muslim presence in the entire world.” In light of this, “the Muslim world should attempt to solve its own problems, especially that the arrogant powers make use of these problems to create divisions and conflicts that serve their own interests”.

The Sayyid wonders aloud, “You Muslims of all sects, do you want Islam or yourselves? The world has declared war on Islam and we have to be ready for the battle by forging Islamic unity as the implication of Islam for ourselves. Be the *Muslim* Sunnis and the *Muslim* Shias, for if you ignore your belonging to Islam, then you will be putting the sect ahead of Islam.”

“We have enough enemies as it is,” the Sayyid laments, “yet we are more dangerous to one another than our enemies. We have turned into sects and parties that live on hatred and fanaticism, even to religious authorities. We produce every single day a new sect that feeds on hatred and fanaticism.” The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) warns, “*In mutual hatred, there is a shaver. Not a shaver of hair, but the shaver of religion.*”

Therefore, Sayyid Faḍlallāh argues that Muslims must freeze their conflicts as, “such conflicts would not fulfil the interests of neither the Sunnis nor the Shias; but they would destroy the Islamic spirit and unity.” He

²³ Qur’ān, 61:4.

adds, “We should unify our positions and stances, because the enemies of Allah, His Messenger and the believers have unified to destroy Islam and the Muslims.”

“We call on the Islamic parties and movements to elevate their performance, rhetoric, and movement to the level of the higher Islamic interest, and the bright Islamic future. In this sense, Islam would play an effective role, not only at the level of the Muslim and Arab region, but also at the level of the entire world. Stepping out of the trap of the local details and of being sunk in the internal margins would become a means of raising the *Ummah's* major issues towards wide horizons and a promising future.”

The Responsibility of Muslim Scholars and Leaders

Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh places the bulk of the responsibility for uniting the *Ummah* and ending the vicious cycles of sectarianism on the Muslim scholars and the socio-political leadership. He expresses disappointment at the lack of mechanisms established to halt sectarian violence and that the expression of unity has been reduced to, “an illusion that we use to only give the impression that the Islamic world is united, and that sects are a source of diversity within the broad Islamic circle.”

“Conferences increase and slogans multiply, and yet we remain right where we are.” He finds the lack of action to be indefensible and shameful in light of all the blood that is spilled by hegemonic and occupying powers, as well as misguided Muslims who have no fear of God. “It is pitiful that this blood does not drive the Muslim Shia and Sunni clerics to act quickly.”

Sayyid Faḍlallāh has sounded the alarm on numerous occasions and has urgently appealed to Sunni and Shia *‘ulamā* from Al-Azhar, Hijaz, Najaf, Qum, and other centres of Islamic learning, to direct their attention to a list of issues that requires of them to live up to their responsibilities:

1. “The sectarian crisis has begun to infringe on the greater taboos and we have started to lose the ethics of criticism and are offending others by insulting the Prophet’s (ﷺ) companions and his Household (‘a)”. Those who engage in this practice, “are not sincere to the *Ummah* or to Islam and seek only to promote their own interests rather than looking for the higher interest.” Therefore, Sunni and Shia religious scholars must, “start to confront this reality, not only on the level of prohibition by words, but also on the level of actions that place it under siege on the ground.”

2. When sectarian wars ensue, “every party starts to call for the protection of (its own particular) Muslim group and starts to talk about the atrocities that the other group commits.” This then is followed by, “a conference that is attended by well-known Muslim scholars (who issue) *fatāwā* that pour oil on the fire.” As a result, the words and actions that are dreaded are, “not only from the oppressor, but also from the *Ummah*’s children and those who are supposed to be the conscious vanguard in preserving and protecting the *Ummah*’s unity.” These scholars need to be told: “Fear Allah . You are about to lose the *Ummah* and plunge it into instinctive sectarian mazes that wipe out everything everywhere.” These sectarian incitements must be placed under siege in their birthplaces.
3. The Muslim religious scholars should be aware of the imperial project which, “seeks to divide the *Ummah* into two axes. One of which is ‘moderate’ and the other is ‘extremist’.” This is yet another form of division that does not serve the interests of any Islamic cause and is in fact a ploy to advance the interests of the hegemonic movements.
4. The insistence of the western axis on revitalizing its imperialist project in the Muslim world, seeking to ignite the fire of sectarianism amongst Muslims as a means to that end.
5. “The strategic issues of Muslims in most of their countries have become subjected to the projects that are manufactured by others to serve the latter’s own interests, armed by a devious scheme that claims to be interested in solving the problems of Muslims of this or that country. These projects are serving their own interests and not ours. For this reason, the leaders, especially the conscientious and faithful religious scholars, must move to solve the problems of Muslims.”
6. “Allah wants Muslims to be strong, competent, and capable of having an effective role in determining world decisions. They should also be open to progress in the economic arena to increase their wealth; in the political arena to establish the basis of freedom and independence, and in the social arena to preserve the Islamic unity that is based on coming together on what we have agreed on and resorting to rational, objective, dialogue concerning the issues that we have disagreed on.”
7. Religious scholars need to take a decisive stance, “in confronting the *takfīrī* groups on the level of public education.” This needs to be done through the issuing of *fatāwā* so as to not allow those, “with a

superficial understanding of religious issues,” to define the “rules of engagement” in the Muslim world. This is especially as they seek to, “benefit from the mistakes that the other parties might fall in, or from the claims of fighting occupation.” In this respect, what is most dangerous, “is that the leadership of this or that sect have become afraid of the people and do not dare to clash with them in their religious or sectarian discourse.”

8. Political and social loyalties whereby, “the loyalty to a person, party and group are based on emotions and instincts, that are in turn based on historical or political fanaticism.” This results in leaders calling upon the elimination of others instead of their acknowledgement, and here there is a failure to consider diversity as a source of enrichment to each individual in the community. Moreover, it offsets, “the role of reason by making the public respond emotionally to any sectarian slogan or goal.” This provides fertile ground for political parties to turn issues into sectarian ones so as to shore up their support. “This is especially true when the rulers lose their popular base and their objective legitimacy. Thus, they will resort to sectarian, racial or regional incitement aiming to win an advantage through the use of the sacredness of the partisan affiliation.” One of the primary factors contributing to this malaise is, “the subordination of Muslim scholars to a certain political side or a particular regional country.” Instead, the religious scholars must have their “own thoughts and stances without being subordinates to anyone.”

Sayyid Faḍlallāh calls for, “a unity in which people are bounded by spiritual and humanitarian brotherhood. Since the people believe in Allah, they should meet on Him and be unified in Him. And since they believe in the Messenger (ﷺ) they should abide by him and follow his traditions.” He also calls upon all the religious authorities, “to interfere directly in preserving this unity and to follow the movement of their representatives in the region making sure that they do not offend the Islamic unity.” Failure to maintain the integrity of the Islamic movement, especially as it faces a critical stage, would result in the *Ummah* “falling into a quagmire, be at the margins and witness sectarian partisan wars,” that weaken and threaten Islam.

