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4. Philosophical Discourses

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

[An intellectual discussion in refutation of the Trinity](#)

STUDENT. The Trinity is one of the points of difference between the sacred religion of Islam and the religion of the Christians.¹ In fact it is the most crucial difference between the fundamental beliefs of the two religions.

Islam calls mankind to unity (*tawhid*), teaches them to believe in One Primordial Origin (*al-asl al-qadim*), and reduces every plurality, of any kind and type that it may be, to that One Origin. But despite the Gospel’s explicit assertion of God’s unity,² the Christians believe in three origins for the universe. This is a fundamental belief for them, to the extent that it cannot be dispensed with.

The Noble Qur’an stands against the Trinity, and denies it based on reason and not just obedience (*ta’abbud*, to the Qur’an and revelation). It condemns those who believe in the Trinity, to the extent that it considers the Trinity comparable to polytheism. Likewise have been the approach and arguments of the Noble Prophet, the Infallible Imams, the Companions (*sahabah*), the Followers (*tabi’in*), and the Islamic scholars from the early years of Islam until now.

However, this is not a matter of the Trinity per se. Rather, the problem is that there cannot be more than one deity (*ilah*) and primordial being (*qadim*) as the origins of creation. In that sense, there is no difference between believing in a Trinity, a Quartet, or a Quintet. It is false to believe in multiple origins for the universe, in any way and any form. The arguments of the Noble Qur’an and the other sources against the Trinity refute all of them alike, and rank them alongside polytheism. Even if one’s divinity is composed of a hundred or a thousand parts, the same arguments apply.

Likewise is the case of the belief in ‘*ayniyyah* (union) of Allah’s Attributes and Names (*sifat wa asma*)’³ with His Essence (*dhat*), Glorified and Exalted is He. This belief entails subdivision, composition and plurality of the Essence of the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*). That is because in the case of union,

God's Essence would not only be predicated by the concepts (*mafhum*) of knowledge, power and life – or the concepts of knowledgeable, powerful, and alive. But the actual and external instances (*misdaq*) of these real concepts would also have to be realised and actually exist in the Essence of the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God, Glorified and Exalted is He). This entails the subdivision of the Sacred Essence of the High One into these distinct instances, which means that the One Essence is composed of the external instances of the Divine Attributes and Names. This is exactly equivalent to the Christians' concept of Trinity. In fact, it does not claim a trinity, but rather the disintegration of God's Essence into His numerous Names and Attributes. Each of His Names and Attributes will appear in His Essence distinct and separate from one another.⁴

The Qur'an's rejection of the Trinity

'ALLAMAH. The Noble Qur'an reprimands the Christians in several ways and with various tones:

O people of the Scripture, do not exaggerate in your religion, and utter not about Allah save the truth! The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the messenger of Allah, and His Word which He cast upon Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not 'Three!' Refrain; it is better for you. Allah is only One Deity. He is Glorified above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; and Allah suffices as Trustee. (4:171)

As it shows, the verse denies the Trinity: '**And say not "Three"**'. It also considers it against the glory of the High Lord to have a child.

Those who said, 'Indeed Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary,' have surely disbelieved; for the Messiah [himself] said, 'O Children of Israel, worship Allah, [Who is] my Lord and your Lord. Verily whoso associateth partners with Allah, then for him Allah hath truly forbidden paradise. His abode is the Fire, and for the oppressors there are no helpers' * Those who said, 'Indeed Allah is the Third of Three' have surely disbelieved; while no deity is there but One Deity. Indeed if they refrain not from what they say, an excruciating punishment will surely afflict those of them who disbelieve. (5:72-3)

Two ideas have been denied in the above two verses. First is that Allah is the selfsame Messiah, son of Mary, and second is that Allah is the Third of the Three. The Christians claim that God is the Third of the three: the Father (*ab*), the Son (*ibn*), and the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*). *Ab*, which means 'Father', refers to the Realm of God's Essence (*dhat*), Glorified and Exalted is He. *Ibn*, which means 'Son', refers to the Realm of God's Knowledge (*'ilm*). And *ruh al-qudus*, which means 'Gabriel' or the 'Spirit', refers to the Realm of God's Life (*hayat*), the Majestic, the Supreme.

According to the above verses, both beliefs – that the Messiah, son of Mary, is God; and that God is the Third of the Three – are heresy (*kufr*).

... And the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of Allah... .' (9:30)

And they said, 'Allah hath taken unto Himself a son.' Be He glorified (2: 116)

These verses imply that the Christians consider the Messiah to be God's son. He is Glorified and Clear from what they say.

And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as deities beside Allah?'... (5: 116)

It is inferred from this verse that in addition to the divinity of Prophet Jesus, the Christians also believed in the divinity of his mother, Hadrat Maryam (Mary).[5](#)

The contradiction between unity and trinity

STUDENT. The unsoundness of the Trinity is based on the inconsistency between unity and plurality. The Gospel explicitly supports monotheism (*tawhid*), the Christians believe that God is One, and they all agree that Jesus Christ called to God's unity. But they maintain that God is at the same time one and three.

If God's unity were real (*haqiqi*) and His plurality notional (*i'tibari*), there would be no problem. And such would be the case if the plurality were real and the unity notional, except for the problem of multiple deities. However, if one says that God is one and many, both in the real sense, then this entails a contradiction and is therefore impossible. The best argument in refuting the advocates of the Trinity is that unity and plurality have two different and distinct meanings, and combining these two ideas in a single reality involves a contradiction.

And the same problem comes up with *'ayniyyah*, when one claims that God's Names and Attributes are identical with His Essence. If the attribute is not separate from the noun (i.e. God's Essence), then the union of the attribute with the noun implies that God's Essence must be One with regard to the Essence, and multiple with regard to His Names and Attributes, for they are the same as the Essence. This is a contradiction.

Thus, there is no resolution but to consider God's Names and Attributes as lower and determined levels of His Essence. In that case, the plurality [of the Names and Attributes] at the level of descension (*nuzul*) and determination (*ta'ayyun*) would not contradict the unity of the Essence. Otherwise, all the objections that pertain to the Trinity – for combining unity and plurality – would also apply here.

'ALLAMAH. The flaw in the beliefs of the Christians is that while they believe God is one, they also believe in three Primordial Origins (*al-asl al-qadim*). But uniting between real unity and real plurality is impossible if the unity and the plurality are of the same nature, such as when they both pertain to the person (*shakhs*), the species (*naw'*), or the genus (*jins*). We provide an example for each case:

As with the unity of the person, it is like maintaining that Zayd is one and at the same time he is three. Or that Zayd, 'Amr, and Bakr, while actually being three persons, are one person and have a single real existence.

As with the unity of the species, it is like claiming that while mankind is one species, it is also three species; for example it is also horse and sheep. Or that in terms of *mahiyyah* (quiddity, 'whatness'), man, horse and sheep are at the same time really one and really three.

And for the unity of the genus, it is like holding that animal (as a quiddity) is one genus and three genera at once – say, animal, tree, and rock. Or that the quiddities of animal, tree, and rock are one and many at the same time. These are impossible.

But there is no flaw in combining the unity of the species or genus and the plurality of persons. For example, mankind is a single species but has multiple persons like Zayd, 'Amr, and Bakr. Likewise there is no problem in combining the unity of the genus and the plurality of the species. For example, 'animal' is one genus but consists of multiple species like 'chicken', 'pigeon', 'horse' and 'sheep'.

Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with combining the unity of persons and the plurality of persons so long as one is *haqiqi* (real) and the other is *i'tibari* (nominal, notional, conceptual). For example, we may subdivide Zayd's body into many conceptual parts and then say, 'Though Zayd is one person in reality, he is composed of several parts.' This subdivision which results in a plurality is based on notions and not reality, and hence it does not result in any contradiction. Or we may say that 'Zayd, 'Amr and Bakr, though three in reality, are one in the sense that they are brothers, partners, or residents of the same city.' Here, their unity would be notional.

But the Christians believe in *real* plurality, and the Trinity is one of their fundamental beliefs. So if they claim that God's unity is only notional, they would actually be denying unity and rejecting monotheism altogether. And if they claim that His unity is real, that would entail combining real unity and real plurality of the person, which is impossible.

Apparently the Christians hold such a belief, and consider the three elements as God's attributes and manifestations – which are not distinct from God's Essence. They believe in the three principles and elements of existence, knowledge, and life. Knowledge is the Word, the Messiah; and life is the Spirit (*ruh*). So if their belief in the Trinity means that these elements, which are God's manifestations and epiphanies, are in union with His Essence, then the concept of Trinity would result in a contradiction.⁶

Real unity and plurality cannot apply to the same subject

'ALLAMAḤ. In other words, the belief in a Father and a Son necessarily establishes multitude (*ta'addud*), and this multitude is nothing but real plurality (*al-kathrah al-haqiqiyyah*). Now if we assume that the Father and the Son are of one species – as we do for human fathers and sons, who are one in being

humans and many in being persons of that species – then we cannot consider God as One anymore. Because the arithmetical plurality of having a Father and a Son contradicts the unity of God.

In God's unity and oneness, everything apart from Him, including the very presumed 'Son', counts as 'other' than God. And anything other than God belongs to and depends on Him. Therefore the so-called 'Son' would not be a deity (God) anymore. This is actually Allah's argument in the Qur'an:

... And say not 'Three!' Refrain; it is better for you. Allah is only One Deity. He is Glorified above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, and Allah suffices as Trustee. (4:171)

In short, combining between real plurality and real unity is impossible, and the beliefs of the Christians are rationally and philosophically invalid. That is why Paul and other heads of Christianity denounced philosophy, as the belief in the divinity of Jesus and that he is God's son is in direct opposition with rational principles.⁷

STUDENT. Accordingly, this very objection to Christianity also applies to those who hold the union of God's Attributes and Names with His Essence. God is One, Glorified and Exalted is He; yet He has many Attributes and Names which are eternal like His Essence. Thus, the 'union of God's Essence with His Names and Attributes' means combining the unity and plurality of the person both in the real sense.

And the falsity of this idea is so evident that it should count as one of the necessary principles of religion, alongside the invalidity of Trinity. Instead, we should accept the view of the gnostics ('*urafa'*) on God's unity. They are those who followed the interpreter of the Noble Qur'an, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. They esteem God's unity as an exalted and noble concept. They identify His Attributes distinct from what they are describing and as lower and confined levels of the Essence. They have truly realised that:

Every attribute testifies that it is other than the noun [which it describes].⁸

Their approach is based on genuine monotheism (*tawhid*). But the *tawhid* of others is mixed with impurities of multiplicity in God's Essence, and so their approach is essentially the same as that of the Christians who believe in the Trinity. Perhaps the reason why many Muslim theologians denounce philosophy and forbid engaging in intellectual problems is that they fear lest philosophy may disclose the reality of their beliefs. They fear that philosophy may reveal that their *tawhid* is mixed with multiplicity and has more than enough shares of polytheism.

It is based on this idea that the late Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i Tihrani – the grand gnostic – insisted on sheer unity, and argued against the union of the Names and Attributes with the Essence most vehemently. According to him, God's Names are manifestations and creations of His Essence, as reported in authentic narrations.⁹ God's Names and Attributes should be viewed at their limits and determinations (*ta'ayyun*), and God's Essence should be taken as a Simple (*basit*) Existence, free from any blend of plurality.

Here, the intention of this humble being is not to refute the religion of the Christians – though its falsity is obvious and it has been shown that the Trinity involves certain contradictions. But what I want to say is that in terms of the impossibility of uniting the unity (*wahdah*) of the Truth and the Trinity of His Attributes and Manifestations (referred to as *aqanim*; i.e. elements, hypostases), exactly the *same* impossibility applies when one asserts the unity of God's Essence but also advocates the union of His Names and Attributes with His Essence. In reaching real *tawhid*, there is no way out and no escape from the *tawhid* of the gnostics (*'urafa'*).

The true sense of God's unity of Essence

STUDENT. The fact of the matter regarding the *tawhid* of the Eternal Essence of God is to consider God's Essence absolutely and utterly impeccable, unadulterated, and pure of any blend of plurality altogether – whether mental or actual, external or internal. That is indeed the word of truth and the truth of the word.

The philosophers' gradation of being concerning God's unity

'ALLAMAH. In those correspondences (between Ayatollah Gharawi Isfahani and Ayatollah Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i, noted above), the late Gharawi Isfahani advocates the Gradation of Being (*tashkik al-wujud*), and has followed the approach of philosophers like Mulla Sadra, Hakim Sabzivari, and others.

But there is no problem with this view of *tawhid*, because in the gradation of being, according to the Fahlawiyyun, ¹⁰ being (*wujud*) consists of many degrees and planes. A higher degree is different from a lower one in terms of intensity and moderation, abundance and scarcity, strength and weakness and so on.

Being to the Fahlawiyyun is a reality,
With an all-inclusive gradation.
Different grades of richness and poverty,
Like the grades of light in intensity.

(Sabzivari)

So at the same time that being is a single and simple (*basit*, not composite) reality, it involves several levels, starting from the highest degrees at one end, and gradually descending to the lowest degree at the other end. And the rest of the degrees are positioned accordingly between these two. It is such that the higher we go in the chain of these degrees, *wujud* becomes stronger, broader, and more intense. On the other hand, the lower we go, *wujud* becomes weaker and more limited.

Every higher plane includes the perfection (*kamal*) of its lower planes, but not vice versa. It is just like light, in that while it has a single meaning and a simple reality, it includes a long and extended chain of

intensities. Its highest degree is at the sun, and its lowest degree is in the dark holes of the earth. And between these two degrees there are various degrees and intensities of light, all within the same spectrum. The brightest light is at the sun, and slightly below it, the light is a bit weaker, dimmer, and more distant [from perfection]. And thus it becomes weaker, more limited, fainter, and more distant at the lower degrees, until the last degree of light in terms of faintness, deficiency, and imperfection.

In general, the discrepancy between these degrees can be explained and distinguished as perfection and imperfection (*kamal wa naqs*). A superior plane includes the perfections of its lower planes, but not vice versa. That is, a lower plane does not include the planes above it and the perfections that they have. The source of light, where the most perfect light exists, is at the top of the chain, and the weakest degree of light, which is a faint and dim shadow, is at the lowest end.

The concept of light is the same across all these degrees, and it is a simple (*basit*) entity. However, the cause of difference is exactly the same as the factor of similarity. Each degree of the long chain and extended continuum of light is distinct from the other degrees because of the selfsame light (which is common between them), and not anything else. Therefore light has a graded reality (*al-haqiqah al-mushakkikah*), meaning that despite having one essence, it has different degrees (of brightness) in that very essence.

Concerning *wujud* ('spiritual' light), God is at the highest level of the continuum (Majestic He is). He is the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*), and His light is infinite in terms of intensity, power, extent, primacy, and perfection.

Then as we descend from that plane, we reach the different planes of divine immaterial intellects and powerful souls. Further below is the realm of ideas and forms (*amthal wa suwar*), and then the realm of matter and nature (*maddah wa tabi'ah*), which is the faintest of all realms and planes. Particularly prime matter (*hayula, materia prima*) is sheer potentiality and ranks below all perfections.

And since the Attributes and Names of the Necessary Being (most Exalted) are boundless, they can also be assumed at the highest end of this chain. They are in union with the Sacred Essence of the Necessary (*wajib*), at the utmost degree of strength, breadth, intensity, and perfection. Thus they have the simplicity (*basatah*) and unity (*wahdah*) of the Essence due to their union with it.

This is the contention of the late Shaykh Muhammad Husayn [Gharawi Isfahani], Mulla Sadra, Shaykh al-Ishraq (Master of Illumination) Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, and the likes of them among the prominent sages.

STUDENT. The concept of gradation of being does not settle the matter or solve the problem. Because first of all, what you said above would entail composition in God's Essence, which is the highest level of being according to the theory of gradation. For, if that level is in union with the Divine Names and Attributes, then all of those Names and Attributes – with their limits – should have actual substantiation (*tahaqquq*) in the Essence. And obviously each Name and Attribute is not merely a notion and concept,

but has an external instance corresponding to It. Hence gradation would involve composition in God's Essence, the very flaw of the Trinity.

Second, the whole theory of gradation of being is questionable and open to doubt. For this theory sets the Essence of the Necessary, Supreme as His Status, at the uppermost plane of the continuum, and then considers the contingent beings at the lower planes and degrees, positioned based on their proximity and distance (i.e. their intensity and degree of existence). But this limits God to the bounds of the contingent beings, and confines His existence to the highest limit of the contingent beings. This is due to the supposition that the Necessary Being and all contingent beings share in the reality of existence, and their distinction is based on their particular shares of existence and their quiddities (*mahiyyah*, i.e. the limits of existence). This means God's existence (which is the same as His quiddity) is limited to the highest degree of the contingent beings, because God is set adjacent and next to that degree. [11](#)

At most, the existence of the Necessary would be distinguished from the other levels of existence based on intensity and weakness, and necessity and contingency. But this does solve the problem of limitation, because at the end of the day, God's existence will be bounded by that of the contingent beings, and would lie within those limits.