As a final note regarding the role of Muslim scholars and leaders in establishing unity, the Sayyid realizes that, “verbal condemnations or conference communiqués are not enough.” When the conferences are over, “we

ought to go to the ground, to our bases, and talk to them about Islamic unity and (encourage them to see) that the disagreements among Muslims could represent the diversity that enriches Islam.” Elaborating on the need to take the conferences to the grassroots, the Sayyid proposes that, “The Conference is not only ‘here’ but the conference is in all our mosques, sites, and forums.” However, Sayyid Faḍlallāh acknowledges that addressing the needful at the grassroots level may not always be welcomed. Many who have been nurtured on hate would end up pelting these revivers and reformers with stones, as the Sayyid experienced first-hand. It is as if he was consoling himself when he defiantly says, “Let us consider these stones to be medals because what is actually stoning you is backwardness and not awareness, knowing that backwardness was what stoned the prophets throughout history.”

The Responsibility of Every Muslim

Despite his numerous meetings and exchanges with spiritual, intellectual, and socio-political leaders, Sayyid Faḍlallāh made it a point to not confine the discourse on Muslim unity and programs of action to the stratosphere of the elite only. Rather, he wanted this concern for Muslim unity to be pervasive throughout the *Ummah*.

As indicated earlier, the Sayyid believed that we are living in times of crisis where the whole world is preying upon Islam and the Muslims. Under these circumstances, the vanguards are outnumbered and all hands are required to be on deck. Here, Sayyid Faḍlallāh uniquely applies the concept of *wājib kifā’ī*—the duty that is an obligation on every Muslim so as long as it remains unfulfilled. Normally this is applied to washing and burying a deceased Muslim, or at times to acquiring a field of knowledge or expertise that is required by the *Ummah*. However, argues the Sayyid, the duty of protecting and defending Islam and the unity of the *Ummah* is also an obligation on every Muslim so long as this duty remains unfulfilled.

Moreover, according to the prophetic tradition, “one who gets up in the morning and is not concerned about the affairs of other Muslims, is not a Muslim.” And in another tradition, “Muslims should treat one another as a human body which if any organ is in pain, the other organs will look after it.” Hence, comments the Sayyid, “No Muslim in any place on earth should be indifferent towards the sufferings and challenges of Muslims in a faraway country.” Applying these traditions to the subject of Muslim unity, Sayyid Faḍlallāh mentions that, “Islam is to feel that you are a part of the Muslim body, represented by the Muslim *Ummah*.” Thus, the Qur’ān says:

وَإِنْ طَآئِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا ۚ فَإِنْ بَغَتْ
 إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ

And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah's command.

(49:9)

Consequently, Sayyid Faḍlallāh encourages, “Every believer ought to support this state of unity and take part in its process as much as he could; thus, exerting every effort for what brings about cordiality and avoiding saying or doing what could lead to partition. Despite the huge negligence of the governments that could actually play a big role in establishing unity, each of the believers in his house and neighbourhood, can participate in what brings about benefit and good to the society.”

Additionally, Sayyid Faḍlallāh sought to draw attention to the role that the media can play in shaping public opinion and reminding Muslims of their responsibilities. By and large, the media has been used as a negative instrument to spread rumours, fan the flames of sectarian conflict by highlighting inflammatory speech, and “fertilizes the ground for sedition that could burn everything and eventually make the Arabs and Muslims drink their own poison.” However, the Sayyid also recognizes that the media is an important instrument that can also be wielded positively to broadcast unity, and hence implores it in these words: “All types of media must make efforts to reflect the real Islamic unity and avoid producing programs that might encourage extremism and division among Islamic groups.”

Towards Substantive Dialogue

One of the most recurring themes in the thoughts of Sayyid Faḍlallāh is the importance of dialogue for bridging differences. In order to establish unity at a religious, political or social level, people need to meet on points of commonality. Such an endeavour, says the Sayyid, “would start by getting to know one another in order to reach mutual understanding and then cementing agreement on the points they concur upon.”

The objective, then, of dialogue is not for, “scoring points on one another, but rather for all the points to be collected for the interest of the crucial causes.” For instance, when there are internal gaps that are ripe for

exploiting with the aim of destroying the *Ummah*, engaging in dialogue would be to, “study the points of weakness and those of strength in an effort to benefit from the points of strength and turn the points of weakness into points of strength.”

The problems in Muslim world, the Sayyid assesses, “are because we do not understand one another and that each of us wants to have everything for himself. This viewpoint is far away from reality and human wisdom.”

The etiquette of dialogue needs to be one of resorting to, “the best words and the best means, for kind and good words would turn an enemy into a friend or at least create an atmosphere of mutual understanding.” Also key to dialogue is to be able to, “listen to the viewpoint of the other,” as often, what is considered dialogue is in reality two sets of monologues with each party speaking to the other with fingers in their ears.

Unfortunately, the common outcome of Muslim dialogue is the exchanging of pleasantries when together, then returning to their bases saying, “we were only complimenting them, we are one hundred per cent correct and not them, our side is right, whereas the other side is wrong.” To this the Sayyid asks, “are we serious in calling for Islamic unity or are we just like those mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān”:

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا
 إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ

When they meet those who believe, they say: ‘We believe;’ but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: ‘We are really with you: We (were) only jesting.’” (2:14)

As engaging in dialogue is of paramount importance to Sayyid Faḍlallāh, he sets about listing several key conditions that would contribute to its success:

1. *Good* intentions and a level platform that is based on the Qur’ānic method of approaching dialogue: “And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error.” (34:24)
2. The prioritization of internal dialogue between **all** the parties within the *Ummah*, Sunni and Shia, and without any exclusion, is in the paramount interest of the *Ummah*. This must also include, “those

whose relationships are very complicated even to the extent of accusing one another with *kufir*.”

Accordingly, the dialogue between Shia groups and Salafi currents, such as the Wahhabiyya, “would be amongst the most vital and beneficial to Muslims.” Any issues that are of particular sensitivity and controversy need to be resolved through the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).

فَإِنْ تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ

then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger. (4:59)

Moreover, internal dialogue should be given priority over external dialogue, “since the international camps do not ask for dialogue unless it is in their interests.”

3. “No taboo issues should be ruled out of the dialogue.” It is important that constructive dialogue include not only a discussion on points of agreement, but that there also needs to be an openness to discuss any issue whatsoever, including those that are sensitive and controversial, “because no one possesses the absolute truth.” Rather, the method of discussion should be on the basis of: “Bring your proof if you are truthful.” (2:111)

After all, the Qur’ān dealt with the, “accusations that were raised against the Prophet (ﷺ), whether concerning his personality or his Message. The Qur’ān has also responded objectively to the wrong notions about Allah, the Most Exalted, although this (issue) was considered sacred to all Muslims. So, what then do we have to say about the issues that are of a less importance?!”

In fact, “perhaps we ought to exclude the term ‘sacred’ from the process of dialogue, because this concept is ambiguous in its meaning (and application), while the objectivity that the Holy Qur’ān has emphasized, and all the messengers have called for, is the logic of evidence and proof.”

4. “Dialogue should not be conducted on the basis of what the earlier scholars from this sect or that had written,” but rather it needs to occur, “amongst the contemporary Muslim scholars, since many of the ideas that each party had about the other were imposed by historical contexts and complications in the past and their associated mentali-

ties, while the jurisprudential perspective of the present is different from that of the past.”

Thus, “we do not consider the thoughts of the earlier scholars as ‘sacred’, regardless of how important they are. Besides, keeping the dialogue within the frame of what they had produced will not help in creating a serious and vibrant dialogue, but rather it will turn the dialogue into skirmishes and into a sphere in which each party records goals against the other.”