But we know that God's Essence, i.e. His existence, is Sheer (*mahd*) and Absolute (*sirf*), meaning that the unity of God's Essence is absolute (*bi al-sirafah*) and not arithmetical. Therefore, anything you imagine in the universe is within It. Otherwise It would lose Its utter sheerness and total absoluteness. Now, given that God's being is absolute, how can it involve any levels and degrees? And how can it be regarded as the highest degree [on the graded spectrum of being]? Its absoluteness of degree embraces all planes and degrees and annihilates them all in itself. So if God's being is absolute, how can there be any room for other beings? This is the basis of *burhan al-siddiqin* ('the proof of the truthful').

'ALLAMAH. In gradation of being, the series of beings in the various planes of existence do not exhibit a horizontal or lateral (*'ardi*) relation to one another. It is not that the planes stand next to and at the limit and boundary of one another. That would confine a superior plane to the limit of the plane below it. Rather, the planes of existence are positioned vertically and longitudinally (*tuli*, each plane includes and is beyond its lower plane). In relation to one another, the planes of existence compose a continuum of causes and effects.

Each higher plane is a cause for its lower plane, and each lower plane is the effect of its higher plane. Thus, since the cause comprises the perfections of its effect (and not vice versa), every degree in the graded chain of being includes every perfection of the degrees below it, and not vice versa.

Hence, each degree on this longitudinal chain comprises the perfections of its lower degree, and that lower degree in turn comprises the perfections of its lower degree, and so on, until we reach the last and

lowest degree of being.

For example, if we assume the graded chain composed of ten degrees, the first degree, which is the lowest, possesses one degree of perfection. The second degree, which is higher than the first, holds two degrees of perfection, meaning that it includes the perfection of the first degree, but not vice versa. And the third degree includes the perfection of number two. That is, anything present in number two – at any intensity, abundance, proximity, power, and so on – is entirely found in number three. Therefore, in any plane of the chain, the lower planes are present in-act (*bi al-fi'l*). This way, any higher plane is not restricted to the limits of its lower planes.

The Essence of the Necessary (the Majestic, the All-Mighty) is at the utmost degree of these levels. Thus, all of the perfections of the lower degrees exist in Him in-act (as opposed to potentially). There is no perfection at any plane which is not present – to its fullest – in the Essence of the Necessary.

Gradation of being and unity of the gnostics

'ALLAMAH. Meanwhile, the *tawhid* (monotheism) of the gnostics does not contradict gradation of being (*tashkik al-wujud*). It rather involves a deeper and more subtle view on being.

According to the philosophers' theory of gradation, contingent beings possess real existence, except that their existence is contingent and limited. Each existent is the effect of the one above it, up to the Essence of the Necessary Being, Majestic is He. Therefore all beings are God's effects and signs of His Magnificence and Grandeur.

However, for the gnostics, existence exclusively belongs to the Essence of the Truth. The rest of the existents (i.e. the contingent beings) are all shadows and shades of God's existence. They are utter manifestations and nothing beyond that. Alluding existence to them is metaphorical and not real. They are only nominally called 'existents'. This does not contradict the view of the philosophers, but it is a deeper and finer view of the existents. In fact, the gnostics' view encompasses that of the philosophers.

But the objection to the Christians, which is valid and unavoidable, is that they believe in three *independent* elements. It is this view that contradicts unity.

Gradation contradicts the absoluteness of God's existence

STUDENT. Of course, in gradation of being, *wujud* (existence, being) is absolute (i.e. unconditional, unmixed, and not numerical), meaning that every grade of the continuum is included in the absolute existence. However, the *wujud* of God's Essence (the Majestic, the All-Mighty) is also Absolute (*sirf*) and Sheer (*mahd*). And that is why gradation contradicts the absoluteness of the Essence of the Necessary.

The absoluteness (*sirafah*) of existence of God's Essence does not leave any existence for others. It does not recognise existence for them even as effects (*ma'lul*, of the higher planes). In other words,

absoluteness does not unite with otherness (*ghayriyyah*, i.e. the existence of others). The claim that God's Essence comprises the perfections of Its effects still allows for some otherness, such as otherness in terms of intensity and weakness. However, any otherness contradicts the absoluteness of God's being.

The subtle view of the gnostics invalidates the view of the philosophers. The philosophers' view is at some level of precision; the gnostics' view passes beyond that level and then refutes it. Seeing the unity of the Truth and observing the absoluteness in His being, a gnostic cannot see or even imagine any 'other' for Him. A gnostic regards all existents as rays, shades, relations, and labels of the Essence of the Truth. In this view of the gnostics – which is pure *tawhid* – the reality of *wujud* exclusively belongs to God's Essence. This view involves neither the problem of many eternal beings, nor the inconsistency between the absoluteness of existence and claiming existence of other (contingent) beings. And this elucidates the [true] meaning of these verses:

... There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth, nor of five but He is their sixth, nor of less than that or more but He is with them wherever they may be. (58:7)

... And He is with you wherever you are, and Allah sees what you do. (57:4)

According to the gnostics' view of unity (*wahdah*), the togetherness (*ma'iyah*) of the Truth with all beings is real (*haqiqi*). It is like that of a pole and its shade, or that of a leaning post and its support. This sense of unity does not entail numerical unity, for the Essence of the Truth, Whose unity is absolute and not numerical, is together with every being. He is with any three, four, five or more or less, without adding to their count. But in case of the Trinity, God is certainly taken as a numeric 'One'. Likewise, the claim that the existential otherness between God's Essence and His Names and Attributes is like the otherness between the cause and the effect (causal relationship) also reduces to numerical otherness.

So if we want to deny all sorts of numerical unity for God's Essence, we must accept His absolute unity. In that case, no 'other' can be imagined for Him, not even as an effect. Instead, all beings would be His names, His manifestations, and expressions of His Sacred Essence, and attributing existence to them would be but a notional and metaphorical ascription.

The personal unity of God's existence

'ALLAMAH. This argument of yours is complete and sound only if you add another premise to your argument! And that is to assume that *wujud* is characterised by *al-wahdah al-shakhsiyyah* (personal unity, unity of person)! In that case, absolute *wujud*, which only involves one person, would be nothing but the Essence of the Truth. Then no being – on the earth or in the heavens, in the material or divine realms – would have any existence of its own. Existence for all beings will be an accident (*'arad*) and a merely metaphorical allusion.

It is not sufficient for *wujud* to be absolutely one, but it should also have personal unity (*tashakhkhush*). Otherwise, the purely one *wujud* may have multiple realisations (in many persons), such as a Necessary realisation and a contingent one. So that would again take us away from the unity of the gnostics. To go around this, one must also maintain that any purely one *wujud* must have only one person. Then given that *wujud* is characterised by unity of person, one can talk about the unity of *wujud* and its properties.

A long time ago I wrote an Arabic treatise on guardianship (*wilayah*), and there I proved the personal unity of being, meaning that being has only one person (*tashakhkhush*). So there is one and only one external and actual person for being, and it is impossible to have more than one person (*shakhs*, i.e. instance) of it. If the absoluteness of God's existence is to leave no room and no existence for any other being, then existence must have unity of person; that is, in the whole universe, there should be only one person of existence. That is because the unity of person cannot be combined with any kind of plurality, though one can have plurality with other forms of unity, such as unity of species (*naw'*) and even graded (*tashkiki*) unity. But if a reality has only one person, it would not allow for any plurality.

Thus, if the reality of the Truth (Glorious and Exalted is He) is one person, i.e. characterised by personal unity, then it is impossible for it to involve any plurality. That is a complete argument. *Wujud* is identical to the one person of *wujud* that exists. God is not one as a genus or species or class or anything like that, but He is 'the person' (of *wujud*).

There is no occupant in the house except Him. (Nur 'Ali Shah Isfahani, d. 1199/1785)

It is based on this argument that the Qur'an argues against the Trinity. Why is it that **'Those who said, "Indeed Allah is the Third of Three" have surely disbelieved' (5:73)**, or that,

'Say not "Three!" Refrain; it is better for you' (4:171)?

The Qur'an charges all Christians [who believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ] with infidelity based on the logic that no type of plurality can define and confine the Essence of the Exalted Creator, Who is personally One.

Certainly *wujud* (being) is characterised by unity of person, or as the gnostics of Allah put it, it is a *tashakhkhush* (personality, individuality). Thus, the being in any existent is in fact God's being, not its own, for it has no being [of its own]. It is God's being that we see in the earth, the heavens, the animals, and all the multiplicities that we see. Being is One (that of Allah), not multiple (that of the objects). There is only one instance of being and no multiplicities therewith. Attributing being to the multiplicities is only metaphorical (*majaz*) and accidental (*'aradi*).

Aversion of the infidels' hearts from God's unity

STUDENT. It is remarkable how clearly the Noble Qur'an describes God's unity (*tawhid*). It is as if the

entire Qur'an was revealed in order to describe the Supreme Truth (*al-Haqq*) and everything that relates to Him. It is a textbook of *tawhid*.

And it is so astonishing how the people run away from the *tawhid* of the Supreme Truth. They do their best to somehow drag God down to the realm of pluralities (*katharat*), and pollute His Reality with impurities of pluralities. Glorified and Exalted is He.

How far and distant they are from God's unity! Wherever there is a mention of it, they rise against it. And how much they love the realm of pluralities, so much that they even want God to have a share in it. Is it because of the congruity between them and the realm of pluralities? After all, it is their abode, to which they are accustomed.

... And when thou mentionest thy Lord in the Qur'an as One, they turn their backs in aversion. (17:46)

And when Allah is mentioned alone, the hearts of those who believe not in the hereafter wince.... (39:45)

[The infidels are addressed on the Day of Judgment:] ***That is because whenever Allah alone was called you disbelieved.... (40: 12)***

'ALLAMAH. The verses in Chapter 102 (*al-Takathur*) are [even] more astounding than these verses that you mentioned:

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All- Compassionate * Rivalry in worldly increase distracted you * Until you visited the graves * No indeed; you will come to know * Again no indeed; you will come to know * No indeed; if you know with knowledge of certitude * You would [or will] surely see the hell * Then you will surely see it with vision of certitude * Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty. (102: 1-8)

'Rivalry in worldly increase distracted you * Until you visited the graves'

'ALLAMAH. In certain cases, the Qur'an is beyond being explicit – though our hearts are such that we refuse to accept the Qur'an's message, and thus we interpret the verses otherwise. The verses are saying:

Seeing and seeking multitudes engaged you from seeing the beauty of the Truth and diverted you from absolute unity; until you are sent down [dead] into the graves!

No indeed; you will soon find out! Again, no indeed (there is no truth or reality in pluralities); you will soon find out! No, it is not so!

If you know with knowledge of certitude (and realise the fact of the matter), indeed you would find (these pluralities) as hell and blazing fire! Then indeed you will realise that fire with real certitude! Then you will surely be asked about the great bounty, which is a servant's means to achieve proximity to God. You will be asked about the extent to which you removed the veil of pluralities and stepped into the field of unity (*tawhid*)!

These verses have been interpreted in two ways. One is that during the Age of Ignorance (*jahiliyyah*) and the early years of the appearance of Islam, the Arabs and nomadic tribes used to take pride against each other. They used to count the number of the heroes and stars of each tribe, and the tribe with the most heroes would be the winner. This process sometimes used to go beyond limits, such that if a party sensed it was being defeated, they would start counting the dead. So they would go to the cemetery and count the number of the dead from each tribe, known from their names and titles. They would add the number of the dead to the living, and for example say, 'Our heroes and stars count to forty: thirty alive and ten dead.'

The second meaning is that these multiplicities and your regards and aspirations for them engrossed you in themselves and precluded you from observing the Truth. And this continues until the time of death, meaning that so long as you are alive you seek and follow the distracting multiplicities, and you keep doing so until you die!

STUDENT. This amassment (*takathur*) is absolute and unconditional (*mutlaq*). It is not only about the amassment of wealth and children, but it also applies to the amassment of virtuous deeds and knowledge – of law (*fiqh*), principles of law (*usul*), tradition (*hadith*), and other subjects and skills. It generally includes any accretion that veils one from the vision of the Truth and the unity of His Precinct, Majestic and All-Mighty is He. All of these are *takathur* (rivalry in amassment) and result in one's engagement in them instead of being engaged in Allah. These multiplicities preclude one from the attempt and endeavour to attain and realise the unity of the Truth.

Mankind ceaselessly seeks knowledge. He wants to know others before knowing himself. He desires to know the universe, the societies, the earth, the time, the heavens, the stars and the planets. He wants this book and that book, and his wants are not satiated 'until you visit the graves.' He is neglectful of the *na'im* (the great bounty) and all that is to be found in the vision (*liqa'*) of Allah! He is unaware of what is going on there, and what assets and benefits he has lost due to the veil of multiplicities! Thus, being empty-handed of what is real (*haqiqah*), he seeks gathering what is unreal (*majaz*); he deviates from unity (*wahdah*) and turns to plurality. This state of seeking, seeing and being obsessed with pluralities continues in man's life until he dies and enters the grave, when the roll of his life is recoiled.

'ALLAMAH. That is right, this verse is unconditional. Any sort of accumulation impedes one from striving for Allah and unity. The latter interpretation is preferred to the former, which is not so compelling.

And going back to the letters between the two honourable scholars, Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i and Shaykh

Muhammad Husayn Isfahani (may Allah be pleased with them) concerning gradation (*tashkik*) and unity (*wahdah*) of being, the late Shaykh was not finally convinced by the unitary gnostic ideas of the late Sayyid. However, later on (after Ayatollah Karbala'i's death), Sayyid Hasan Kashmiri resumed the debate with the late Shaykh following the arguments of the late Sayyid Ahmad, until he convinced the late Shaykh.

When I was in Najaf and used to benefit from my master, the late Qadi, one day I was in a state of trance (*khalsah*) when I attended the presence of Hadrat 'Ali ibn Ja'far (may Allah be pleased with him). It felt like he was drawing near, to the extent that I could sense the air around his body and hear his breathing. 'The concept of unity (*wahdah*)' he told me, 'is amongst the certain and fundamental principles of us, the Household of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt).'

The problem with gradation of being

STUDENT. This matter should still be clarified: are gradation of being (*tashkik al-wujud*) and unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) two incompatible theories, or are they both true, except that the latter is superior to and more complete than the former?

The advocates of *tawhid* (i.e. the gnostics) claim that the Sacred Essence of the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*) does not assume any name or title, never bears any determination (*ta'ayyun*), Its existence is absolute, and Its unity is not an arithmetical unity. Therefore, if we confine It by any determination – be it in any way or manner – that determination results in contradistinction (*tamyiz*) of God's Essence and negates Its absoluteness.

But the advocates of gradation claim that the Essence of the Necessary Being is the highest degree of existence, and that Its supremacy, grandeur, dominance and intensity distinguish It from the other beings. The existence of the Necessary Being and that of the contingent beings are both pure and simple (*basit*), and therefore the point of their distinction is the selfsame existence, for they have nothing but existence. This means that what distinguishes the different levels in the continuum of existence is the actual existence – whether it is the distinction between the Necessary Being and contingent beings, or between a stronger contingent being and a weaker one. This is a characteristic of graded realities, that although their elements differ from one another; this difference is due to the selfsame graded reality, not due to a nonexistent, external or essential (*mahuwi*, based on quiddity) factor.

That is how the reality of the Necessary is distinguished from the other planes of existence. We distinguish God's existence by regarding it as greater, more solvent and at a higher degree compared to the contingent beings, which are smaller, weaker and at lower degrees of existence. But these are concepts that denote external instances (sing. *misdaq*) corresponding to them. These are relative properties of existence (*wujud*), and therefore this way of distinguishing the Necessary Being from contingent beings entails the determination (*ta'ayyun*) and delimitation of the existence of the Necessary.

Of course, the higher degrees comprise the perfections of the lower degrees, but there is still some distinction between them. It does not entail that existence has only one person (*tashakhkhus*). Even this slightest amount of contradistinction (*tamyiz*) and separation between the graded degrees results in the delimitation and determination of the Necessary, and suffices to deny the absoluteness (*sirafah*) of the highest degree of existence. Hence the Supreme Truth will be reduced to an arithmetical entity, Exalted is He.