Therefore, “the dialogue should be based on the jurisprudence of the present scholars and not of the previous ones in order that we are not transported by the dialogue into history, thereby ignoring the reality of the present.”

5. Dialogue should stay away from, “skirmishes and counting scores by this sect or that.” Thus, “we must appraise the feasibility of the media coverage of the dialogue, since this coverage might instigate fanaticism in the Muslim ‘street’.”

“It goes without saying that the seriousness of any Muslim-Muslim dialogue, in its relation with the Muslim ‘street,’ is determined according to the results of the dialogue.” The actual stages and acts of dialogue, however, may contain, “many elements of instigation, regardless of how objective and scientific this act might be,” which, in turn, can rally the ‘street’ and complicate and even hinder any dialogue, “regardless of how important this dialogue might be.”

6. At the same time, amongst the most important contributors to the failure of previous attempts of dialogue and reducing sectarian tensions is, “in addition to it lacking a high level of seriousness, the inability of the positive results of dialogue to get down to the ‘street’.” What is required, then, is for dialogue to be followed by “popular educational tools” and “a new Islamic education” that includes the methods of disagreements within the rules of Islamic jurisprudence.

Reconciliation: Going Beyond Just Talk

After presenting the perspectives of Sayyid Faḍlallāh on dialogue, it is fitting then to end with his thoughts on reconciliation. Dialogue by itself is insufficient, as “there is no good in much of our talk if it does not contain a call for performing good acts which include the reconciliation between people” As the Qur’ān states,

AL-TAQRIB

لَا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّن نَّجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَن أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ
إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ
فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

There is no good in most of their secret counsels except (in his) who enjoins charity or goodness or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this seeking Allah's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward. (4:114)

Moreover, the Sayyid emphasizes the necessity of reconciliation and encourages people to, "intervene and reconcile those who differ and to remind those who incite strife that they will be punished." For, Allah says,

مَّن يَشْفَعْ شَفَعَةً حَسَنَةً يَّكُنْ لَهُ نَصِيبٌ مِّنْهَا ^ط وَمَن يَشْفَعْ شَفَعَةً
سَيِّئَةً يَّكُنْ لَهُ كِفْلٌ مِّنْهَا ^ط وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّقِيتًا

Whoso intervenes in a good cause will have the reward thereof, and whoso intervenes in an evil cause will bear the consequence thereof. Allah oversees all things. (4:85)

And in another verse, settling differences is presented as an act of obedience to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ):

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَنْفَالِ ^ط قُلِ الْأَنْفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ ^ط فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ ^ط وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

They ask you about the windfalls. Say: The windfalls are for Allah and the Messenger. So be careful of (your duty to) Allah and set aright matters of your difference, and obey Allah and His Messenger if you are believers. (8:1)

The Qur'an also states,

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you. (49:10)

Such is the vital importance of reconciliation, that, "Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) used to leave some money with some of his companions to be used in solving the differences among his followers, in the event that solving the differences depended on paying some money."

In fact, as the Sayyid points out, Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (‘a) even permitted bending the truth in order to reconcile differences between people. The Imam (‘a) says, "The one who reconciles (others) is not a liar". The Imam (‘a) has also said, "Talking is of three kinds: Truth, lies and reconciliation among people." According to the Sayyid, what the Imam (‘a) means is that, "when you tell someone that the man he had differed with said good things about him you would be lying, but you will be rewarded for this lie. In such cases, lying is not only permissible. It is a duty." The following verse of the Qur‘ān is cited by Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) in explaining that solving the differences between people is so important that one can even break an oath sworn to Allah not to intervene:

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا اللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَتُصَلِّحُوا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Do not make Allah an obstacle, through your oaths, to doing good and being Godwary, and to bringing about concord between people. And Allah is all-hearing, all-knowing. (2:224)

Indeed, such was the concern of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) for reconciliation that the last will of the Commander of the Faithful Imam ‘Alī (‘a) to his sons Imams al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (‘a) was: "I advise you both, and all my children, my relatives, and whosoever receives this message, to be conscious of Allah, to order your affairs, and to reconcile your differences. I heard your grandfather, peace be upon him, say: 'Reconciliation of your differences is more worthy than a year's worth of prayers and fasting.'"

A Lifetime Labour of Love; A Soul now at Rest

Through the voluminous thoughts, sayings, and actions of Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh, we find a personality who lived his life in the service of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), in defending Islam and the *Ummah*, and in calling for the unity amongst Muslims.

The Sayyid was a man of tremendous love, who loved Allah and through this love, loved others. He was a servant of the Creator and served the created. As he states in one of his Friday sermons, “I do not bear in my heart any hatred towards a believer nor do I bear in my heart any malice towards others, because I love you all. I love for us to live together by way of fraternity in God, and in order for us to cooperate so that love becomes for all. That we love all people, that we love those who agree with us so that we can cooperate with them and those who differ with us, so that we can dialogue with them.”

He opened up to one and all, friend and foe: intra-faith, inter-faith, and those with no faith at all, as he sought to advance the ideals and realities of Islam and believed that attainment of truth was an offspring of dialogue.

Indeed the Sayyid lived the statement of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) that, “No one of you will believe until he loves for the other what he loves for himself and hates for him what he hates for himself.” It is this great love that put into his big heart the concern of others. He lived with the people and shared their issues. He was a father to the orphans, a stout supporter of the oppressed, and it was a badge of honour for him to be a thorn in the eye of the oppressors. The poor and the downtrodden were the closest to his heart, and he saw in the youth an aspiring hope, provided that they armed themselves with Islamic culture, knowledge, and awareness. And we found these priorities exhibited in the scores of orphanages, schools, colleges, and hospitals that he established

Such was Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh, who called people to, “Join us in love, away from personal, regional, partisan and sectarian considerations. Let us all meet and gather under Allah's shade instead of disagreeing in His name.” He has also said, “Life cannot bear hatred, for hatred is death and love is life.”

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ أَرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَةً

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَأَدْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

Iran and Egypt on the Path to Proximity⁺

Hujjatul Islām Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshahī*

Translated by Muḥammad ‘Asad Dhārsī

Abstract

Iran and Egypt, since historical times, as two representatives of original Eastern civilizations, have contributed immensely towards the development of history and human civilization. Historically, the people of Iran and Egypt have always been inclined to engage in bilateral cooperation. Familiarity with the historical and cultural precedence of the interactions between the two countries can assist us in identifying the contemporary conditions and needs at hand. This article intends to analyze the relations between Iran and Egypt from ancient times to the post-Islamic period—especially the past century. It will then address the role of religious clerics on the relationship between the two countries, with a study of the reform movement of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥusaynī [Asadābādī aka Afghānī] and Shaykh Muhammad Ṭaqī Qummī, and will conclude by delineating the role of Iran and Egypt with respect to the challenges of globalization and the dialogue between civilizations.

Keywords: Proximity between the [Islamic] schools of thought, relations of the reform movement, globalization, Dialogue between civilizations.

Iran and Egypt as the two principal centres and ancient loci of Eastern civilization, have had connections since the earliest times and have contributed decisively towards the unfolding of history and human civilization. The beginning of this link goes very far back in time to the period in which both countries were known as the “cradle of civilization.” Over the historical course of this relationship, despite the fact that the kings of each historical era—at certain times due to jealousy and other times due to rivalry—would challenge and oppose each other, the people of Iran and Egypt would demonstrate an increased inclination towards improvement of relations and cooperation. An overview of the historical and cultural aspects of

⁺ This article first appeared in the original Farsi in the quarterly *Andisheb-i taqrīb*, vol 6, Spring 2006.