But it is proven that His existence is absolute, and the breadth and dominion of His existence has overwhelmed and annihilated all beings. This idea has also been mentioned in supplications and narrations.

[He is] One, but not as a number; [and] Upright, but without any support. [12](#)

Gradation of being and tawhid of the gnostics

‘ALLAMAH. According to gradation of being, the highest degree of existence is superior to all other degrees in all aspects, such as power, intensity, and abundance. The highest degree is the cause, and the other beings are its effects. This does not contradict the absoluteness (*sirafah*) of existence, but is actually equivalent to the concept of absoluteness.

The graded chain of being extends from weakness to perfection. Every lower plane is the effect of the plane above it, and every higher plane is the cause of the plane below it. Meanwhile, it has been proven that the cause incorporates the effect entirely, except the aspects of deficiency of the effect, which are due to its quiddity and nonexistent limitations. The cause has immediate and presential knowledge (*al-’ilm al-huduri*) of the effect. Therefore, the Necessary Being, which is the End of the ends and the Origin of the origins, is the cause of every grade of the chain of being; He is both the efficient cause (*’illat al-fa’ili*) and the final cause (*’illat al-ghayi*). Hence, He includes the existential perfections and realisations of the lower planes. There is no perfection found in any plane except that it is actually present in the Essence of the Necessary Being, and this is the selfsame absoluteness of existence.

Therefore the absoluteness of God’s existence does not contradict its being the highest degree of existence.

So the idea is that when we go through the degrees of being, the perfection (*kamal*) of any lower degree is present in the degree above it, while the perfection of the higher degree is not held by the lower degree. And this higher degree would itself count as the lower degree compared to the one above it, and thus the higher degree incorporates the perfection of the lower degree, but not vice versa. So each degree will be lower than the one above it.

And thus the sequence goes up to the highest degree, above which nothing exists. And since this sequence cannot go up infinitely – for it is impossible to have an infinite regression (*tasalsul*) – it must

reach a Maximum above which there is nothing. Then that Maximum comprises all perfections and realisations of the lower degrees put together. This is while none of the lower degrees comprise the perfection of that Highest Degree, despite their number and multitude.

The realisation of all perfections in the highest level is the same as absoluteness of existence. That is because any excellence, intensity, solvency, power and any other kind of perfection that we may imagine is present there. Based on our assumption, He is the Cause, and the cause comprises all perfections of the effect.

One cannot claim that although the Highest Degree of perfection includes the perfections of its lower degrees, it does not include the *actual* lower degrees (i.e. claiming some distinction), and so that is a constraint on its absoluteness.

That is not true because the existence that an inferior degree has is nothing but perfection. The aspects of quiddity and limitation of the inferior degree have no existence; they are nonexistent matters (i.e. its inferiority and non-perfection are things that it *does not have*; therefore anything that it *has* is some degree and form of perfection). Thus, anything that an inferior degree has – any realisation, existence or sign of existence – is found in the degrees above it.

The inferior is a degree of existential perfection, characterised by what it has in terms of solvency, intensity, abundance, proximity, precedence, and so on. All of these, without their nonexistent and inherent limits, are present at the superior degree in-act. The superior degree has presential and immediate knowledge to the inferior degree, meaning that the latter is under the dominance, power, and authority of the former.

The example of light is often used here, and it clarifies the subject quite well: assume the spectrum of sunlight to have a hundred degrees from its source at the sun down to the earth. Then we would have light of degree one on the earth, above which is degree two, above which is degree three, and above which are degrees four, five, six and so on, up to the sun, whose light is assumed to be of degree one hundred.

Any of these degrees and intensities of light in the spectrum contains the light of the lower degrees and intensities, but not vice versa. And there is no light that is not present at the highest degree (one hundred) which is the source of light and the perfection of light. So there is a series of degrees, one above another, which make up the degrees of light.

Any higher degree is the cause of the degree below it. The lowest degree lacks the perfections of the higher degrees, while the highest degree includes the perfections of the lower degrees. One degree means one degree of perfection, and two degrees means two degrees of perfection. And a hundred degrees means a hundred degrees of perfection, which incorporates the perfections of all one hundred degrees. This is the meaning of absoluteness (*sirafah*).

Absoluteness means to not involve any form of constraint, and since the highest degree (the hundredth degree) involves no constraint whatsoever, gradation does not contradict absoluteness. In fact this is nothing but absoluteness! This example of degrees and intensities of visible light is a very appropriate example, and elucidates the idea. Likewise is the case with the true and genuine light, which is the reality of being.

Real tawhid is only that of the gnostics

STUDENT. In gradation of being, the numerous grades of being have real and genuine existence. Being is the point of similarity between all degrees in the continuum, and at the same time it is what makes the degrees different from one other. Meanwhile we know that being is a single reality. Therefore, the reality of being has adopted actual gradation based on its intensity or weakness, precedence or delay, and so on. So existence, which is a single reality, is graded, meaning that it consists of different instances that are all entities of existence. The notions of existence and existent apply to all these instances.

But the actual nature of existence, which underlies the whole continuum, is a simple entity, and its unity is certainly absolute. There is nothing against it to designate and classify it as a number. It is such that 'Any second entity that you assume for it reduces back to that first one, and whatever you assume to be outside of it, is inside it.'¹³ That is because it is absolute, and this is the meaning of absoluteness.

Sure, the utmost degree of being, the Necessary Being, certainly incorporates all perfections of its inferior degrees. And all grades of being are actually present in it, apart from their nonexistent and inherent limits. Yet there should certainly be something that distinguishes the highest degree from the other degrees, and that is nothing but the notion of 'otherness' (*ghayriyyah*).

Thus, although the inferior beings – excluding their limits – are present at the highest degree, they are outside and external to it because of involving those limits. This exclusion and being outside entails some division and detachment that separates the two existents, and this contradicts the absoluteness of being. There should be no numbers if there is absoluteness, but here we are dealing with numbers.

Even though the Necessary Being is at the top of the continuum and is the cause of the other beings, there is nevertheless a numerical distinction between the cause and the effects. The inclusion of the effect – without its limits – in the cause is not sufficient for the union and oneness of the effect and the cause.

And since the Essence (i.e. existence) of the Necessary is Absolutely One, the concept of existence can only be true for an absolute entity. There must only be one person and instance of existence, which includes all existents (the contingent beings). In other words, there should be One Individual Being (*al-wujud al-shakhsi*), which is sheer necessity (*wujub*), such that all contingent beings are its manifestations, epiphanies and expressions, as opposed to themselves having [actual] existence.

This is realised in the theory of unity or *wahdah* (of the gnostics). It has already been proven that first, being (*wujud*) is characterised by unity of person; and second, there is only one *wujud*. This means that *wujud* is the single person, and that is Allah, Exalted is He.

This Personal Being is absolute, for there is nothing outside of It, and thus It cannot be enumerated. All beings are Its signs and images, without any existence of themselves. Alluding existence to them is a notional and metaphorical reference. The stamp of privation, nothingness, need, and indigence is printed on all their foreheads. Thus, the belief in gradation of being does not represent pure *tawhid*. At the end of the day, it involves some idea of constraint and number in the Essence of the Necessary, though this constraint and number may be subtle and hidden.

The reality of God's unity

STUDENT. The gnostics have followed the teachings of Imam 'Ali in *Nahj al-Balaghah* and his other speeches, and the words of wisdom of the two Sadiqs (Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq, peace be upon them). These Imams were the real exegetes of the Noble Qur'an on the subject of *tawhid*.

The theory of gradation of being has no value in the school of the gnostics, which dispenses with gradation of being altogether, and sets [real] *tawhid* as its basis and foundation.

Say, He, Allah is One * Allah is the Independent [and Besought by all] * He begetteth not nor was begotten * And there is no counterpart for Him. (112: 1-4)

He is the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward; and He is All-Knowing of everything. (57:3)

His *ghirah* (jealousy, protectiveness) [14](#) did not leave any *ghayr* (other) in the world.

Things in the world are only apparitions,
Images in mirrors, fantasy, or illusions.

(‘Abd al-Rahman Jami)

People of the ‘ruins’ (*kharabat*) have some criteria:

Tawhid is to drop everything that's extra.

Being, which moves in its own perfection,

Is only determined in one's conception.

(Shabistari)

‘ALLAMAH. I also know similar poems! But unfortunately the matter is not resolved by poetry. Of course one cannot maintain that there are various instances and persons of being. The concept of being (*qua* being, in itself) does not allow for multiple persons of being. Thus, if gradation of being requires

accepting multiple persons of being, then gradation should be rejected. But if I remember right, according to my explanations in the *Risalat al-Wilayah*, which I wrote long ago, the idea that God is the highest degree of being (i.e. gradation of being) does not contradict the absoluteness of being. [15](#)

[Adequate elucidation on the gradation and unity of being](#)

‘ALLAMAH. What we mentioned about the series of planes of being was to establish the gradation of being. The idea is that if there is some being, then if there is to be another being, one of them will be inferior to the other and included by it in terms of being. What the inferior being possesses belongs entirely to the superior one. The same idea applies as we consider a third being and so on. This keeps going up until it reaches a degree above which there is no degree, and that must be the Necessary Being. This means that being is graded, and the degree of the Necessary Being would be the highest. If being is to be absolute, it is only so at that highest degree. This is the argument of the proponents of gradation of being.

But this is not sufficient to establish both the gradation of being and its absoluteness (*sirafah*). It is only a hypothesis that considers the highest level of being along a series of beings. And of course the utmost degree would be absolute since it comprises all perfections. No being lies outside the domain of His existence and reality. As a realisation and instance of existence, He includes and overshadows everything that has any element of existence and perfection. Nonetheless, the subject is subtle; it must be reflected upon and investigated more, and I will think more about it, if Allah wills.

[God’s Essence transcends all names, identities, and determinations](#)

STUDENT. Is it possible to derive many concepts from the Sacred Essence of the Truth, Exalted He is? If yes, based on what grounds and reason? And if not, how have the Names and Attributes of the High Truth, Majestic and Exalted He is, come to be? Are God’s Names and Attributes, which are certainly concepts with external instances, in togetherness (*ma’iyyah*) and identification (*‘ayniyyah*) with His Essence? Or are they at a different plane from that of the Essence, and count as lower determinations and delimitations of the Essence?

For we know that it is impossible to derive multiple concepts from an Essence that is Simple in every aspect (*basit*, i.e. pure, uniform, unmixed). Concepts (sing. *mafhum*) are mentally derived from external instances (sing. *misdaq*). Thus if there are many concepts, it means that there are many instances corresponding to those concepts. So how can we associate multiple concepts with a single instance (i.e. God’s Essence)?

The answer of Mulla Sadra and Sabzivari (who advocated the union of God’s Names and Attributes with His Essence) is that the multiplicity of God’s Names and Attributes – such as All-Knower, All-Powerful,

and so on – is only a conceptual matter and a result of mental derivation. The mind ascribes these Names and Attributes to the Essence because there are aspects of knowledge and power in God's Actions – i.e. His Actions (*af'ala*) exhibit knowledge and power. That is what it means when we say that God is Knowledgeable and Powerful. [16](#)

Likewise, Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Isfahani insists on the identification (*'ayniyyah*) of God's Names and Attributes with His Essence, and does not consider it impossible to derive multiple concepts from a Single Essence in one way or another. But the late Sayyid Ahmad Tihrani Karbala'i insists against the union of God's Essence with His Names and Attributes.

'ALLAMAH. Certainly there is no way to derive multiple concepts from an Essence that is One and Simple in every aspect.

And no doubt the controversy over the union and disunion of God's Attributes and Names with His Essence does not concern *all* Names and Attributes. There is no controversy on the Attributes and Names of Action (*fi'l*) such as the Sustainer (*al-Raziq*), the All-Wise (*al-Hakim*), the Creator (*al-Khaliq*), the Forgiver (*al-Ghafir*) and the like. The disagreement is concerning the Names and Attributes of Essence (*dhat*), such as knowledge, power, life, hearing, and sight.

So we may put the Attributes of Action aside. And the Attributes of Essence reduce to the five mentioned above. In fact, hearing and sight further reduce to knowledge. Therefore only three Attributes of Essence are left: life, knowledge, and power. Here we are particularly concerned with God's knowledge and power pertaining to His Essence, just like life, which is an Attribute of God's Essence.

To make this matter clear, we maintain that, in general, concepts give rise to plurality. Each concept, essentially and in and of itself, is necessarily separate and distinct from the other concepts. Hence, identifying something as an instance of a concept involves some delimitation of that concept. One who reflects upon it finds that this delimitation is a necessary consequence of assuming an external instance for a concept. Equivalently, if a concept is to be identified with an instance that is unlimited in its essence, the concept must be at a plane that is inferior and subsequent to that of the unlimited essence. We also know that the predicate (*mahmul*) is subsequent and inferior to the subject (*mawdu'*).

Now, the Essence of the Necessary Being is unbounded, since His existence is absolute. Hence, this absolute existence (i.e. God's Essence) is above all determinations that are associated with the Divine Names and Attributes. His Essence is above all conceptual limits and requirements, including this very rule. Our claim that 'God's Essence is not ruled by anything' predicates a rule on God's Essence (the subject). But the utterly Simple Essence is higher and purer than being the subject of our rule (or *any* rule). Therefore, that Sacred Reality is unconditional (*mutlaq*) and free of all confinement, including this very ruling and requirement (of unconditionality) that we 'impose' on it.

This means that the rationally proven identification (*'ayniyyah*) between the Essence and the Attributes only goes in one direction – meaning that the Essence is the same (*'ayn*) as the Attributes, but the

Attributes are not the same as the Essence. By this we mean that the Essence stands on Its own, but the Attributes depend on the Essence.

STUDENT. Can one prove that only one concept can be derived from a Single and Purely Simple Essence on the grounds that ‘From One, there emerges only one’ (*al-wahidu la yasduru minhu illa al-wahid*), which has been shown to be true?¹⁷ That is, can it be used to show that it is impossible to derive multiple concepts from a Simple Essence?

‘ALLAMAH. Of course that discussion concerns the subject of causality and not that of inference and derivation (*intiza*’). Nevertheless, it may be that the basis of that argument and its premises also apply to this case, though it has not yet been argued as such.¹⁸

What is meant by manifestation (tajalli)?

STUDENT. There is an idea that is repeatedly found in the works on mysticism and philosophy, that ‘There is no recurrence (*takrar*) in manifestation (*tajalli*).’¹⁹ What does ‘manifestation’ mean here?

‘ALLAMAH. It means existential manifestation. There is only one external realisation (*tahaqquq*) of existence, and an existent cannot be realised twice. Zayd has a unique realisation of existence. There cannot be two realisations of Zayd while he is a single entity; it is meaningless to have two instances of him. Zayd is one; we do not have two Zayds; we do not have two Commanders of the Faithful (two Amir al-Mu’minins).

This does not mean that a person’s existence cannot be identified with two where’s or when’s (two positions or times). There is a different reason for that, but that is not called recurrence in manifestation. If a substance (*jawhar*) has two accidents (*‘arad*), that is not recurrence of manifestation, like Zayd’s being in two times or two locations concurrently. The denial of recurrence of manifestation means that one substance does not become two substances, and one realisation of existence does not become two realisations of existence. There is only one existential realisation (no recurrence). Number one does not become number two. Existence is one, and the realisation of existence is one. And a single realisation does not become two.

Thus, the whole created world is all but one manifestation. From the beginning to the end of the universe, each realisation is unique and without recurrence. The universe is one unit and a single entity. If we look at the whole universe, it is a single entity with a single realisation; and if we look at a part of it, [again] it is a single entity with a single realisation.

All these images and figures full of grace
Were a single flash of the Tapster’s face
That shone on the glass of time and space.

(Hafiz)

'The soul is bodily in origination and spiritual in subsistence'

STUDENT. The principle that the soul is bodily in origination and spiritual in subsistence (*jismaniyyat al-huduth, ruhaniyyat al-baqa'*) is truly precious, sensible, and clear.²⁰ It has been proven by the doctrine of transubstantial motion (*al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*), which is itself verified by certain verses of the Noble Qur'an, and was established and solidified by Mulla Sadra (may Allah be pleased with him).

What are the most evident and relevant verses of the Qur'an on this subject?²¹

Man's creation originates from the earth

'ALLAMAH.

Verily We created man from an extract of mud * Then We set him [as] a drop in a secure receptacle * Then We created of the drop a clot; then We created of the clot a tissue; then We created of the tissue bones; then We garmented the bones with flesh; thereafter We produced him as another creation. So Bounteous is Allah, the Best of creators. (23: 12-14)

Here Allah says that 'We created man from an extract of mud,' and obviously mud is a body (*jism*). Thus, the origination (*huduth*) of man is from mud, which is a body.

'Then, after creating it from mud, We turned it [the creation of mud] into sperm.' Here again it is observed that it turns into a body, for sperm is a body. Therefore, based on transubstantial motion (*al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*), mud is turned into sperm. It means that one body turns into another.

'After that, We created of the sperm '*alaqah*,' which means blood-clot, coagulum. Here again, one body is turned into another.

'And then We created of the '*alaqah mudghah*,' which means some crushed muscle tissue. Once again, a body is turned into another.

'And then We created of the *mudghah* bones.' Here also one body is turned into another.

And once Allah covered the bones with muscle, the verse says, 'At this stage, We gave man another creation.' It means 'We turned the bodily man spiritual.' The reality and spirit of these bodies turn into man's rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*, i.e. intellect).

So 'Thereafter We produced him as another creation' indicates that matter is set aside, and the body turns into an immaterial and transcendent soul (*al-nafs al-mujarrad*). Thus, what is inferred from the verse contradicts the stand of the ancient philosophers. They held that in creation of man, first the foetus is realised, and it develops until it reaches the capacity at which the spirit (*ruh*) can be inspired and blown into it. That is when the soul (*nafs*) is created by God right away, and is attached to the matter

(the foetus).[22](#)

The ancient sages maintained that man is composed of the spirit and the body. However, the verse does not suggest composition (*tarkib*); rather, it explicitly talks about transformation (*tabdil*). It says that man is [made] from the extract of mud, and it is this extract of mud that becomes these things. So God's creation carries on step by step and bit by bit in a material course, until it reaches a point where it jumps out of matter. 'Thereafter We produced him as another creation' is about the same matter, saying that it becomes another creation. Based on transubstantial motion, matter turns into a transcendent being; the body becomes the rational soul.

This verse is very clear. Nevertheless, we also have other verses in the Noble Qur'an that convey this idea, such as:

Thereof [out of the earth] We created you, and thereunto We return you, and thence We bring you forth once more. (20:55)

This verse clearly says that We created you out of the earth. So the onset of human's creation is corporeal.

And Allah caused you to grow out of the earth like a plant [or such a growth!]. (71:17)

Man's growing from the earth indicates that the origin of his creation is corporal and material. And among these verses are the four expressions of the Glorious Qur'an regarding the origin of man's creation:

... From dark putrid dried mud. (15:26)

... From dry clay like the potter's. (55:14)

... From an extract of mud. (23:12) as well as

... And He began the creation of man from mud. (32:7)

... From an extract of some worthless water. (32:8)

There are also six verses in the Qur'an that imply that the origin of man's creation is from soil and dust, including these two verses:

Allah created you of dust, then from a sperm-drop, then He made you pairs.... (35:11)

Truly, for Allah, the likeness of Jesus is as the likeness of Adam; He created him of dust.... (3:59)

The stages of man's transformations in transubstantial motion

'ALLAMAH. Overall, these verses imply that certainly man's soul (*nafs*) originates from body and matter. Then, through transformations in its substance (*jawhar*), that original matter – the dry clay or distasteful mud – changes into the form of sperm, then into blood-clot ('*alaqah*) and then crushed tissue (*mudghah*). God created Adam, the father of humankind, from soil. Then He bestowed existence to him by the word 'be', which is nothing but God's Divine Will, and this was also a substantial motion.

It means that substance is inherently in motion. Man's substance first had the quiddity (*mahiyyah*) of, say, an extract of mud. Then, due to motion in its essence and substance, it reached the status of a sperm and adopted the quiddity of a sperm. After that, the sperm moved substantially and essentially toward being an '*alaqah*'; so it became an '*alaqah* and adopted its quiddity. That quiddity was in turn transformed to the quiddity of being a *mudghah* because of substantial motion. And then *mudghah* also moved in its substance and transformed into bones.

Then after growing muscles on the bones, suddenly matter turned into the immaterial soul: ***Thereafter We produced him as another creation.***

So matter became the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*) and thereby the spirit (*ruh*) was attached to matter. The spirit is in the mould of the body. And when man departs this world, this immaterial spirit abandons matter at once and proceeds on its path after death. The matter is left on the earth without being connected to the soul:

Then indeed after that you will surely die. (23: 15)

After death and its detachment from matter, the rational soul keeps moving toward its perfection based on substantial motion. And after passing its course in *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this world and the Day of Resurrection), it achieves a *tajarrud* (catharsis, immateriality) which is appropriate for the Day of Resurrection [i.e. it will be disentangled even from forms]. It will put on a dress that is appropriate for that day:

Then on the Day of Resurrection you will surely be raised up. (23: 16)

All these are through transubstantial motion. So long as man is sheer matter, the motion is in matter. Once he becomes a rational soul, his transubstantial motion continues with the rational soul.

We can liken these transformations to the light of a lamp that emerges from the wick. The origin of the light is oil, castor beans, firewood, or kerosene. The kerosene, castor oil, and their like transform into a flame of light due to the purification caused by combustion. And the flame turns into gas, emitting light and illuminating its surroundings.

Man's arcs of ascent and descent toward perfection

STUDENT. In that case, what happens to the arcs (*qaws*) of ascent (*su'ud*) and descent (*nuzul*)? There are some narrations that God created the spirits (*arwah*) two thousand years prior to their bodies. There are also other narrations, with different wordings but a common theme, that the spirits were created before the bodies. More generally, there are narrations that imply that before coming to the realm of nature and matter, man had existence in other realms. He had certain conversations in those realms, and then he descended from those realms, one after the other, until he came to this world.

'ALLAMA. Those narrations in no way contradict the belief in the corporeal origin of man's creation. Not only human beings, but everything in the realm of nature and matter has some heart (*malakut*) and spirit (*jan*), the reality of which is not of the physical and corporeal realm, but is rather of the superior realms. However, that spirit has somehow been attached to matter. The sperm has some spirit; the 'alaqah has some spirit; the rock, the tree, the water and the earth, each has a spirit. Animals, birds, stars and planets, all have their own specific souls and spirits. These spirits are not from the corporeal world, but belong to the celestial realms. Each has descended from its specific place in the higher realms, and has attached to matter in its own way.

Likewise, the human soul is from the immaterial celestial realms. There it realised that it cannot achieve certain aspects of perfection by staying immaterial (*mujarrad*), and that those aspects are in the inferior realms of plurality (*kathrah*). Thus it came down in order to achieve the perfections of the realm of plurality, and afterwards ascend once again to attend the Precinct of the High Truth. Therefore it is from the superior, came to the inferior, and again returns to the superior.

In other words, the spirit was initially in the higher realms, but then it came down step by step, in a downward journey. In going through these stages of descension, its only objective was to attain the perfections of plurality, which can only be attained in the physical world and through materiality; that was its sole goal and objective.

If man only had his initial humanity (*insaniyyah*) and nothing beyond that, he would not have benefited from these multiplicities (i.e. the multiplicities that he engages in, in this world). Without the body, there would have been no variety of actions and attributes for the spirit.

In its descension to this world, the spirit adopts the colour of any realm that it passes through. At every plane that it reaches, it becomes an entity of that plane. As it reaches the realm of forms (*mithal*), it assumes an archetypal form just like the other beings in that realm, and becomes a member of the realm of forms.

And as it reaches this realm of nature and matter, it completely becomes a material entity and sheer matter. It becomes a sperm. The transcendent spirit has descended so much that now it is only a sperm. Then as a result of transubstantial motion, it transforms and changes to different forms and quiddities,

until it jumps out of matter and once again becomes immaterial. This jump corresponds to the point when voluntary movement and activity is observed in the foetus, whereby the spirit comes to be.

When man is a sperm, his reality has descended to that of truly being a sperm. And after the transformations and changes of its form, when it reaches the stage of ***'Thereafter We produced him as another creation' (23: 14)***, the selfsame bones that are covered with muscle will actually turn into the immaterial rational soul, and then the rational soul goes through the subsequent stages. It is not that the body is separate and the spirit is infused into it. It is not that the spirit is apart from the body and matter, and that they are brought together for a few days and then they split up.

The merits and perfections of man are due to its endeavour in the realm of plurality. Had it not descended and become sheer matter and then resumed to the higher realms once again, he would not have any perfection. When the spirit descended, it was a single unit (with no multiplicity). Once it comes to this world, it starts to actualise its potentials and collect various traits and pluralities. It gathers and packs them all, and departs up, for good.

Subsistence of permanent archetypes in God's Essence upon annihilation

STUDENT. Given that the higher realm is not a realm of multiplicity, how does the human soul carry up the multiplicities that it has acquired with itself? Multiplicities and their properties and components are specific to the realm of multiplicity, but there is no multiplicity in the realm of annihilation (*fana*^ʿ).

Zayd, 'Amr, and Bakr belong to the stages prior to annihilation in God, but nothing exists in annihilation. Of course after annihilation, in the realm of subsistence by God (*baqa' bi-Allah*), these multiplicities are again conceivable. Zayd, 'Amr, Bakr and their properties and aspects of plurality will have their own place once again.

The perfections and properties of all beings will be found once again in the realm of subsistence after annihilation (*baqa' ba'd al-fana*^ʿ), just as they used to be. But in the realm of annihilation, perfection (*kamal*) exclusively belongs to God. At that stage, there is nothing other than God to have any perfection. In other words, nothing can enter the realm of annihilation, because it is the realm of *annihilation*. There is only the Sacred Essence (*dhat*) of the Supreme One in that realm. How can Zayd go there and carry along his gatherings of multiplicities such as knowledge and scholarship?

Of course, perfection exclusively and entirely belongs to God from the beginning to the end, and no one else is entitled to any perfection. The ascription of perfection to people in the realm of plurality is only metaphorical (*majaz*). The veil of heedlessness and illusion had blinded and prevented them from seeing the beauty of the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God). After the lifting of the veil and the removal of the cover, it becomes patent that real perfection exclusively belongs to the Essence of the Truth, and ascribing it to others is utterly metaphorical. Perfection [for other beings] is to reach the status of annihilation in God,

and this perfection has no aspect of plurality. All pluralities fade away, vanish and annihilate, and perfection belongs absolutely and exclusively to the Essence of the One and no one else.

Upon annihilation, no distance or cover will be left. All veils will be wiped out, even the veil of one's existence:

Between me and Thee, is my being that opposes me;
Remove my being from in-between, by Thy mercy.

(Hallaj)

'ALLAMAH. Man acquires certain perfections in the course of his life in this world. As a human being, any perfection that he acquires is acquired in this world. When he was individuated and determined and sent down, he did not have a body. Therefore he did not have a name, nor did he have the attributes of time and position. Once it reached the realm of pluralities, was dressed in a body, and came to the physical and corporeal world, these qualities appeared in him. That is when the names appear. It is at this stage that 'This is a man,' 'This is Zayd' and 'This is 'Amr' are realised. Thus man acquires certain perfections through these pluralities, and when he returns to God and annihilates at the end, his Permanent Archetype (*al-'ayn al-thabit*) still remains.²³ The Permanent Archetypes of Zayd, 'Amr, and Bakr do not vanish and are not unified.

Annihilation in God's Essence does not involve the elimination of the Permanent Archetype, which is not eliminated in any way whatsoever. The 'Zayd-ness' of Zayd, and the "Amr-ness" of 'Amr are never removed or destroyed. One's identity is not nullified.

If the Permanent Archetypes are eliminated and if the identities are nullified upon perfection – which is the selfsame station of annihilation in God – then what are all these efforts, struggles and worship for? If there is going to remain no name, no identity, no 'I' and no 'we', then what is the call [of religions] for? And what do the prophets and saints call mankind to? They would be saying, 'Endeavour! Struggle! So that your efforts may be destroyed and annihilated!' If the result of acquiring perfections were total extermination, then the call would be pointless; no one would accept it and there is no point in accepting it.

Yes, all perfections are and have always been exclusively for the Essence of the Truth, Majestic and Exalted is He. The call is to absolute perfection, which is annihilation in the Essence of the One. Zayd's perfection is his annihilation in the Absolutely Perfect. So there must remain some 'Zayd', some identity, and some determined entity and Permanent Archetype so that we may refer to it and say, 'Zayd reached his perfection and was annihilated in the Essence of the Truth.'

It is correct to say that 'Zayd was annihilated in God's Essence, and that is his utmost perfection.' However, it is unacceptable to maintain that Zayd is completely abolished due to annihilation, nothing of him remains, and there is no Permanent Archetype to be considered annihilated. We cannot claim so.

If there will remain no Zayd, no name, no identity, nothing and nothing, then he is going toward sheer nonexistence and non-being (*'adam*). But every human being intrinsically feels that he moves toward absolute perfection and not toward nonexistence.

The meaning of 'inniyyah' in Hallaj's poem

'ALLAMAH. In the poem, 'Between me and [between] Thee, is my being that opposes me', there are four things: 'between me' (*bayni*), 'between Thee' (*baynaka*), 'my being' (*inni*), and 'opposes me' (*yunazi'uni*). One cannot claim that the narrator is asking for all these to be eliminated and destroyed to absolute nothingness.

Is there no trace of mankind and humanity in paradise and in the superior world? If nothing exists in paradise, which is the realm of annihilation, then what kind of a paradise is that?

STUDENT. In the realm of annihilation, there is nothing but the Essence of the One, for it is supposed to be the realm of *annihilation* in His Essence (*dhat*). And if one allows plurality to enter God's Essence, countless problems will arise. 'Zayd-ness', 'Amr-ness', names, identities, determinations and Permanent Archetypes – all are subjects of plurality, and therefore have no path to the sanctuary of God's Essence.

And all faces shall be humbled unto the Living, the Upright. And whoso carrieth [a burden of] some oppression is disappointed [and is a failure]. (20: 111)

Thus, nothing persists in the realm of annihilation, for nothing can enter the sphere of God's Essence, and that is for sure. Of course, in the realm of subsistence after annihilation, all multiplicities persist (once again), with all their limits, qualities, and properties. It means that after annihilation, when the soul (*nafs*) returns to pluralities and sets on its journey toward the creation by the Truth (*sayr ila al-khalq bi al-Haqq*), all properties of pluralities exist at their original place, not having shifted a bit. And it is in those realms that the soul enjoys and delights in all its acquired perfections; its knowledge, gnosis, and expertise all belong to the realm of subsistence [after annihilation].

However, there is nothing (there *can* be nothing) in the realm of annihilation. Over there, perfection hinges on non-being; that is the biggest perfection of all. Who can view himself possessing any perfection before the Essence of the One? Since He has perfection, there is no perfection to be found anywhere else. And this is the highest rank for a person and for humankind: to regard one's self nonexistent, and see God's Essence as the sole being.

It would be inappropriate to talk about existence and perfection for others where every existential perfection and reality exclusively belongs to God's Essence. Given His existence, it would be unacceptable for one to have an identity (*huwiyah*) or entity (*'ayn*), or to carry along his Permanent Archetype with himself. That is the station of 'He is He' (*Huwa Hu*, i.e. only He exists, so even referring

to Him is beyond our conception as there is nothing other than Him). What would the Permanent Archetypes be doing there?

... Whose is the kingdom today? It is Allah's, the One, the Dominant. (40: 16)

Confessing God's Oneness means to accept that the Permanent Archetypes are eradicated and have no existence in the realm of annihilation. That is to acknowledge God's guardianship (*wilayah*), which is His absolute right and entitlement to the worship and servitude (*'ubudiyyah*) of His servants. And this does not make the matter of religion and a servant's efforts pointless (rather it is in accordance with the servant's worship and servitude being exclusively for God).

In the world of multiplicity (*kathrah*), man claims and demonstrates [some sort of] lordship (*rububiyyah*), as each of his attachments pulls his heart toward itself. However, when he reaches the realm of annihilation, he admits and confesses his absolute non-being and sheer nonexistence before the High One, and finally forsakes even his own existence at the last stage whereby annihilation is achieved. Then there is no 'self' over there that may see himself or see God, because there is no 'self' in God. Zayd and 'Amr have no path to that domain. Over there, it is the Truth (*al-Haqq*) who observes Himself; the Truth comprehends the Truth, for there is nothing except the Truth. 'There is no deity but He' (*la ilaha illa Hu*) and 'There is no he but Him' (*la huwa illa Hu*).

And paradise and its pleasures all belong to the realm of multiplicity and appear upon subsistence after annihilation. There are eight paradises, in two of which nothing exists but the Essence of the Truth: the Garden of Vision (*jannat al-liqa'*) and the Garden of Essence (*jannat al-dhat*, which is the highest degree of annihilation). The 'nonexistence' at that stage is more 'existent' than all other existences. May everyone's life be sacrificed for that nonexistence, for it is genuine existence and the reality of existence.