* Scholar, researcher and faculty member of the ‘Wahdah’ conference

the relationship between the two countries can assist us in identifying the present situation and its attendant needs. This in turn could lead to the expansion and strengthening of ties in line with the interests of the two nations in particular, and the Islamic Ummah in general.

IRAN-EGYPT RELATIONS IN ANCIENT TIMES

On the basis of current historical evidence, Iranians, on the orders of Cyrus and through his successor Cambyses II, conquered Egypt. Even though Greek historians, especially Herodotus, held a negative opinion of Iranian activities in Egypt, early Egyptian sources paint another picture. Recently, the Egyptian Cultural Heritage and Archaeological Association, with the aim of shedding further light on the issue, has dispatched a group to uncover the remains from the military advancement of Cambyses II in the deserts of Egypt. The locus of the archaeological activities of this group is somewhere between Wāhah al-Khārijah [The Outer Oasis] and Wāhah al-Dakhilah [The Inner Oasis] in the Egyptian desert.

Darius I, in the continuation and completion of the military advancement and conquest of Cambyses II, marched from southern Egypt towards Ethiopia. Based on a relic written in four languages—Ancient Persian, Elamite, Assyrian and Egyptian—Darius had prepared plans for digging a canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

It has been noted in Egyptian historical records that during the Achaemenid era Iranians, under orders from Darius, learned astrology and medicine from the Egyptians. Conversely, Egyptians took example from the irrigation system of the Iranians, especially the aqueducts. Similarly, under the command of Darius, libraries were established in Egypt which till that time were unknown in that country.

Relations between Iran and Egypt, following the attacks by Alexander of Macedonia and the dominance of his successors over the region, increasingly came under the influence of military politics and the friction between Iran and Rome. Similarly, other ups and downs have continually existed in the relations between the two countries.

IRAN-EGYPT RELATIONS IN THE POST-ISLAMIC PERIOD

After the founding and emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and its spread towards the East and the West, the people of Iran and Egypt converted to Islam. In the Muslim brigades preparing for the conquest of

Egypt, a significant contingent of Iranians were present, many of whom hailed from Khurāsān. Subsequently, a group of Iranians migrated and settled in Egypt. Some of Salmān al-Fārsī's (one of the great companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)) children settled in Egypt, while a number of others settled in Iran. During those days, all Muslims had come together and united on the basis of Islam, and the question of racial identity or geographic origin was considered a secondary matter. For this reason, many signs of cultural, political, academic and economic exchanges exist between all Islamic nations, including Iran and Egypt.

Layth ibn Sa'd (b. 94 AH), who was an Imam in Islamic jurisprudence and narrations and who was highly popular amongst the Egyptians, was Iranian in origin. Kindī in the book *Wulāt al-miṣr [the Rulers of Egypt]* clarifies that many governors of Egypt during his time were Iranian. He even mentions the birthplace of these individuals. He says for example, 'Awn ibn Zayd is from the people of Gorgān and Harthimah ibn A'yun is from the people of Balkh.

Historians have also made mention of some Iranian poets who after the 4th century A.H. were sent to Egypt and were extremely influential like, Abu Nuwās, who according to some is considered the greatest poet of the Abbasid times. Nāsir Khusraw Qabādiyānī, the famous poet and philosopher, even visited Egypt in the 5th century A.H. and settled there for a period. He, as the Ḥujjat of the land of Khurāsān and with directives to spread the Ismā'īlyyah school of thought, was posted to Iran by al-Mustansir, the Fatimid caliph. Nāsir Khusraw in his memoirs has noted valuable details regarding Egypt; the Nile, the lifestyle of the people and the structure and architecture of the buildings found in the country.

Sa'dī is yet another Iranian poet who had settled in Egypt during the Ayyubid period. A result of this travel is a collection of morally inspiring stories that Sa'dī has incorporated in his *Bustān* and *Gulistān*.

Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, a poet and famous Sufi, in the 8th century A.H., went to Egypt and was honoured by the Sultan and reached the level of "Shaykh al-Shuyūkh". Shaykh al-Shuyūkh in those days referred to the chief of the Khānaqāh [Sufi centre for mystical practice]. The first Khānaqāh in Egypt was constructed during the era of the Ayyubids and ever since, rulers and viziers have vied with each other for the establishment of Khānaqāhs, and have donated large sums of money for them. In the period of the Mamluks, the number of Khānaqāhs saw a significant increase. These Egyptian Khānaqāhs at present are one of the examples where the influence of Iranian architecture is greatly noticeable.

With the fall of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols and the subsequent collapse of Iranian governments and the dominance of the Ayyubids of Shām [Syria] over the Fatimid caliphate, there was a period of interruption or estrangement in the bilateral relationship between Iran and Egypt. Similarly, as a result of the attack of the Timurids on the lands associated with the Egyptian Mamluks, interactions between the two countries became strained. An investigation into the relationship between the two countries during the aforementioned historical periods indicates that the period of the Fatimid rule in Egypt was the pinnacle of the flowering of cultural exchanges between Iran and Egypt. The Fatimids adopted many of their customs and conventions from the Iranians; they adorned their courts like those of the Iranian kings and similarly celebrated many of their occasions. In a mannerism that was similar to Sassanian monarchs, the Fatimid caliph would seat himself behind a curtain during public audiences, and at the time of assembly and gathering, the curtains would part and the reciters of the Holy Qur'ān would begin recitation.

One of the celebrations that the Fatimids adopted from the Iranians is Nowrouz, whereby, according to documents present, poets would offer congratulations to the ruler Tamīm ibn al-Mu'iz. These celebrations are clear examples of the inclination of the Fatimids towards following Iranian culture and civilization. It is also worth noting that Fatimid art was also severely under the influence of Iranian art, and consequently in handicrafts where weaving, woodcarving, engraving and tile work was involved, the style and technique of Iranian artists is clearly noticeable. Another example of cultural exchanges between Iran and Egypt is the prevalence of some Persian terms in Arabic, especially in the Egyptian dialect. The usage of these terms was undertaken primarily by the Fatimids, Sufis and the Ottomans. Muḥammad Maqbal Baig, in the book *al-Durr al-thamīn fī asmā' al-banāt wa al-banīn*, points towards many names used in Egypt that have a Persian root. Dr. Ḥusayn Mujīb al-Miṣrī in his book *Īrān wa Miṣr 'abr al-tārīkh* along with some of his other works, and also Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn Abd al-Mun'im in his article *al-Alfāz al-Fārsiyyah fī al-'āmmiyyah al-Miṣriyyah*, have described these terms¹.