And although the four things that you mentioned are present in the poem 'Between me and Thee, is my being that opposes me', the poet is tired of them. He requests them to be abolished and turned into nothingness: 'So remove my being from in-between, by Thy mercy.' That is, 'Remove my existence, annihilate me in Thy Essence and make me sheer non-being!'

If the one's existence is eliminated, it follows that the other three things will also vanish. There will remain no 'opposition', no 'between me', and no 'between Thee', because these two relations and the opposition hinge on the person's existence.

In the realm of *tawhid*, unity is absolute; otherwise it would not be *tawhid*. There is no one there other than God, Who observes Himself and is immersed in His Essence. No one's name, existence, or Permanent Archetype is allowed to enter.

The verse, ‘Say: my Lord hath only prohibited indecencies, whether inward or outward’

The Messenger of Allah said:

Indeed Sa’d is very *ghayur* (protective),²⁴ and I am more *ghayur* than he is, and the Supreme Allah is more *ghayur* than I am. It is as a result of His *ghirah* that He **‘hath prohibited indecencies, whether inward or outward.’ (7:33)**²⁵

Ghirah (protectiveness) requires the prevention of ‘others’ (*ghayr*) from entering [one’s domain and sanctuary]; otherwise it would not be *ghirah*. This is the reason for the prohibition of vices and indecencies. One’s reliance on his own existence against God is in fact Pharaohship (i.e. arrogance). How can one’s existence find way into the Essence of the Truth? He (God) would fling him in such a way that no trace of him would ever remain whatsoever. Subsistence of the Permanent Archetype upon annihilation would in fact deny annihilation. So maybe there is no annihilation in God’s Essence? If so, then what happens to the meaning of these verses:

... And to Allah is the return. (35: 18)

...Be informed! All affairs return to Allah. (42:53)

... And every affair returns to Him.... (11: 123)

Is annihilation in God’s Essence contrary to the intellect (*‘aql*) or the narrations (*naql*), so that we would have to reject it in favour of subsistence of the Permanent Archetypes?

‘ALLAMAH. But if the perfections belong to the realm of subsistence, and if the realm of annihilation is totally dominated by sheer non-being such that the Permanent Archetypes are also eliminated and destroyed, then what will the spirits return to in the realm of subsistence?

Because presumably nothing exists in the realm of annihilation, and the ‘Zayd-ness’ of Zayd has faded, vanished and disappeared. So then at the time of return to subsistence, what is there to return to? There is no Zayd, no entity, no Permanent Archetype. All pluralities would be the same in that case, and there would be no distinction between the different entities, beings, and quiddities. It (the spirit) wants to return, but to where and in what? Therefore subsistence would be totally meaningless. Besides, if nothing exists during annihilation, then what is going to return to subsistence (after annihilation)? There should be something with some identity and existence that would return after annihilation.

That reduces subsistence to a new creation and origination (*huduth*). There was some Zayd; he proceeded until he reached annihilation, vanished, and disappeared in God’s Purely Simple Essence, and no nothing of him was left whatsoever. Then God creates another entity and Permanent Archetype, manifests in it and gives it existence. But that would be a new creation and origination, not *subsistence*

after annihilation (i.e. resumption of the same identities).

Therefore one should accept that the realm of multiplicities stays in its own place. Multiplicities are realities that exist, and each of these realities has its path and journey toward its perfection, to which it is called. That perfection would be senseless if we deny the persistence of the Permanent Archetypes. It is unacceptable to claim that, upon the resurrection and returning from annihilation, nothing exists except non-being! We cannot claim that there would be nothing but annihilation in God and that no multiplicities will remain.

And the subsequent realm of subsistence cannot be a new creation, because in that case there would be no room in the realm of subsistence for the annihilated beings, since the new creation would have no connection with them. No Permanent Archetype was left to allow for some bond of identity. Hence *any* new creation could be viewed as taking up the subsistence of *any* annihilated being.

For instance, we may assume the Zayd of the realm of subsistence after annihilation to be the annihilated 'Amr, and the 'Amr of the realm of subsistence after annihilation to be the annihilated Zayd. And thus we may take anything as the subsistence (resumption) of anything, the invalidity of which is obvious.

And narrations such as 'Indeed Sa'd is very *ghayur*' are not applicable here. The Qur'anic verses like '**All affairs return to Allah**' (42:53) are all correct, but what do they mean? Do they imply that when the beings annihilate, their Permanent Archetypes vanish, or is their annihilation such that their Permanent Archetypes persist? Indeed the latter is the case, for it says, 'All affairs return,' so there must exist *some* affairs so that one can speak of their return to Allah.

Every immaterial species is unique

'ALLAMAH. In philosophy, it has been asserted that among the immaterial (*mujarrad*) beings such as the angels, each species (*naw'*) is unique. Angels do not compose a species that has persons (sing. *shakhs*), for they are not corporeal, but they are *mujarrad*. The concepts of genus and differentia (*jins* and *fasl*) do not apply to them, and thus each immaterial species is unique.²⁶

But then it has been objected that if these unique species have no multiplicity, how do they descend to this world? And how do they create these multiplicities? In the realm of angels, there is only one Gabriel and one Michael, so how do these pluralities – which are the existential effects of the angels – come to be?²⁷

In response to this, it has been argued that the multiplicities appear as a result of the determination and entification (*ta'ayyun*) of their names. It is through these determinations that the pluralities emerge. So our notions of unity and multiplicity are not the same here. The sense of unity in the immaterial realm should not be mixed with the sense of many in the realm of pluralities. At any rate, it is not possible to

establish plurality for the immaterial beings, such that they have *real* plurality (rather, the plurality applies to the descension and determination of their names).[28](#)

Gabriel's unity and his connection with the many beings of this world

'ALLAMAH. Gabriel is one: a single immaterial being. He comes to this world and creates some pluralities through his connection with this world. Gabriel is one particular being, and thus he is distinct from Michael, 'Izra'il (the Angel of Death) and Israfil (the angel that will sound the trumpet). But since he is nominally determined (*al-ta'ayyun al-ismiyyah*), like sunlight, he spreads out through the world and creates pluralities.

The sun is one, and its light (sunlight) is also one. However, by shining on multiple locations, it becomes multiple in a sense. It shines on a thousand locations and everywhere it is named differently; thus it results in a thousand units.

The reality of Gabriel is one and devoid of plurality. But despite this unity, he creates multiplicities in the realm of multiplicity based on his determination. He is not plural himself, yet he creates pluralities.

Say: whoever is an enemy of Gabriel, [he must know that] indeed he hath sent it [the Qur'an] down upon thy heart, by Allah's leave.... (2:97)

The Trustworthy Spirit (al-Ruh al-Amin) hath come down with it [the Qur'an] * Upon thy heart, so that thou mayst be [one] of the warners * In clear Arabic language. (26: 193-5)

The point is that Gabriel adopts some sort of multiplicity as he descends to this world. It is based on this multiplicity that he connects with the multiple things in this world. That is how he has gone to the Prophet and the Imams. That is one view concerning the unique immaterial species like Gabriel. But regarding the spirits that annihilate, if we maintain that the Permanent Archetype (*al-'ayn al-thabit*) totally vanishes during annihilation, then how will the annihilated being descend back and reach the realm of subsistence? There would be no determined entity or identity left for Zayd, so how would he connect back to the realm of plurality? Clearly he can have no kind of connection, because he has no determined entity whatsoever.

Annihilation, immolation, nonexistence, and relinquishing one's determination

STUDENT. After reaching annihilation, the person does not see, hear, or understand anything (he has no comprehension, awareness, or conception). What is that state? If he is asked, 'Who are you? Where are you? What were you? What will you be?' what would he answer?

He is speechless, does not have awareness, intellect, or understanding. He is immersed in the rays of Divine Manifestations. He has lost [control and conscious of] himself, abandoned existence, and has let go of the outfit of his determination. He has drowned his existence in the rays of Magnificence of the Precinct of the Truth, Majestic and Exalted is He. He truly has no self, no name, and no identity. Neither does he comprehend when we talk to him, nor can he reply. In fact, there is no one there to reply.

It is only the Truth, Majestic and Exalted He is, that exists in that realm; has always been and will continue to be. The reply [by the annihilated 'Zayd'] will be, 'The Truth (*al-Haqq*) is the Truth, Beginningless (*Azali*) and Endless (*Abadi*).' This person is annihilated in the rays of Mercy, Magnificence, Majesty, and Beauty of the object of annihilation, which is God, Glorious and Exalted is He.

All worship, struggles, and efforts were just to attain this degree of perfection, and that is the ultimate perfection and absolute existence. Before his annihilation, Zayd was constrained, his being was confined and determined, and he was troubled by this constraint, confinement, and determination. So he removed his determination and immolated and annihilated his existence in the comprehensive existence of the Supreme Truth. In other words, existence exclusively belonged to God's Essence, but Zayd was ignorant of this. Then by tearing apart the veils of illusion, it became evident to him that existence belongs to God and no one else.

Every effort in worship is intended to bring about this stage. This sheer nonexistence is accompanied by sheer existence. This is the meaning of:

My servant, obey Me, so that I make thee like Myself.[29](#)

What is the goal of the butterfly when it flies into the candle, catches fire and burns? Does it want to keep its existence, identity and Permanent Archetype? Does it aim for some symbolic perfection? Does it want to add to its prestige and reputation? Or does it want to perish and fade away, become the candle and turn into light?

Once it burns, it does not have any determined entity anymore and its Permanent Archetype is gone. It is only the candle that exists thereafter. It is not that the butterfly is the candle, but it is the candle that is the candle; it is the light that is the light. The butterfly used to exist, but now it is gone; now only the candle exists.

It is this selfsame attire of determination that troubles man. Man's nature tends to the realm of transcendence (*tajarrud*). This is an intrinsic, God-given, and natural movement in him that pulls him toward expansion and breadth.

Nothing exists over there. That is, in annihilation by itself, there is no laughter or weeping, no sorrow or sadness, no despondence or joy; and there is no person and no Zayd. One's efforts are for God, not for one's self. He and his selfhood were nothing but a veil of illusion (*wahm*). But now, as he reaches the

Truth, the illusion is gone. The sun of reality rises, and [it becomes evident that] everything belongs to God. When the names and titles are removed, the Truth will manifest. Right upon our annihilation, we are immolated and sacrificed for Him.

What does 'I have turned my face to Allah' (*wajjahtu wajhiya li-llah*) mean? It means that may my action, thought, and inclination be sacrificed for Him (see 6:79). What does 'May my father and my mother be sacrificed for thee' (*bi-abi anta wa ummi*) mean? What does it mean when we say it to the Messenger of Allah [in his *ziyarah*]? What do 'May I be sacrificed for you' and 'May I be immolated for you' mean? They mean, 'May I vanish and annihilate for you and in you, such that no name or identity of mine remains.'

If one's sacrifice involves the persistence of his being and the reinforcement of his identity, then that is not sacrifice. If that is what one means when he claims to want to be sacrificed for the Messenger of Allah, then that is no devotion toward the Messenger of Allah. The meaning of sacrifice is that 'I would exterminate and disappear for the persistence of your existence and being, such that no trace or entity of mine would remain.'

When a mother throws herself in fire in order to save her child, what intention does she have? Does she want to strengthen and consolidate her own existence and identity? Or does she want to perish, fade away and cease to exist, so that her child may survive, gain existence and not be the subject of loss, fatality and death?

'ALLAMAH. If nothing remains in the realm of annihilation and we have absolutely no role in that realm, then what do 'I' and 'you' mean? And what are these discussions, proofs, and disproofs for? What significance do they have for us? And why should we seek the Truth and search for Him? Then there would be no pleasure, and likewise no pain and no chastisement. So why should one worship?

'I have turned my face to Allah' (*wajjahtu wajhiya li-llah*) is true, and it has an underlying logical implication: this worship and turning of the face needs a subject (one who does the action). Otherwise, it would be vain and meaningless to talk about the turning of face to Allah. Because then there would be nothing there; no subject and thus no face (*wajh*) – no one to talk about, and no one to comprehend.

Not only is annihilation in God's Essence possible, but it is in fact necessarily true. Moreover, the meaning of annihilation is its very conventional definition, not any other meaning. However, one should find the right way to prove this (i.e. to combine the seemingly contradictory suppositions).

'May my father and my mother be sacrificed for thee' and 'May I be immolated for you' are both true. They imply that I have a comprehension of certain realities about you, and I am willing to sacrifice and eliminate myself in order to preserve those realities.

All beings proceed to annihilation; there is nothing but Allah; 'There is no he but Him'

STUDENT. In order for the Permanent Archetype to persist, one of the following two cases must be established: either annihilation in God's Essence (*dhat*) is impossible, or we should discard our conventional definition of annihilation and replace it with another meaning.

As with the first case, is it not that annihilation in God's Essence is true? For one thing, forced and involuntary annihilation is certainly true and undeniable:

There is none in the heavens and the earth but that cometh to the All-Merciful as a servant.
(19:93)

And voluntary annihilation has always been the objective of the messengers, the prophets, and the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them all). It has been the way of the friends, intimates, and chosen servants of God. This is the true meaning of annihilation. And this reality should not be dispensed with, for it is the ultimate end of the path of perfection. If annihilation means anything else, or if there is no annihilation in God's Essence, that would shake the whole basis of man's path to perfection. In the journey to God, if the slightest 'I-ness' (*ananiyyah*) and personality remains for a servant, it means that his journey is not complete yet and he needs as much correction and refinement as the amount of annihilation that he is missing.

So long as a hair-tip of your being exists,
The practice of worshiping yourself persists.

'I smashed the idol of conceit,' you said, 'so I'm freed';
But this idol that 'I'm freed of conceit' persists.[30](#)

The principle that one's personality and being persists is true for every goal and objective except annihilation. One who seeks annihilation would sincerely offer his whole existence, being and reality. And that is what makes this station most superior and its achievement most difficult. One does not easily consent to immolate himself and give up his existence in the path of the Truth, Majestic and Exalted is He. One would achieve real existence by means of nonexistence, by means of giving up one's determined and notional existence.

A lover is willing to sacrifice himself for his Beloved because of his love. He wants to not see any being for himself before his Beloved's being. This is the meaning of real love – that the lover does not see anyone other than the Beloved, does not talk to anyone and does not hear anything. Otherwise, it would not be love, but only a pretension. And if the Beloved detects that the lover wants to retain his being and Permanent Archetype, use this love to preserve his identity and personality, and achieve some perfection for himself, then He slaps him on the neck such that 'neither a head remains nor a turban!'

What does 'There is no he but Him' (*la huwa illa Hu*) mean? If being, identity, and real existence exclusively belong to God, Glorified and Exalted He is, then the existence of all beings is illusory and unreal. Their existences are merely semblances and manifestations [of God] as opposed to genuine and real existences. In that case, the sooner this veil of illusion – of the existents ascribing existence to themselves – is torn apart, the better. Then existence will be left to its Possessor, and it becomes truly evident that 'There is no he but Him.' In other words, sheer unity (*tawhid*) becomes manifest and clear, and that involves the disappearance of all beings and creatures in the Essence of the Truth.

If the Permanent Archetypes are eradicated, a being cannot exist in God

'ALLAMAH. I do not deny these concepts. The problem is that if annihilation entails the elimination of one's identity (*huwiyyah*), then the call of religions (*da'wah*) would not make sense. And without making sense of the call, we cannot have any path to what it calls to. In that case, all aspects of *da'wah* – including the caller, the addressee, the destination, and the means of *da'wah* – would be senseless.

That requires us to justify what we mean by annihilation, while we have no justification (the concept is already clear). That is the problem.

I also know quite a bit of these mystical and lyric poems, but I deliberately do not want to argue based on poems. We must either prove that the state of annihilation is a reality beyond all realities, and there is absolutely no plurality, particularity, reputation and the like involved in it (i.e. deny the persistence of Permanent Archetypes); or else we should prove that even though annihilation is a reality whereby there would be no names or identities in God's Essence, it is still possible to talk about Permanent Archetypes and certain pluralities. The latter would be similar to the case of immaterial species discussed earlier.

Only one person of immaterial species is realised. Despite this, they acquire pluralities due to their descension to the material realm. This does not contradict their being immaterial and having their own individual and nominal properties.