In the Ottoman period and after the reforms that were introduced by Muḥammad 'Alī Pāshā, the Persian language, was instituted as an academic and a semi-official language of Egypt. This led to the publication of many

¹ Refer to *Kayhān Farhangī* cultural newsletter, special issue on Egypt, by Mr. Asadī, Vol. 9, Year 9, December 1992 and the Ḥujjat article.

valuable Persian literary books, like the *Dīwān* of Hāfiz, *Mathnawī* of Mawlānā Rūmī, the *Kulliyyāt-i Sa'dī*, Of note also is the the publication in Egypt of Persian dailies such as *Thurayyā*, *Parvarish*, *Chehreh nama* and *Hikmat*.²

In 1516 Shāh Ismā'īl I, the founder of the Ṣafavīd dynasty, sought a coalition with the Egyptian sultan al-Ghawrī against the Ottoman government, and for this sake appointed an ambassador and dispatched him with a letter of friendship, along with two hundred slave-boys and slave-girls, to the Egyptian sultan. The Egyptian sultan accepted the proposal of the Iranian king and along with an army comprising of 30,000 men marched towards Syria. From that period onwards, the relations between Iran and Egypt can be studied and analyzed within the framework of diplomatic relations. In the Treaty of Rome signed in 1848 by Mīrzā Taqī Khān Amīr Kabīr of Iran, it has been clearly mentioned that the government of Iran can set up a consulate in each of the cities of the Ottoman lands where it has business interests (except Makkah and Madinah).

Eight years later in 1855, the government of Iran for the first time proceeded to dispatch a temporary commissioner as an "expediency officer" from Istanbul to Cairo. In 1299 A.H. differences between Iranian traders and Egyptian customs took place over Iranian tobacco.

The Iranian embassy in Istanbul sent Ḥājji Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān as the expediency officer and permanent commissioner to Egypt. This measure was the precursor to the installation of political relations between Iran and Egypt in the modern times.

IRAN-EGYPT RELATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

After the end of the First World War and the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, relations between the two countries gained steam, and in addition to affairs of trade, cultural relations between Iran and Egypt also saw considerable movement. This process had a significant impact on the elevation of diplomatic ties between the two countries, and in 1939 the Iranian mission in Cairo was upgraded to an embassy. In the period of Fārūq, the teaching of Persian in Egyptian universities gained prominence and

² At Al-Azhar too, Persian was regarded second language status in specializations such as Philosophy, History, and Arabic language in the College of Islamic sciences.

with the dispatch of Persian language instructors from Iran to Egypt, cultural and academic relations between the two sides were further expanded.

Even though the divorce of the sister of the Egyptian king from the Shah of Iran [then crown prince] was a source of discomfort for the Egyptian king, it nevertheless did not affect the overall foreign policy of the two countries. With the fall of the Egyptian monarchy and the rise of the military rulers, major changes were affected to the internal and external policies of Egypt, and Colonel Nasser, drawing upon Arab nationalism, challenged the Pahlavi regime. In such circumstances, relations between the two countries saw a downturn and eventually resulted in the severance of diplomatic ties on 15 August 1960.

After the tragic defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war, which took place because of ambitious policies cum mistakes of Colonel Nasser, changes were made to Egypt's regional and international policies. In this context, the apparent support of Iran for the Arabs in 1967 was a good opportunity for the healing of ties, and with the mediation of Kuwait and the subsequent contact between the two sides, relations between Iran and Egypt took an upturn, and on the 29 August 1970, the two countries released a statement indicating a decision to elevate the level of ties through ambassadorial relations. However, a month after the announcement of renewal of ties between the two countries, Nasser passed away³.

With the arrival of Anwar Sadat, Egyptian foreign affairs policies to a great extent became closer to the stances of the Shah's regime. Examples of such political conformity include the turning away of Sadat from the Eastern to the Western bloc and the adoption of economic policies based on the free-market model. Sadat, following the October 1973 war, adopted the policy of compromise and cooperation with Israel. Relations between Iran and Egypt after this war, with the announcement of Iran's readiness for cooperation with the rebuilding of Egypt and increase in bilateral contact, reached their height.

The Shah offered his full support to Sadat's policies towards resolving the Middle East crisis through negotiations with Israel, and in reality the expansion of business and trade links between the two countries during this period was the practical outcome of this policy. In modern history, the relationship between the Shah and Sadat, two figures who were completely attached to Western imperialism, came to be considered the golden age of relations between Tehran and Cairo. Payment of macro-loans from Iran to

³ Tikkiyehei 1996-97, p.96

Egypt, signing of agreements in the fields of industry, trade and joint investments in the fields of tourism and energy, all of which indicate the warming of relations. Meanwhile though, the US benefitted from the encouragement offered by the Shah to Sadat for opening the door of direct negotiations with Israel. It is said that the most important topics of discussion between the Shah and Carter towards the end of 1977 was around the same subject.

After the victory of the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, due to the signing of the Camp David accords by Egypt, relations between the two countries were severed on the orders of Imam Khomeini (r). Shortly thereafter, when Egypt gave asylum to the deposed Shah, relations between the two countries became convulsive. After the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, Egypt primarily condemned both countries and expressed its opposition towards “this unnecessary war between two Muslim and neighbouring countries,” though secretly it was pleased by the fact that Iraq had become a barrier against the spread of the Islamic revolution. By keeping in mind this fact, Egypt soon after the intensification of the war, dispatched a great deal of military assistance to Iraq⁴.

After the Islamic revolution in Iran, the growth of Islamism had a significant trend in the region generally and in Egypt particularly, to the extent that it became the cause that many Egyptian politicians blamed the Islamic Republic of Iran of interference in the internal affairs of their own country. In this vein, on 3 March 1988 the government of Egypt formally accused Iran of interference and began measures to shut the Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Cairo.

With the acceptance of resolution 598 and the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in a unilateral humanitarian gesture and through the mediation of Shaykh Muḥammad Ghazālī, a prominent cleric, released all Egyptian prisoners of war who were caught alongside the Iraqis. After the end of the second Gulf War and the “liberation” of Kuwait by the Allied forces with the leadership of the US, the political map of the Middle East transformed yet again. These transformations and upheavals, provided a suitable setting for further conciliation between Tehran and Cairo, and on 28th April 1991, the Interest Sections of the two countries were established in Tehran and Cairo. From that time onwards, the officials of the

⁴ Mujīb al-Misrī, pg 97

two countries—primarily the foreign ministers—through bilateral meetings and discussions, have sought to improve the emerging relations.⁵

Over the past decade, the two countries have had good cooperation with each other on the following international issues:

1. Collaboration of stances of the two countries on the issue of Bosnia and assistance to the Muslims of that country.
2. Taking up stances close to each other over the NPT (Nuclear non-proliferation treaty)
3. Bilateral consultations over the issue of human rights resulting in the switch in the Egyptian vote over a resolution regarding the status of human rights in Iran from positive to an abstention.
4. Cooperation between the two countries within the framework of the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) and the participation of Amr Moussa, Egyptian foreign minister, in the Tehran meeting and undertaking of common stances in many of the issues brought forward in the committees of the conference.

At the level of regional cooperation, the two countries have in many instances adopted common stances, some of which are as follows:

1. The need to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by the Zionist regime.
2. Support for the territorial integrity of Iraq and prevention of its disintegration.
3. Proposal for the disarmament of nuclear and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

In the area of bilateral interactions, the following instances of cooperation may be pointed out:

A. Economic cooperation: The revival of economic relations has been seriously followed up after the reopening of the interests sections by the two countries.

In this area, the construction of five sugarcane factories in Khurāsān Razavī province by Egypt and the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the sale of a thousand tractor units to the Egyptian private

⁵ Ahmad Hashim, 1993-94, pg. 78

sector and other commercial transactions, include some of the noteworthy economic activities.