This is a very subtle topic, and it is not easy to digest or judge. The main idea of annihilation in God's Essence is true and undeniable. One should find how to prove it, but rejecting the Permanent Archetypes is not the way to do it. Muhyi al-Din (Ibn al-'Arabi) believes in persistence of Permanent Archetypes, and he insists on it. This is while he also accepts annihilation in God's Essence.

A similar idea has been said concerning the resurrection of the beings. Some have argued that, coming from the imaginal world (*barzakh*), the beings are immaterial, yet they have their own determinations and distinctions (i.e. pluralities). But their pluralities are not a source of evil (*sharr*) for them. That is, one cannot claim that they will be in chastisement and retribution and not in joy and reward because of their pluralities. At any rate, there are various arguments and questions that come up on these topics, but the important thing is to provide a solution and work them out.

I do not deny the noble statement, 'There is no he but Him' (*la huwa illa Hu*) which establishes the Sacred Essence of the One as the sole identity (*huwiyyah*). But how should we interpret this statement so that it is sound? This is my point.

In the realm of annihilation, there are no identities or beings; there is no earth and no sky. In that case, when we say, 'There is no he but Him,' there are no identities to be denied. The statement would deny 'everything other than God', but there is no 'everything', there is no 'otherness', and there is no 'other than God'. The expression is correct, but one should decipher what it entails. Annihilation in God's Essence is a fact, but one has to find the right approach to it and how to prove it.

You say that no condition enters the 'realm of unity'. But based on what you said above, there is no 'realm' and no 'unity', whatever you say is *not*, and we cannot conceive or imagine anything there, because it is annihilation. There is no identity there, so what can we talk about?

The account of the butterfly's sacrificing and burning itself and turning into light, the story of the mother's entering the fire in order to save her child, and the description of the lover's love reaching the level of annihilation and immolation are all correct. But we should find the right approach and solution to what they mean. Otherwise we are stuck. We know that these statements are all true, but we do not know anything beyond that. We know neither their apparent meanings, nor the details. The main theme is correct, but this (i.e. denying absolutely every identity and entity as suggested by the student) is not the way to prove it. Nonetheless one cannot overlook this topic (of annihilation), and I do not deny it.

'Allamah's own poems regarding annihilation in God

STUDENT. The way to prove and elucidate annihilation in God's Essence is by these lines, inspired by God on one's heart and tongue:

I'm a nameless mote that fell in the flood
It took me as it flowed, to the heart of the bay.
I reached the sun, not on my own;
I was an iota, Your love made me sway.
For a glance on Your brow, and Your heavenly hand,
My name and fame, I had to pay.[31](#)

The solution lies in the fact that man exists by God's being (*inniyyah*) and identity (*shakhsiyyah*). Man's existence is that of the Supreme Truth (*al-Haqq*). However, before annihilation, he thought that he possessed something – some being and existence – by himself. When a person advances toward annihilation, it means that he forsakes his limited being, identity, and determination (*ta'ayyun*), to be replaced by unconditionality (*itlaq*). And it is clear how enjoyable this journey is.

Annihilation means to put down the state of boundedness, not to lose existence. It means to tear up the

illusion of a narrow and restricted existence and achieve Absolute Existence. And there is no room for the Permanent Archetype in Absolute Existence.

The following lines splendidly convey this meaning. They are most likely by Muhyi al-Din, and are quoted by Mulla Sadra in *Asfar*:

I hugged her, but my soul was still longing for her;
But beyond a hug, how can I be any closer?
I kissed her mouth to dissipate my fervour;
That only made my excitement greater.
As if there is no healing for my heart's ardour;
Except if our souls are united together.[32](#)

Can one even imagine any trace of the Permanent Archetype when two souls are united? Mulla Sadra also quotes these two lines as evidence on this very topic of love:

The one who loves, and the beloved, is me;
Two souls we are in a single body.
When you look at me, it is him that you see;
And when you look at him, we are in unity.[33](#)

So wonderful and rich these verses are! Metaphorical and unreal (i.e. worldly) love is essentially a bridge toward real love (i.e. love of God). The similes, metaphors, expressions and figures of speech that are used for metaphorical love or for the manifestations and appearances of the Real Beloved can be quite representative and illustrative of real love. We see annihilation and immolation in the illusory loves of this world, the truth of which is as bright as daylight. So the same can be true concerning annihilation in the Essence of the One. We accept the disappearance of one's identity, being and Permanent Archetype in worldly loves, so why should we not allow it for real love?

As mentioned earlier, when a mother sacrifices herself for her child, is she conscious and mindful at that time? Does she throw herself into the huge flames of fire in order to preserve her personality, and to retain her Permanent Archetype?

Or is it that if we can read her mind at that time, we would find nothing there but nonexistence and sheer non-being? She would be saying, 'Burn me! Set me on fire! Chop me to bits and pieces! Throw me in a well and drop a millstone on me so that all my bones shatter into pieces! Drop Mount Abu Qubays on my head! Only that my child may survive.'

This exact sense of nonexistence and annihilation that is seen in this mother applies to a wayfarer in the realm of annihilation (*fana*).

However, when he regains consciousness and returns to subsistence (*baqa*), all those pluralities and

their signs and components are again with him. Wife, child, father, mother, Heaven, Hell; everything is there. And the way to prove it is, again, to argue that the Arc of Descent (*qaws al-nuzul*), which is the very Will and Command of God that emanates and descends from His Sacred Essence (the realm of *Huwa Hu*, 'He is He'), should go back to the same origin (God's Essence). That is how these two verses will come to realisation:

... ***You will return as He originated you. (7:29)***

... ***As We originated the creation at first, We shall bring it back. (21:104)***

If the beings do not return to the origin from which they descended to the realms of plurality, then their journey would not be a journey toward God, and the cycle would not be complete.

Annihilation and the burning of the butterfly and the mother in fire

'ALLAMAH. The verse, '***You will return as He originated you***' (7:29) and the similar verses indicate that man returns to the same place where he originated from. That is for sure. The origin of anything is the very first point of realisation of the decree to its creation, which is in the Divine Realms. That first realisation is nothing but the Permanent Archetype (*al-'ayn al-thabit*), and the verse does not suggest anything beyond that.

When the mother or the butterfly burn (and likewise in other examples), one would say, 'The mother was annihilated' or 'The butterfly burned.' So there is some noun and some reference to the mother or the butterfly. That object of reference is the selfsame Permanent Archetype. In the sentence, 'The mother was annihilated,' if we do not have the third person conjugate '-ed', we would not have a sentence, and our sentence would be incomplete. There would be no mother, no annihilation and no becoming. So this sentence is congruent and makes sense only when it has a noun, and that noun is the Permanent Archetype.

The realms of blackness, imagination and whiteness prostrate for Allah, Exalted He is

STUDENT. The reality of annihilation has been mentioned in the supplications of the Prophet and his family. On the night of fifteenth of Sha'ban, the Messenger of Allah used to utter in prostration, while the ground was wet with his tears:

O Allah, my blackness and my imagination and my whiteness have prostrated only for Thee.³⁴

Clearly blackness (*sawad*), imagination (*khayal*) and whiteness (*bayad*) represent the three realms of being: the realm of nature (*tab'*), the imaginal world (*mithal*), and the realm of spirit (*ruh, nafs*). All these

spheres have prostrated; that is, they have reached the station of annihilation.

Many verses in the poems of Ibn al-Farid, especially his 'Rhyme of Wayfaring' (*'Nazm al-Suluk'*, also called *'al-Ta'yyah al-Kubra'*) explicitly talk about total annihilation.

Apart from all these, how do you assume the Permanent Archetypes are central and principal, while you advocate the principality of being (*asalat al-wujud*) in philosophy? You support and consolidate it with a thousand lines of reasoning, strongly protect it against any doubt, and regard quiddity (*mahiyyah*) as merely a delimitation and a notional matter (*i'tibar*).

What do Permanent Archetypes even mean? We do not have anything 'permanent' except existence (*wujud*) and that which exists (*mawjud*). There is no intermediate between nonexistence and existence. So how can we claim that upon annihilation, one's existence disappears but his identity (*huwiyyah*) subsists!? What meaning and result could this have, other than calling for some middle ground between existence and nonexistence?

In order to be consistent, we should still claim that principality is for existence, and that quiddity is a conceptual matter and nothing but the limits of existence. And existence continuously moves toward its own perfection, until it reaches a point where it disappears and annihilates in the Sacred Essence of the One. And when the existence is gone, it would be senseless to talk about the quiddity, for there would be no real instance of the quiddity. There would be nothing left of the quiddity other than a concept, without any external reality. At that point, what would it mean to claim that the Permanent Archetype persists?

Does not such a claim lead to inconsistency and contradiction? Instead of that inconsistency, we should deny the [persistence of] Permanent Archetypes altogether.

Gnostic ideas of Muhyi al-Din, Ibn al-Farid, and Hafiz Shirazi

STUDENT. And the arguments of Muhyi al-Din (Ibn al-'Arabi) and the followers of his school in support of Permanent Archetypes do not agree with the principality of being (*asalat al-wujud*).

'ALLAMAH. I did not mention Muhyi al-Din's stand as evidence. There is no difference between Muhyi al-Din and others when it comes to reasoning. He has a couple of insipid poems early in his discussions, but he follows with some truly fascinating and interesting discussions. As with Ibn al-Farid, he is truly a mesmerising master in terms of the elegance and loftiness of his poems, and in conveying mystic ideas. We can truly claim that in Arabic poetry and mysticism, Ibn al-Farid is the counterpart of Hafiz Shirazi in Persian poetry and mysticism. Both figures are matchless; one in Arabic mystic-poetry, and the other in Persian mystic-poetry.

Ibn al-Farid's *Ta'yyah* alone consists of a total of between seven hundred to a thousand verses,³⁵ and it is truly a superb and outstanding poem. According to our master, the late Qadi, Ibn al-Farid was a

pupil of Muhyi al-Din (Ibn al-'Arabi). One day Muhyi al-Din told Ibn al-Farid, 'Why don't you write a commentary for your *Ta'yyah ode*?' 'O our master,' Ibn al-Farid responded, 'this *al-Futuh al-Makiyyah* of yours is a commentary of my *Ta'yyah*.'

Muhyi al-Din was extremely close to Shi'ism.³⁶ Generally speaking, the case of Shi'ism was different in early Islam and even in the subsequent centuries than it is today. Most prominent scholars and gnostics were actually Shi'a; however, they had no choice but to conceal their real faith (*taqiyyah*). They used to hide their actual beliefs so as to prevent external problems and conflicts. They would keep it in themselves and not reveal it except through secret words, hints or intimations. There are two verses by Ibn al-Farid whereby he clearly and explicitly expresses his faith in the guardianship (*wilayah*) of Ahl al-Bayt. He says:

Fruitless was my life; elapsed in vain;
Because from you, I had no gain.
Save for what I got for my allegiance
To the Prophet of Qusay and his descendant.³⁷

STUDENT. But generally speaking, if we maintain that the Permanent Archetype persists upon annihilation, that entails the existence of some determined entity in the Sacred Essence of the One; but He is Glorified and Exalted above that.

Otherwise we would have to maintain that annihilation does not mean *annihilation*; that is, it does not mean nonexistence, eradication, and elimination. Or else we would have to say that annihilation in God's Essence is fundamentally impossible, and any annihilation that takes place is actually in His Names and Attributes (not in His Essence).

The argument you presented is that if we advocate total annihilation in God's Essence, we would be saying that perfection lies in nonexistence, and thus we would be calling everyone to non-being. But no being would like to let go of its existence for elimination and nonexistence. Thus, calling to and promoting total annihilation, obliteration and sheer nonexistence is actually promoting the total elimination of one's identity, being and determination, which in turn leads to the elimination of the Permanent Archetype. And one's instinct does not allow him to renounce his existence for nonexistence. This is one problem.

Another problem (that you mention) is that if annihilation is utter nonexistence and spares no Permanent Archetype, then what entity would the beings have upon subsistence (*baqa'*) after annihilation? There would be nothing left after annihilation; there would be no identity for the beings to return to. In that case we would have to maintain that subsistence is not subsistence (i.e. resumption of the beings that existed prior to annihilation) but is a new creation.

These are the two problems in short. And it is not difficult to answer them. Concerning the first problem, to move from existence to nonexistence is to move from confinement and determination to

unconditionality. It is like changing *dirhams* for *dinars* (i.e. changing pennies for dollars or pounds).

And concerning subsistence after annihilation, we argue that all annihilated beings remain in the realm of annihilation (they remain annihilated). They do not have any subsistence after annihilation. The Arc of Ascent (*qaws al-su'ud*) ends by the return of beings to God, and that completes the cycle of perfection: 'From Allah and to Allah' (*min Allah wa ila Allah*). What about the people who actually have subsistence? For them, true annihilation has not fully taken place. If it is fully achieved, nothing of the person's entity or properties would remain. And there is much evidence for this.

Subsistence of the noun upon annihilation

'ALLAMAH. These are all true, but whom does the sentence 'Zayd was annihilated' refer to? The sentence needs a subject. 'Zayd was annihilated' refers to Zayd; thus, the 'Zayd-ness' of Zayd, which is his very identity, persists.

STUDENT . Do we need the 'Zayd-ness' of Zayd before his annihilation or do we also need it after he becomes annihilated? Before annihilation, Zayd is Zayd, and therefore he has some Permanent Archetype, identity, and being. However, after annihilation, he is not Zayd anymore. In that state, there is no name, noun, essence, identity, or property of him left.

When we say, 'Zayd was annihilated,' we are talking about a state where there is no Zayd anymore. That is the realm of unity (*wahdah*), and there are no names in the realm of unity. Upon annihilation, the annihilated Zayd is not Zayd anymore; over there, there is only the Truth and nothing else.

We use the noun (*damir*) as an instrument. That is, by 'Zayd was annihilated' we mean that, 'That entity which had the identity of Zayd and the Permanent Archetype of 'Zayd-ness' before annihilation has become annihilated.' It means that its Permanent Archetype expired and turned to non-being. It means that its confinement and determination turned into unconditionality. It means that it crossed the veil of determination and immersed into absolute existence; it faded away and became annihilated.

However, once annihilated, there would be no noun or subject anymore. The '-ed' (the conjugate form of the verb referring to a third person singular subject) corresponds to the Zayd that used to be Zayd in the past. But there is no '-ed' anymore.

Consider the sentence, 'We dropped the sugar cube in the water and it dissolved.' Once it is dissolved, there is no sugar cube anymore. So what does the conjugate form 'dissolved' refer to? It says that the sugar cube that used to be a sugar cube before being dropped into the water, dissolved. But when it is dissolved, it is not a sugar cube any more. Its determined entity and all of its effects and properties are gone. Of course the sweetness exists, but in this sentence we are talking about 'the sugar cube', which clearly has disappeared and vanished.

It used to be a sugar cube before being dissolved, but now it is nothing there except water. Before

Zayd's annihilation, he used to observe the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God). But after annihilation, Zayd does not observe the Truth anymore; it is the Truth that observes the Truth.

There is no doubt that no one can comprehend God's Essence except God's Essence. Thus Zayd cannot comprehend God's Essence. If there is a Zayd, then he has not reached the station of annihilation. It is before annihilation that we have Zayd's observing the Beauty of the Truth. But if annihilation has fully taken place, then there is no Zayd; he is gone, and there is no name or trace of him left. In the Sacred Essence of the Truth, there is the Truth and only the Truth, and that does not ever change.

When we speak about the sugar cube, do we have any uncertainty about its dissolving, disappearing, and being lost in water?

If we drop a droplet in water and that droplet loses its shape, then would there be any doubt that the droplet became water? Saying, 'The droplet became water, and there is no droplet once it became water,' is exactly the same as saying, 'Zayd became annihilated in the Essence of the One, and there is no Zayd upon annihilation.' The two sentences are similar in structure.

Zayd in 'Zayd became annihilated' is like the droplet in 'The droplet became water,' in the sense that both nouns are used as instruments to express an event (*istikhdam*). It means that that amount of water that was called 'a droplet' and had a spherical dimension and a particular shape has now lost its spherical dimension and has given up the name of 'droplet'. By falling in water, it is no longer a droplet. At that stage, the water is all that there is. Within the container of water, there is no room for the droplet's dimension and determination (*ta'ayyun*). Even if you establish a thousand Permanent Archetypes, the droplet is not a droplet after it enters the water! We cannot reject our own conscience and cognizance. There is no noun, label, subject, reference or object of reference at that stage. And using nouns and subjects as instruments is quite common in linguistics.

There must be a Zayd when we say, 'Zayd became annihilated'

'ALLAMAH. Regardless of what approach you take and what example you use, at the end of the day, the sentence has a subject to which it refers! You have to identify what the sentence refers to!

'Zayd disappeared and annihilated,' 'The droplet became water,' 'The sugar cube dissolved' – all of these have subjects. If we repudiate Permanent Archetypes, then what do these subjects represent? These examples do not solve the problem. When there is no noun for the pronoun and no object of reference, what good can be achieved by providing examples?

It is true that no one other than the Essence of the Truth can comprehend the Essence of the Truth. But it does not require the rejection of the Permanent Archetype when we say, 'Zayd was annihilated in the Essence of the Truth.' We cannot do away with the subject of the sentence. If we do, our sentence

would be incorrect, for there are many people who annihilate in the Truth (i.e. there must be some means of distinguishing Zayd from others).

It is true that the droplet became water, but do not put it as 'Now there is no droplet anymore!' The way to put it is to say that 'There was a droplet and that droplet disappeared and vanished in the Truth or the water!' which means that we need to have some droplet. We should be able to identify a droplet that has disappeared in the Truth. And this does not make sense without the Permanent Archetypes.

When we say, 'The droplet annihilated,' if you remove the conjugate form '-ed', we would be left with 'the droplet' and 'annihilate', without any connection between the two, which does not mean anything. You either have to show and identify the droplet or forget about annihilation! And since we cannot let go of annihilation, the droplet persists.

You maintain that only the determination of the droplet has disappeared, not its actual existence! That is right, but what do we do with the subject of the sentence? It is this subject that is causing the problem.

'And thou threwest not when thou threwest, but Allah threw'

... And thou threwest not when thou threwest, but Allah threw. (8:17)

STUDENT. Looking at it from the world of multiplicity, it is the Prophet who threw and fired the arrows, and there is no doubt that he got hold of the bow and fired the arrow. But if we look at it from the standpoint of unity (*wahdah*) and annihilation (*fana'*), then there is no prophet over there; there is no messenger; there is no Muhammad.

... They are but some names that you and your fathers have named, for which Allah has sent no authority. (53:23)

From the viewpoint of *tawhid*, all beings are only manifestations and epiphanies (*mazhar*). They are only some names, without any existence of their own. They are appearances, not beings. You take away the names and nothing would be left! Even these names have only been assigned by the people: 'You have named them.'

The floor, the ceiling, the door, the wall, and the carpet are some beings. If we look at their plurality, they are all determinations, delimitations, and instances of plurality and multitude. But if we look at their unity, we would have to put their delimitations and determinations aside. They would cease to have that aspect of plurality. And so is the case with Zayd's annihilation.

If we look at his determinations, then he cannot be at the state of unity, for he has all those delimitations and determinations. But if we look at his state of annihilation, then he is sheer existence. And in either cases, when we look at Zayd and say, 'Zayd is annihilated,' the subject of our statement refers to the selfsame entity that *used to be* Zayd before annihilation, but is not Zayd after that. It used to be Zayd so

long as it was outside God's Essence, but there is no object of reference after he reaches annihilation; there is no Zayd anymore.

And if you claim that for annihilation to take place, the subject of the sentence, 'Zayd was annihilated' must refer to his Permanent Archetype and therefore the Permanent Archetype persists, we would respond that if so, then annihilation in God's Essence is impossible, for it is impossible for the Permanent Archetype to enter God's Essence.

Let alone the case of annihilation in God's Essence, these same problems, questions, and answers also apply to the case of annihilation in the Attributes and Names of the Truth, Glorified and Exalted is He. If the Permanent Archetype persists upon one's annihilation in one of God's Name or Attribute, it entails the entry of Zayd's determination into that Name or Attribute, and that is impossible. It would not be annihilation if his determination were to enter therein. But then again you would object that what does the subject of the sentence refer to? It is the same problem.

But, after all, can we deny annihilation in God's Names and Attributes, such as 'the Powerful' (*al-Qadir*), 'the All-Knower' (*al-'Alim*) and 'the Vivifier' (*al-Muhy*)? Can we even deny annihilation in His particular names, like the annihilation of a being in another being, or the annihilation of the lover in the beloved? After all, every being is a sign and manifestation (*mazhar*) of God. All beings are His Names, either Universal (*kulliyah*) Names or Particular (*juz'iyyah*) Names.³⁸

Generally, in all its types and forms, annihilation necessitates the disappearance of the subject of the sentence. Annihilation – whether in the Divine Essence or a Divine Attribute – does not hold if the subject is preserved.

Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah and the subsistence of the Permanent Archetypes upon annihilation

'ALLAMAḤ. Muḥyi al-Dīn (Ibn al-'Arabi) has addressed the topic of subsistence of the Permanent Archetype. In *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*, he more or less suggests that when a being annihilates in the Truth (*al-Haqq*), only its existence perishes – not its Permanent Archetype. Its existence (to which it owed its external realisation prior to annihilation) perishes, but its Permanent Archetype subsists.³⁹ So we would know that it is Zayd who is now 'lost' and annihilated, and thus he is the Truth. That would make sense.

Of course, we cannot claim that the Permanent Archetype is *in* the Truth, but we can say that overall, the Permanent Archetype subsists. So we are actually saying, 'Zayd, whose Permanent Archetype subsists, was annihilated in the Truth.'

Indeed there is no subject in the Essence of the Truth. And it is true that 'There is no he but Him' (*la huwa illa Hu*) and 'Thou threwest not when thou threwest.' But if you maintain that we had a Zayd at

some point but not anymore, then Zayd was not annihilated, for the sentence ‘Zayd was annihilated’ has a subject. You have to take care of this issue. Take the viewpoint of plurality, or that of unity; take any perspective that you so desire; the pronoun would still need an object of reference and you have to be able to show it! But you cannot show it, and at the same time it would be wrong to conclude that there is no annihilation. Sure, we do not have this sense of annihilation, but we do have some annihilation, where Zayd’s Permanent Archetype is preserved.

Annihilation in God’s Attributes and Names is no different than annihilation in His Essence. In any case, there must be some object of reference for the subject of the sentence, and the Permanent Archetype has to subsist. In every type and stage of annihilation, when we say ‘a being was annihilated in the Truth’, that being is the noun and we should identify whom it refers to. It refers to the Permanent Archetype, which was previously attached to some existence. Now it has lost that existence due to annihilation, but the Permanent Archetype does not disappear.

Transformation of the quiddities, and ‘Whose is the kingdom today? It is Allah’s, the One, the Dominant’

STUDENT. Is it correct when we say, ‘The larvae in the water grew wings and flew to the sky’? There are certain wrigglers that breed and grow in stagnant waters, and then they grow wings, like mosquitoes, and fly off to the sky. Now, did this larva fly while it was a larva, or did it fly when it grew wings and became a mosquito?

Of course it flew once it became a mosquito. However, in this sentence we say, ‘The *larva* grew wings and flew.’ Obviously this is an inaccurate expression, for the larva does not fly while it is a larva. We mean that what *used to be* a larva has now flown. It converted to a flying quiddity, became a ‘flier’ (a being that flies) and took off.

‘Zayd was annihilated in the Truth’ means that whatever he possessed before annihilation – in terms of his human identity, Permanent Archetype, and ‘Zayd-ness’ – was transformed existentially, and moved from the realm of determination and being to the realm of unconditionality and non-being. It means that what used to be has now faded away and disappeared. Zayd is not the subject of the sentence anymore. Now, *the Truth* is the Truth (*al-Haqq*), not *Zayd*.

‘Zayd was annihilated’ is an inaccurate statement. Its real meaning is that God’s Essence – the Pure, Simple and Absolutely Transcendent Existence – was observing determination up to this point, but from now on It observes unconditionality.

This is just like the larva example: the larva was the larva; but now it is the mosquito (not the larva) that is the mosquito. And if we say, ‘The larva flew off,’ it is a neglectful remark, for the larva cannot fly, and everyone knows and it is understood that this expression involves some linguistic abstraction. It means that the being that had the determined entity of a larva flew off, but only after abstracting from and

renouncing the quiddity of being a larva and adopting the quiddity of a 'flier'.

So upon annihilation, Zayd is not Zayd, but he is the very Boundless (*mutlaq*) and Simple (*basit*) Existence. We had confined the Boundless and Simple Existence by Zayd's determination, and had named the confined entity, 'Zayd'.

But now we have broken free from that limit and have entered the vast ocean of limitlessness. Thus, there are no bounds to be identified as 'Zayd'. There is no being and no identity anymore:

... Whose is the kingdom today? It is Allah's, the One, the Dominant. (40: 16)

In the realm of annihilation, kingdom, divinity, and being exclusively belong to Allah – the One Allah Who is Dominant and smashes all beings and crushes all identities. His Oneness (*wahdah*) is tied to His Dominance (*qahhariyyah*).

'ALLAMAH. The sentence, 'The larva turned into a "flier" and flew off' also needs an object of reference for its subject, and one should be able to show it. Any sentence without an object of reference for its subject would be incongruous.

We cannot claim that 'Zayd was annihilated' is an inaccurate and neglectful statement. That would mean that the reference to Zayd has been made inattentively, which means that speaking of annihilation is also metaphorical and unreal (*majaz*), which is not true.

If the meaning of annihilation in the Essence of the Truth is that there is the Truth and no other being and no 'Zayd' whatsoever, and that even his Permanent Archetype disappears, then annihilation cannot be called annihilation. Then one would not be able to say that 'Zayd became annihilated.' It would be only the Truth over there, Exalted and Bounteous He is, and it would be meaningless to speak of annihilation of anything in Him.

What one should say is: this being (Zayd) used to be related to and dependent upon the Truth. But now, that aspect of dependence has disappeared, and hence nothing remains except the Truth. In other words, 'Zayd is the Truth.' This is acceptable; but to claim that 'Nothing remains except the Truth, and that there is not even any reference to Zayd' does not seem to be correct.

STUDENT. After all, is it possible for mankind to know God or not? Yes, it is possible for God's chosen servants (*mukhlasin*).

Glorified be Allah from that which they describe [of Him] * Except for Allah's chosen servants. (37: 159-60)

But can one have a complete knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God without annihilation? No, it is never possible, because there is always some otherness (*ghayriyyah*) and 'I-ness' (*ananiyyah*) in any plane other than annihilation, and the other-than-God cannot know God. In every plane prior to annihilation, the

knowledge of God's Essence is relative, and true *ma'rifah* cannot be achieved.

If we ask Zayd at the state of annihilation, 'Who are you?' what would he say? Would he reply, 'I am Zayd'? Or would he say, 'I am the Truth'? Neither, by no means! He would not answer at all. We are asking Zayd; but in the state of annihilation, Zayd is annihilated (*fani*); there is no Zayd. At that state, the tongues are mute and the ears are deaf. Allah would reply Himself by His Splendour and Magnificence, ***'It is Allah's, the One, the Dominant'*** (40:16). He would say, 'It is the Truth that is the Truth' (i.e. there is nothing there but the Truth).

You once narrated that there was a dervish in Tabriz who used to walk around the market and the streets and say, 'I seek Him, I seek Him.' This went on for a while, but after some time he started saying, 'I seek myself, I seek myself.'

What does this mean? Does it not mean that he used to search for God, but then he lost himself as he achieved the state of annihilation? Thus he began searching for himself so that he may find some essence or property of himself. But this is not possible; how could he find himself anymore? He cannot find himself in the state of annihilation. The only way to find himself is if his annihilation terminates and he returns to the realm of subsistence once again.

Zayd used to have a name, a quiddity and some personal limits. As the limits were removed, his being gradually expanded. So he passed beyond the limits, but not beyond existence. At every stage he lost a limit and adopted a broader limit, and thus he grew out of each limit for a broader one, until he finally left all limits behind. So he forsook himself and entered somewhere without any limits. Over there, there is no limit, there is no name, and there is no 'Zayd'.

The verse, 'And unto Him you are overturned'

'ALLAMAH. The knowledge of God's Essence through annihilation is indeed possible for His chosen and intimate servants. There is no problem with that. However, no matter how we manoeuvre and what approach we take, there is a reference being made to Zayd, and that does not vanish. We cannot say that 'Zayd was annihilated and became Him' means that 'He [God] took Zayd's position, so there is nothing but Him.' Then what do we do with the 'Zayd'?

And if we ask Zayd, 'Who are you?' he would not answer 'I am Zayd,' but he would say, 'I am the Truth.'

And when that dervish uttered 'I seek myself,' he meant 'I seek the Truth,' Exalted and Bounteous is He.

What would be Zayd's condition upon his annihilation in the Truth, the Exalted? The Qur'an puts it as, '***And unto Him you are overturned'*** (29:21).

'There was Allah and there was nothing other than Him, and now it is as it has always been'

STUDENT. We have to be able to combine the things that we know to be true. First we hold that knowledge of God's Essence is possible for mankind. Second, annihilation means sheer non-being. Third, we know that true and complete knowledge of the Truth is not possible without annihilation, and that one can only have a relative knowledge at the lower stages.

Fourth, we know that there can be no determination in the Essence of the Truth. Otherwise it means that His Essence is divisible; but there is no he but Him, and His Exalted Station is beyond being a place of pluralities and determinations. The Essence of the Truth consists of nothing other than the Truth – not even anyone to say, 'There is nothing other than the Truth.'

Now how can we combine all these?

There is absolutely no way that we can say, 'Zayd became the Truth' with the subject of the sentence referring to Zayd (i.e. his Permanent Archetype). That is because Zayd does not become the Truth, for 'Zayd' consists of a determination, and determination contradicts unconditionality. The Supreme Truth is unconditional (*mutlaq*) to the utmost degree of unconditionality.

There used to be a Zayd – with some determination – only so long as he had not reached annihilation. But once he became annihilated, he is not Zayd anymore, and there is no determination.

This is just like saying, 'Zayd became nothing! He was obliterated, became nonexistence, and perished.' Of course there must be some object of reference for the conjugate 'became' (or '-ed'), but that need not be the Permanent Archetype.

Think of the cases where the subject of the sentence does not have a Permanent Archetype, like when we say, 'Uniting between two contradictories is impossible,' or 'The Creator's partner does not exist.' How do we deal with these? How do we identify the subject of the sentence? What does it refer to?

We imagine some sense of 'the union of two contradictories' and then we rule out its possibility, or we assume a concept of 'the Creator's partner' in the external world and then declare its nonexistence. Likewise, here we talk about the annihilation of 'a human being with Zayd's personality, and a concept that had taken on Zayd's determination.' His annihilation means that he gave up his determination, took off the robe of existence, and nothing was left except a sheer concept (*mafhum*). And clearly mere concepts and quiddities – without existence – are only notional (*i'tibar*) and nonexistent ('*adam*'), particularly according to the principality of being (*asalat al-wujud*).

And thus is the case of the other examples, like 'The larva flew off,' and 'The butterfly burnt in fire.' Consider a fire, a heap of glowing and flaming fire! The butterfly throws itself into the fire, catches fire

and burns. It becomes fire and light, unconditional and boundless. And we say, 'The butterfly burnt and *became* fire.' Where is the butterfly? Where is its Permanent Archetype? The butterfly was a butterfly when it had not fallen into the fire. Once it fell into the fire and *became* fire, then it is not that 'the butterfly is fire,' but 'only the fire *is*.' Whoever looks at the fire would say, 'The fire is fire' (without any reference to the butterfly).

As long as the butterfly had not approached the vicinity of the fire it had an essence and certain properties and traits. It was only then that it was called a butterfly. It had a self, a Permanent Archetype, and some name and identity. However, since it became fire, we cannot call it a butterfly anymore. No name, identity, determination, essence, or property of the butterfly is left. How much ever we search and look, there is only fire to be found; there is only the light and glare of the fire there. Hence, '[Only] the fire is fire.'

We claim that there is only One Being in all realms of existence, and that is the Existence of the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He. No other being has genuine and real existence. They are rather names, labels, limits, determinations and manifestations of existence (*wujud*). The names that we assign to them – such as Zayd, 'Amr, 'tree', 'stone', and so on – describe the determination and the limits of each being's existence. Therefore these names are names and descriptions not of existence, but of the determinations of existence.

So when we refer to Zayd as 'Zayd', it does not denote his existence, but it denotes his determination of existence. When Zayd annihilates, he lets go of that determination and crosses over all limits. Otherwise, real existence is the same as it used to be at first: it used to be unconditional and still is. It is only that a delimited part of existence was named 'Zayd', but now that limit has been removed. This is annihilation, whereby we do not see those limits [anymore], but we see the unconditionality. The being used to be delimited, and it regarded itself as an independent being. But now that view has changed to a view of dependence and dissolution; because after all, pluralities are merely notional matters. That is what annihilation means.