B. Cultural cooperation: The signing of agreements for academic cooperation between the 'Ain Shams university of Egypt and the 'Allāmah Tabātabāi university, the travel of few distinguished scholars and academic, literary and cultural personalities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Egypt and their meeting with the Shaykh of Al-Azhar and a meeting of academics and publishers from Egypt with Iranian authorities, similarly the broadcasting of Iranian movies in Egypt and friendly sports meets are considered parts of the cultural activities of the past years.

What is clear is that all of the above stances and instances of conciliation can be attributed to Egypt's gradual distancing from the Camp David accords.

THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY IN IRAN-EGYPT RELATIONS

Without doubt, the people of Iran and Egypt share many similarities with respect to their religious sensibilities. Both nations benefitted from religion in their struggles against colonialism. It was religion that provided the motivation for jihad against the colonialists. History is witness that the Egyptian armed forces crossed the Suez Canal in the Ramaḍān War and broke the fortifications of the Barlow line with calls of "Allāhu Akbar."

Similarly love of and affinity with the Ahl al-Bayt (*a*) is one of the shared religious values that is clearly visible between the Egyptians and the Iranians. In this midst, the role of the scholars and the foresighted clerics in bringing together the two nations—Iran and Egypt—is very important. Here, we shall limit our discussion to the brief study of two examples: the reform movement of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī [or Asadābādī] and the movement for the proximity of the [Islamic] schools of thought of Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Qummi.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT OF SAYYID JAMAL AL-DIN AFGHANI

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn towards the end of the year 1215 A.H. entered Egypt for the first time from India. The period of his stay during this visit was only forty days, but during this short period he became acquainted with Al-Azhar [seminary] and went for Ḥajj from there. This stay of the Sayyid, though short, had a profound impact on the students at Al-Azhar.

In his second visit, which began around the beginning of Muharram 1287 A.H., Sayyid went to Cairo apparently with an intention of a long-term stay. This time he stayed at the Ibrāhīm Beyk Muylgi lodge near the mosque of Sayyidanā Ḥusayn, though he later went to Khān al-Khalīlī and upon request from the students of Al-Azhar, began teaching theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and astronomy.

According to the writings of historians and Sayyid's notes on the back cover of some books, he used to teach the books: *Zawra'*, written by Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī in Tasawwuf [Sufism], *The Exposition of Shamsiyyah* by Qutb in Logic, *Hidāyah*, *Ishārāt* and *Ḥikmat al-'ishrāq* in Philosophy, Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī commentary on *al-'Aḍudiyyah beliefs* in Theology, and *Tadhkirah* of Shaykh Tusi in traditional-astronomy. (A collection of his lecture series on 'The exposition of beliefs' was later published in Egypt under the name of Shaykh 'Abduh).

The notable students of Sayyid include: Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh, Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm Salmān, Shaykh Ibrāhīm Laqānī and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Ḥalbāwī.

For this group, Sayyid used to teach the standard sciences of the Hawza [seminary] and those of Al-Azhar. There was another group who at times would benefit from Sayyid's lectures on social and political sciences. These lessons would at times be held at the homes of the individuals. The notable participants of these sessions were: Maḥmūd Samī al-Bārūdī, 'Abd al-Salām Muwaylihī and his brother Ibrāhīm Muwaylihī, Sa'd Zaghlūl, 'Alī MAzhar, Salīm Naqqāsh, Adīb Ishāq, among others.

Aḥmad Amīn in his book regarding the life of the Sayyid writes: "What did Sayyid want from teaching in Egypt?" and thereafter responds: "Sayyid had two objectives from the teaching of Azharian and non-seminarian sciences: The first goal being the awakening of the students and the enlightenment of the minds of the Azharians such that they become acquainted with the new world, especially with philosophy, which after the Fatimid times in Egypt, had become proscribed."⁶ Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh in the introduction to the treatise *al-Wāridāt fī sirr al-taḥlīlāt* writes "When I went after philosophy, at Al-Azhar they told me that [the study of] philosophy is *ḥarām* [religiously forbidden]. This state of affairs continued until the time that the sun of truths rose and through the presence of the perfected sage and the standing truth, that is our teacher Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn

⁶ 'Amīn, pg. 293

Afghānī, aspects of it were made apparent to us. We requested this of him, and thank God, it was given to us.”⁷

Based on this very spiritual influence, as narrated in *Zu‘amā’ al-iṣlāh fī ‘aṣr al-ḥadīth*, Shaykh [‘Abduh] says about the Sayyid: “Certainly my father granted me a life, he shares it with me, and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn granted me a life, I share it with Muḥammad (ṣ) and Ibrāhīm and Mūsa and Īsa and the saints and the holy ones...”⁸

In the same period ‘Abduh, in collaboration with Abū Turāb, an Iranian student of the Sayyid, annotated and translated the treatise “*Nijariyyah*”⁹ into Arabic and published it in Cairo.

The second aim of the Sayyid from the presentation of general courses was the awakening of the Egyptian masses, the criticism of the tyrannical rule and the disclosure the brutality of colonialism. Sayyid openly criticized the occupation of Islamic countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria by France, and the occupation of Egypt, Sudan and other Muslim lands, by England. It is in line with this opposition that he established the Hizb al-Waṭanī [The National party] in Egypt, which is mentioned by the Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa in the book *Tārīkh al-ustādh al-Imām* with the name of al-Hizb al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr’ [The Free National party].

The role of Sayyid in the upheavals at Al-Azhar, the awakening of the Egyptian people and the enlightenment of the politicians is clear. While it is also obvious that this movement could not have come about without the cooperation and sympathy of the Egyptian side, in particular that of Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh and others. It is for this reason that eventually the Egyptian government officials, on the request of England, deported the Sayyid from Egypt, who then went to Paris and in collaboration with Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh published *al-‘Urwat al-wuthqā*, which in itself is a separate story¹⁰.

⁷ Husaynī, 2000-01, pg. 43

⁸ ‘Amin, ibid.

⁹ Sayyid’s ‘The treatise on *Nijariyyah* or Naturalism, which was authored and published by him during his stay in India and has been reprinted many times in different languages, was translated by Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh with the cooperation of ‘Abū Turāb, an Iranian student of the Sayyid, into Arabic which has lately been printed once again under the “Treatises on Philosophy and ‘Irfan”, with explanations under the title of *al-Radd ‘ala al-Dabriyyīn*.

¹⁰ *Al-‘Urwat al-Wuthqa* was a cultural-political publication which was published on a monthly basis by Sayyid with the cooperation of Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Paris. But after 18 volumes, publishing was terminated. Volume 18 of this series,

PROXIMITY BETWEEN THE [ISLAMIC] SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Another topic of import, both past and present, is the establishment of *Dār al-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, or the ‘House of Proximity between the Islamic Schools of Thought’ in Egypt. Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt in his treatise *Qīṣat al-taqrīb*, published in the quarterly *Risālat al-Islām*, has dealt with this issue in detail. Ustād Muḥammad Taqī Qummī was an Iranian scholar who was apparently sent to Egypt by the Iranian government for cultural activities. He, however ended up establishing contacts with Al-Azhar. The result of this effort was and acquaintance with the great Shuyūkh [scholars] of Al-Azhar, such as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majīd Salīm, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, Shaykh Muḥammad Faḥḥām, Shaykh Muḥammad Abū Zuhrah, Shaykh Muḥammad Ghazālī and Shaykh Ḥasan al-Bannā’ and others.

The complete fifteen year series of the *Risālat al-Islām—Qāhirah*, which was published in its entirety by the Assembly for Proximity, Tehran, delineates the history of the Iranian-Egyptian conciliation movement.

Undoubtedly, if the cooperation of great scholars of Egypt and Iran (such as the Late Āyatullāh Burūjirdī) was not there, Shaykh Qummī single-handedly would not have been able to accomplish anything. It was as a result of these very efforts that eventually the fatwa of Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt: “It is permissible to follow the Shia school of thought just like the other schools of thought” was released, after which Shiite jurisprudence was taught at Al-Azhar and the *Tafsīr Majma‘ al-bayān* was published in Cairo.

Without doubt this Iranian-Egyptian movement, was able to overcome many of the problems and differences between Shias and Sunnis in the Muslim world, and if currently we are witness to peaceful co-existence between the followers of all the schools of Islamic thought in the Islamic countries, it is surely the result of the cooperation between the Iranian and Egyptian scholars. It is quintessential that this work is continued through the cooperation of Iran and Egypt.

IRAN AND EGYPT AND THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS

The dialogue between civilizations aims at combating the onslaught of Western culture and its dominance over the world. It is not hidden that numerous civilizations and cultures exist around the world and each of

along with an introduction and explanations from the author of this article, has been recently published by the Centre of Islamic Analyses, Qum.

them have a role in the formation of the identity of each of the nations of the world. But we are witness to the fact that today, the world's nations are concerned about having a special form of culture imposed upon them by various stratagems and contrivances—many employing communication technology.

The purpose of this trend is the Westernization of the culture and customs of the traditional nations and peoples. The idea of 'Dialogue between Civilizations' seeks to demonstrate that the world is composed of cultures and civilizations who have a right to protect their own independence and unique identity. Iran and Egypt, with the backing of their rich and magnificent cultures, can cooperate in this regard to ensure the best results for all other nations.

CONCLUSION

Egypt holds an honoured and privileged place with all Muslims. This is especially because in the Holy Qur'an there are five instances where the name "Egypt" has been utilized and no other country holds this great honour.

For example in Sūrah Yūnus we recite:

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَأَخِيهِ أَنْ تَبَوَّءَ لِقَوْمِكُمَا بِمِصْرَ بُيُوتًا
وَأَجْعَلُوا بُيُوتَكُمْ قِبْلَةً وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

We revealed to Moses and his brother [saying], 'Settle your people in Egypt, and let your houses face each other, and maintain the prayer, and give good news to the faithful.' (10:87)

And in Sūrah Yūsuf it says:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰ إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ وَقَالَ ادْخُلُوا مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ

When they entered into the presence of Joseph, he set his parents close to himself, and said, 'Welcome to Egypt, in safety, God willing!' (12:99)

In both cases, there is mention of giving refuge and assigning the houses as a *Qiblah* [direction of prayer] and the upholding of *ṣalāh* in those houses. And then there is talk about giving glad-tidings to the believers and their being in safety.

Without any doubt, it will be a great loss for the Muslim Ummah and the Islamic world to lose 'Egypt.' The Muslims have a principled and deep-rooted difference with the [former] Egyptian government on the Camp David issue. Moreover, the stance of the Islamic Republic and the world's Muslims on Palestine is one of the clearest stances and its nature is apparent to all.

The issues subject to differences should be solved gradually. In the meantime, one must not consider the points of difference only, but must also take into consideration the commonalities. Differences are not removed by a 'severance of ties'; there are other ways of doing this. If we are ready to exchange views with the People of the Book—according to the Qur'ānic mandate—then why do we not sit with the People of Faith and our brothers-in-Islam to deal with differences?

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خلاصة المقالات

الكلمات الرئيسية: آية الله السيد محمد حسين فضل الله - الوحدة الإسلامية - قادة المسلمين - لبنان - المصادر الشيعية.

ايران و مصر في طريقيهما نحو التقارب

حجة الاسلام والمسلمين السيد هادي خسروشاهي

الخلاصة: منذ عهود تاريخية قديمة كانت ايران ومصر، باعتبارهما يمثلان حضارتين شرقيتين، يتمتعان بعلاقات طيبة مضافاً إلى إسهامهما الضخم في التطور التاريخي للحضارة البشرية. وتاريخياً أبدى شعبا مصر وايران دائماً جنوحاً إلى تقوية التعاون فيما بينهما. التعرف على المبادلات الثقافية والتاريخية بين البلدين يمكنه أن يساعدنا على تحديد الظروف المعاصرة والمتطلبات الحالية. هذا المقال يسعى لتحليل العلاقة والظروف السائدة بين ايران ومصر منذ العهود القديمة وحتى القرن الماضي مروراً بما بعد الاسلام، كما تناول الكاتب موضوع دور علماء الدين في العلاقة بين البلدين مع دراسة الحركة الإصلاحية للسيد جمال الدين الحسيني (الأسدآبادي) والشيخ محمد تقي القمي، وينتهي بدراسة دور البلدين في ظلّ تحديّ العولمة والحوار بين الحضارات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التقريب بين المذاهب الإسلامية - علاقات الحركة الإصلاحية - العولمة - الحوار بين الحضارات.

المترجم: الشيخ تحسين البديري

التقريب

وجهة نظر الاسلام في الجمال

محمد علي قاسمي

الخلاصة: من الحقائق التي تقبلها العلماء هو أنّ الطبيعة البشرية ورثت ميزات ومسحات محدّدة، وإحدى هذه الميزات التي ورثها هي ميول الإنسان نحو الجمال والبحث عنه. والإسلام باعتباره الدين الأكمل قدّم للبشرية فسحة من النظريات والممارسات العلمية مبلوراً ايدلوجية منسجمة مع طبيعة البشر والعواطف والأحاسيس الأساسية. ومن المهم أن تكتشف وجهة نظر الإسلام عن الجمال. المقال بعد ما يقدم تعريفاً للجمال يلاحظ مظاهر الجمال في الوجود من خلال منشور القرآن والسنة. إنّ الجمال الإلهي وجمال السماء والنجوم وجمال خلقة الأرض والموجودات الحية الساكنة فيها وجمال البحار تعدّ جميعها من مظاهر الجمال الأصلي. إضافة إلى هذا فإنّ سلوكيات وأعمالاً محدّدة عدّت جميلة من قبل القرآن والسنة. يعرف القرآن الدين كجمال القلب، كما يذهب إلى أنّ الصبر جميل ويدعو البشر إلى البحث عن هكذا جمال. كما أنّ الإسلام يؤكّد كثيراً على ضرورة تحلّي الانسان بالجمال الظاهري والباطني. ويشجّع المسلمين على اغتنام فرصة الظواهر الجميلة في العالم لأجل الرقي والتكامل الأخلاقي والروحي. ولأجل ذلك يدعو الإسلام المؤمنين لأن يرتدوا أفضل الملابس عند العبادة. وهذا يدخل في اطار رؤية الاسلام العامة، حيث يرى الجمال من صلب الطبيعة الانسانية في الوجود والعمل وفي الجوانب الظاهرية والباطنية للحقيقة في ضوء الهدف من الخلق.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الجمال - القلب - الكون المتناغم - البشرية - المظهر.

آية الله السيد محمد حسين فضل الله: عمر من الدعوة إلى الوحدة

زيد الموسوي و محمد حبش

الخلاصة: بمناسبة سنوية رحيل سماحة آية الله السيد محمد حسين فضل الله تناول كاتب المقال موضوع مواقف الراحل التي عدّت أسطورة في مجال وحدة المسلمين. المقال يتكوّن من قسمين، الأول: يعرض للظروف الجغرافية والاجتماعية والسياسية التي أتاحت فرصة تبلور وجهة نظر السيد فضل الله ومواقفه المتواصلة تجاه الوحدة. وفي القسم الثاني يعرض لوجهة نظر سماحته عن وحدة المسلمين من زوايا مختلفة، من زاوية قرآنية، والتي تمثّلت نموذجياً في الرسول، مع أخذه بنظر الاعتبار الظروف الاستراتيجية والمقتضيات الأخلاقية للوحدة في ضوء الظروف المعاصرة.

خلاصة المقالات

الكلمات الرئيسية: التصوّف - العرفان - السيرة النبويّة - العقلانية - الانسان الكامل - العقل - القلب - الولاية الإلهية.

الرسول الأعظم هو المؤسس للحضارة الإسلامية

أكبر يوروتي موفّق

الخلاصة: يقيم المفكّرون الحضارة الإسلامية من جهات عدّة، تاركين في هذا المجال كتباً ومقالات متنوّعة، لكن من سوء الحظ أنّ العامل الأساس لهذه الحضارة والذي لا يضاھيه عامل آخر أثر في بلورة هذه الحضارة وقع في غفلة من هؤلاء المفكّرين. ذلك العامل هو الرسول (ص) فيداه الماهرتان قد غرستا هذه الشجرة الإلهية، وقد قوى جذورها من خلال هجرته إلى يثرت التي استبدل اسمها فيما بعد إلى المدينة. تدارس الكاتب في مقاله هذا العامل الأساس لبلورة الحضارة الإسلامية وفقاً لما يقرّ به الكثير من العلماء، وأوضح فيه دور الرسول في إيجاد السلام والأمن والتضامن بين الأتباع والتعاون في تنشأة الأخلاق والصبر والوحدة والرفاه النسبي، وهي جميعاً عوامل مؤثّرة في بلورة وتطوير الحضارات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الحضارة - الرسول محمد(ص) - المعرفة - السلام.

صوت الوحدة - القسم الرابع

مناهج كسب المعرفة واستئصال جذور النزاعات

آية الله محمد واعظ زادة الخراساني

الخلاصة: في رابع حلقة من الحلقات التي تناولت موضوع الوحدة، ركّز هذا المقال على الاختلافات والنزاعات. في البداية ذكر الكاتب قسمين من الاختلافات: ١ - الاختلافات المذمومة. ٢ - الاختلافات التي تعتبر مفيدة أو التي يحتملها الدين. المقال يركّز على الثاني. وفي تنقيبه عن الصنف الثاني تحدّث عن مختلف مناهج البحث وطلب العلم. لقد عرف الاجتهاد من وجهة نظر القرآن وبين كيف يمكن استخدام هذا التعريف لإيضاح الاختلافات الظاهرية بين المذاهب المختلفة وأتباعها وكيف يمكن التسامح فيها.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الوحدة الإسلامية - الإخوة الإسلامية - التفرقة - الطائفية - الاجتهاد - طلب العلم - الاستنباط.

التقريب

الوحدة عبر منشور القلب

سعيد مالك

الخلاصة: الروحانية، كأمر متعالٍ وعنصر رفيع في الدين، تفتح طريقاً يهدي إلى الله. ومحطة هذا الطريق في الاستقامة الجدّية في الممارسات والطقوس الدينية. الاستقامة الدينية هي الربة الغنية التي تغذي شجرة النفس. هناك الكثير من الكتب المقدّسة والكثير من الرسل المقدّسين تدلّ على أنّ لطريق الروحانية انشعابات عديدة، متجذّرة في النواة الأساسية. في وقت يؤمر الرسول وأتباعه بالتعرّف على جميع الأنبياء والأديان يؤمرون في ذات الوقت باليقين والقطع بآخر رسالة وبأن ينغمروا في حقيقتها. وباعتبار كون الاسلام آخر الأديان ويتمتع بالتصميم الإلهي الحكيم يحضى بقابلية طبيعة لتحمل باقي الأديان. وعلى أتباع الاسلام أن يدافعوا بحماس عن هذه الهبة الإلهية، ليس بالإقرار بها فحسب بل بتثمينها. ألهمنا القرآن هكذا يقظة عالية وهدانا بالقلب الذي يحدث بها ويدعو طبيعة البشر المتنوعة والمنكسرة إلى مقام السلام الحقيقي والوحدة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: وحدة الأديان – الاستقامة – قابلية الاحتمال – الاخلاص – الاسلام.

العرفان العقلي: العرفان الإسلامي الأصيل المتمثّل في حياة الرسول وسيرته

محمد جواد رودكر

الخلاصة: العرفان من طرق المعرفة التي قد تحصل من خلال التزام هدى الحياة المعنوية والروحانية والقيام ببعض الرياضات التي صادق عليها العقل وحدّها الشارع. المبدأ الأساس الذي يعتمد هذا النمط من العلم والمعرفة هو تطهير النفس والقلب. وهذا عملياً يتمثّل بمستويات ومحطّات مختلفة للسفر الروحاني وينتهي بمحطة الوحدة، والكون مثل الله في الصفات. يُعرّف العرفان بمجاله النظري والعملي _ باعتباره يشمل الرحلة من النفس إلى الله، ومن التعدّد إلى الوحدة _ بمثل سيرة الرسول وروحه المتعالية. العنصر الذي حدّ من توسيع تعريف العرفان هو المصادقة من قبل العقل والتطابق معه ومع الدليل، وهو ما نشهده في سيرة الرسول. في عرفان الرسول نجد كلاً من العقل والحبّ والفهم والشهود والبرهان والعرفان والسلوك الفكري والسلوك العملي منسجمة مع بعضها الآخر، لكلّ موقعه ووظيفته المتطابقة مع مستوى الوجود. ثمرة هكذا عرفان هي أنّ الدليل يكون مدعماً بالشهود، والشهود مدعماً بالدليل. إنّه يوافق بين المشاركة الاجتماعية والرياضات الروحانية، وبين القيادة السياسية مع البواطن والدواخل النفسية، وبين المعرفة الإلهية مع الاهتمام بالعدالة الاجتماعية.

الإشراف العام: الشيخ محمد علي التسخيري
المدير المسؤول: الشيخ علي اصغر اوحدي
رؤساء التحرير: الدكتور السيد حسين هاشمي - الشيخ شجاع علي ميرزا
المحرر: رضوان راشد
المدير الإداري: محمد هادي باباجانيان

هيئة التحرير: السيد علي قلي قرائي - الدكتور مهدي هادوي طهراني - الدكتور
محمد جعفر علمي - الدكتور قاسم جوادى - الدكتور محمد
حسين طالبى - الدكتور محمد ليكنهوزن - الدكتور مظفر
اقبال - الدكتور رولاند بيج - الدكتور رضا شاه كاظمي



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altaqrib@gmail.com

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