Zayd has changed only in terms of his comprehension and conception (*ma'rifah*). Otherwise there has been no real change whatsoever: previously only the Truth used to be, and so is now, there is only the Truth.

Many times we mentally abstract a certain concept from everything, and set it as a subject of a statement. For example, we consider mental existence – *qua* being mental – as the subject for certain predicates. Sometimes we even abstract from the mental existence of a concept and only consider its essence, and then we associate it with certain predicates. Therefore abstraction (*tajrid*) is a common mental process.

Likewise, we strip Zayd of his determination and say, 'He is now annihilated in God's Essence.' Thus there would be no determination in God's Essence. In that realm, only absolute existence is absolute

existence. In other words, that being which we used to call 'Zayd' had a determined share of existence; we dismissed that determination, and therefore only the existence remains. So existence is existence, and that is the absolute existence, which is the existence of the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He.

And if one expects to find a full and complete object of reference for the annihilated Zayd, then he should keep on waiting!

There are two verses in the Noble Qur'an:

And unto Him you are overturned. (29:21)

... And thou threwest not when thou threwest, but Allah threw.... (8:17)

What do they mean? When God says, 'You did not throw, but Allah threw,' there is no one other than Allah there. 'You', 'thou', and 'thou threwest' do not hold in that realm. Thence nothing remains but the Essence of the Truth, and Its comprehension of Itself:

There was Allah and there was nothing other than Him, and now it is as it has always been.[40](#)

O Thee, Above what the intellect speaks;
And Higher than what the spirit seeks.

O, Superior to every high and low;
Who you are, only Thou can know.

No one can ever come to know Thee;
He who knows Thee is no longer he.[41](#)

There is some subject in every type of annihilation, and that is the Permanent Archetype

'ALLAMAH. 'Zayd became the Truth' means that the Truth replaced Zayd in his being and became his hand, eye and ear. It means that Zayd is not Zayd anymore, but Zayd is the Truth. This is true and plausible.

It is *Zayd* who became annihilated! If there is no Zayd, then who was annihilated? God, Exalted is He, has ever been and will always be, and the Truth is always the Truth. But we are talking about Zayd's annihilation. If we do away with the relation that bonds this incidence of annihilation with Zayd, then nothing would remain. It would be as if no annihilation has occurred.

In the other examples, we say that 'The larva flew off,' or 'The butterfly became fire.' But if there is no butterfly whatsoever, then there is no butterfly to have become fire, and it would not make sense to say, 'The *butterfly* became fire.'

You have a subject, which you do everything to do away with. And at the end you want to maintain the butterfly but at the same time you want to have it become fire and be annihilated, such that nothing would remain except the fire and only the fire be the fire! Thus you are back to square one!

We cannot say that 'The butterfly is,' because it became fire. Any statement that the butterfly *is* something requires the preservation of the butterfly's existence, which contradicts its annihilation. So 'The butterfly was annihilated' means that the butterfly had a real external existence; but then that external realisation (*tahaqquq*) was removed, and so now there is nothing but the fire. Therefore, what remains of the butterfly – when we say, 'The butterfly became fire' – is its Permanent Archetype and nothing else.

We do not contend that the Permanent Archetype of Zayd is in the Essence of the Truth, just as we do not contend that the Permanent Archetype of the butterfly is in the fire. There is nothing in the Essence of the Truth except the Essence of the Truth, just as there is nothing in the fire except the fire. However, we maintain that when Zayd annihilates and becomes the Truth, his Permanent Archetype subsists, just as the Permanent Archetype of the butterfly subsists when it becomes fire. And this does not entail the determination and entification of the Essence of the Truth. What happens is that the external reality of the Truth, Exalted is He, replaces Zayd's being, without any loss of unconditionality. Upon the annihilation and disappearance of Zayd's being, the external reality of the Truth (i.e. His absolute Essence) manifests and appears through Zayd's Permanent Archetype.

The difference in Zayd's degree of gnosis as he moves from limitedness to unconditionality and breadth is due to the substitution and realisation of the Truth in Zayd's place. There must be an object of reference for the subject of the sentence. But after Zayd annihilates and loses his existence, nothing remains for the subject to refer to, except Zayd's Permanent Archetype. If you say that 'Zayd was annihilated' means that no sign of him was left whatsoever, then what effectively remains of the sentence is only 'was annihilated' with no subject. What do we do with that?

Some have used the verse, '**And unto Him you are overturned**' (29:21) in order to prove the subsistence of the Permanent Archetype. But Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim Jili draws on this verse as he argues for the total annihilation of all beings when they return to God, Majestic and All-Mighty is He. [42](#)

It is true that '**And thou threwest not when thou threwest, but Allah threw**' (8:17), and by no means does anything exist except Allah, as mentioned in, '**And unto Him you are overturned.**' But when we say, 'Zayd became annihilated and disappeared,' does the conjugate form 'became' also disappear?

STUDENT. We are not making any statement inconsistent with the common or literary language, or against referring the noun to its object of reference. I agree that in 'Zayd became annihilated,' the conjugate 'became' refers to Zayd.

The sentence 'Zayd became annihilated' is no different than the other sentences. That is, the conjugate 'became' in this sentence should have the same meaning and be interpreted in the same way as in 'The

butterfly became fire,' 'The droplet became water,' 'The sugar cube became dissolved,' and 'The larva in the water became a "flier".' Do we uphold the subsistence of the Permanent Archetypes of the butterfly, the droplet, the sugar cube and the larva when they – respectively – become fire, water, dissolved or a 'flier'? No, we do not. Likewise we do not uphold the subsistence of Zayd's Permanent Archetype.

Once the butterfly becomes fire, there will be no butterfly anymore. It is gone, and there is only and only fire at that point. Previously there was a butterfly, but its existence turned to nonexistence, and it adopted the fire's existence. There are only two beings: the butterfly and the fire. The Permanent Archetype is not anything at the level of existence. And other than existence, there is quiddity (*mahiyyah*), which is a mental derivation (*intiza'*) from an external reality. And after the elimination and collapse of a being's existence, only a *concept* of quiddity will remain, without any subsistence or realisation (*tahaqquq*).

'Zayd became annihilated' means that Zayd used to have a certain determination of the pure (*baht*) and simple (*basit*) existence which encompasses the universe, and that particular determination of existence was named 'Zayd'. Then he progressed and advanced in the path of servitude (*'ubudiyyah*), step by step and stage by stage, advancing toward perfection. He crossed the boundaries one after another, until he reached a point where he dispensed with determinations altogether. What used to be in Zayd so far was his existence, but now there is no rapport between him and existence. 'Zayd' was the name of that particular determination, but there is no determination after annihilation.

You will return as He originated you. * A party He guided, while misguidance befell on a [another] party.... (7:29-30)

Based on the verses of the Noble Qur'an, all people surely return to the same point where they started. One has some existence and determination before getting there, but beyond some point, the person loses his self, and that is when he reaches the realm of annihilation.

It means that one can ascend, while retaining his selfhood and Permanent Archetype, up to the point of his origin. But to go beyond that, he has to give up his existence, and hence there is also no Permanent Archetype beyond that point. There is a Permanent Archetype from the point of one's origin up to the point of one's return. The Permanent Archetype appears where one comes into existence, and it ends at the same point. The realm of annihilation is above and beyond the realm of existence; the realm of annihilation is the realm of nonexistence.

The difference between Zayd's existence and nonexistence is that when the former holds, God's Sacred Essence observes Zayd; but when the latter is achieved, His Essence observes Itself. In other words, the Essence of the Truth used to see some determination, but now It sees Its Existence with no determination. Is this true or not?

When Zayd becomes annihilated, we cannot literally say that his Permanent Archetype is in God's Essence. So the Permanent Archetype must be associated with God's Names and Attributes. That is

why saying, 'Zayd was annihilated in God's Essence' involves some neglect in the language.

At the end of the day you either have to redefine what annihilation means, or you should maintain, as you just said, that God's Essence was observing plurality up to the point of annihilation, but from then on It observes unity. This is an excellent way to put it. For instance we say, 'So far Zayd was watching his ring, and now he is watching himself.' This way there is no mention of a pronoun or subject referring to the ring, and there is no allusion to the ring's Permanent Archetype. Thus, when we talk about annihilation, we do not put it as 'Zayd's determination annihilated,' but we say: thus far, the Sacred Essence of the Truth was seeing Its Beauty through the determinations of Zayd, 'Amr, and Bakr. It was observing Itself in these mirrors, manifestations and reflections. But now It observes Itself with no intermediary and not through any mirrors.

This is the meaning of '***And unto Him you are overturned***' (29:21). It means that the determination is removed and overturned altogether.

Annihilation is one's obliteration in God's Being, removal of the determinations, and God's observation of His own beauty

'ALLAMAH. All these ideas equally apply to statements like 'The butterfly became fire,' 'Zayd became dust,' 'So-and-so does not exist,' and so on. If we do away with the subject, we would be left in dark and unresolved. There must be some subject that pertains to the message, and that subject is the Permanent Archetype. There used to be some reality and some being named 'Zayd'. Now he loses that reality. Thus, there remains nothing but the Permanent Archetype.

And your assertion that 'So far, the Supreme Truth used to see a determination, but from now on He sees Himself without any determination' is quite appropriate. I have no problem with that and actually concur with it! But you should clarify that the Truth's observation is through Zayd. The Supreme Truth used to observe Zayd, and now He observes Himself *by* Zayd. It would not make sense if Zayd is totally dismissed.

You maintain that God's Sacred Essence – the Absolutely Simple Existence – was observing this determination (Zayd's) up to now; but from now on It observes unconditionality. All this is absolutely correct. But still, 'Zayd was annihilated.' We want to find and identify this 'Zayd'. Where did he come from? What does this 'Zayd' refer to? Could it be anything other than his Permanent Archetype?

And sure, the Permanent Archetype cannot be in God's Essence, but it can be associated with God's Names and Attributes. It is also true that before annihilation, God used to see through Zayd's determinations, and now Zayd has become annihilated in the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He. But there is still some noun and subject that remain even after his annihilation.

If the meaning of '***And unto Him you are overturned***' (29:21) is that even the Permanent Archetype of

Zayd does not persist, and that it is the Truth that observes the Truth, then why do we say, 'Zayd was annihilated'?

The true unity of God's Essence is beyond all confinements

STUDENT. Why should we have any reference to a subject when we are speaking of absolute being (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*) and when we are not dealing with any determination? The subject is associated with the realm of God's Names and Attributes, and is not allowed in the realm of God's Essence. So in fact the subject of the sentence ('Zayd') retains its position – outside the realm of God's Essence. Annihilation is where God's Sacred Essence observes Itself. So let the subject of the sentence – our 'Zayd' – stay where it is, abandoned and overthrown, lying there for a thousand years! We have no business to do with Zayd, let alone his conjugate and reference!

Your insistence that Zayd's Permanent Archetype and the subject of the sentence should be preserved complies with the principality of quiddity (*asalat al-mahiyah*). But according to the principality of being (*asalat al-wujud*), nothing exists but the Truth, and no one other than the Truth can comprehend and observe the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He.

Zayd has endeavoured and grown in terms of being. He has reached the being of the Truth, has given up his own properties, and has entered the house where 'There is no occupant in the house except Him.' There is no one in that house except the Landlord. So how can Zayd enter therein, while the Landlord's name is not 'Zayd'?

If the flash of His *ghirah* (protectiveness) glitters, there will remain no Zayd and no 'Amr, no friend and no companion, no name and no identity. That is a sphere where no one can enter. So how does Zayd want to go there, spread out his belongings, and run his business?

Zayd is prevented from entering that realm while retaining his selfhood. That is right! As long as Zayd is Zayd, he has no path to that realm. But the annihilated Zayd is not Zayd anymore, for he has broken out of determinations one after another, and at the end, he has sincerely offered his own being. His 'self' is gone because he gave up his being. It means that that the bounds that he had are transformed to boundlessness, and his restriction is converted to unconditionality.

It is not Zayd's 'Zayd-ness' (i.e. his quiddity or Permanent Archetype) that moves, but it is his being (*wujud*) that moves, and it keeps moving until it reaches the unconditional *wujud*. Now, what does that mean? It means that he gives up his determination and takes on a superior determination. But then he also loses that determination and adopts an even higher status, and so on until the point where it is only the Truth who observes His Essence.

Then if one asks Zayd after annihilation, 'Who are you, and where do you come from?' he would reply 'I am nothing. I am not Zayd. "Where do you come from?" belongs to the realm of multiplicity, but here is

the realm of unity (*tawhid*). There is no time or space here; there is no Zayd or ‘Amr here.’

It is narrated from Bayazid [Bastami] that, ‘It has been thirty years that I have not talked to anyone but the Truth. Whoever has asked me a question has been the Truth, and the one answering the questions has been the Truth.’⁴³ What does this mean? It means that I have been in the realm of annihilation. It means that I am not ‘I’ anymore. ‘I’ is for the realm of multiplicity; but here (in the realm of annihilation and unity) ‘I’ is the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He.

‘The glass is delicate and so is the wine’

STUDENT. That is right! When the glass and the wine are so fine and delicate that every time one looks at the glass or the wine they are seen as one, then how is it possible to make out or recognise any difference?

The glass is delicate and so is the wine,
Hard to tell them, as they intertwine.
As if it’s all wine, and no glass,
Or there is a glass but there is no wine.
(Sahib Abu al-Qasim Isma’il ibn ‘Abbad, d. 385/995)

Do the goblets glitter due to the wine?
Or is it through the clouds that the suns shine?
For the pureness of wine and delicacy of the glass,
The colours of the two amazingly combine.
As if it’s all wine and there is no glass,
Or all is the glass and there is no wine.
(‘Iraqi)

‘ALLAMAH. We cannot let go of Zayd, for the whole story of annihilation hinges on him. How can there be no ‘Zayd’ when we want to explore and study *Zayd’s* annihilation? It is true that he was annihilated, but there should be *some* reference for the ‘-ed’ conjugate.

I also argue based on the principality of being. I do not believe in the principality of quiddity. The efforts and the growth of Zayd, the poor servant of God, are in terms of being, and it is in terms of being that he achieves annihilation.

But do not say, ‘Zayd became annihilated *in* the Essence,’ because it means that there is some determined entity in the Essence of the High Truth. Rather, say, ‘Zayd became annihilated *to* God,’ which means that God sees, hears, and talks through Zayd’s determination.

Zayd spent a lifetime as a determined being, and once he annihilates, the Truth sees Himself unconditional and with no determination. At the end, it is *Zayd* who has grown out of determination, and

so the subject remains in its position.

And when he is questioned, Zayd answers, 'I am not *me* [Zayd], but I am the Truth.' So the pronoun subsists. If Zayd were not the Truth and there were no connection between him and the Truth, how could he reply 'Why do you address me? Why do you call Zayd?' Because then there would be no 'I' to be addressed anymore; there would be no Zayd anymore.

And Bayazid Bastami's words certainly indicate his state of annihilation. But when he says, 'I do not exist anymore, but the Truth does,' there is still a reference to himself. And when you say that 'Zayd has lost himself,' or that 'He sees by the eyes of the Truth,' all of these have subjects and predicates, and thus they require some object of reference. And the poems of wine and glass that you read are indeed very charming. But even saying that 'It is as if the wine is the glass or that the glass is the wine' involves a subject! At any rate, regardless of what path and approach one takes, there is no escape from the Permanent Archetypes, and one must accept that they persist during annihilation.[44](#)

The 'known provision' of mukhlasin

Except for Allah's chosen servants * For them there is a known provision * Fruits; and they are honoured * In Gardens of Great Bounty [of paradise]. (37:40-3)

STUDENT. Here, 'fruits' is an apposition and description for 'a known provision'. But *mukhlasin* (chosen, those who have been made sincere by God) are those who have reached annihilation in God's Essence. So how come the verse sets and fixes a distinct reward of a certain ('known') amount for them? Is it not that one who reaches the station of annihilation owns and benefits from all of God's blessings, without any limit? How can being *mukhlis* be compatible with the limitation and specificity of one's reward and remuneration?

'ALLAMAH. Apparently, having a 'known' (*ma'lum*) provision refers to a certain notability that their provision brings about for them.

In fact, a chosen servant would himself desire the achievement of such a reward. After all, *mukhlasin* are still among God's servants: they are those servants who are *mukhlis*. In that sense, not only their provision, but they themselves will be known and determined. This is what some gnostics have affirmed – and it is a fair word – that one's identity (*huwiyyah*) and quiddity (*mahiyyah*, which is one's 'whatness') does not disappear in the hereafter. The Permanent Archetypes subsist.

And actually that is how it should be, because even though they have reached annihilation, they nonetheless have some determined entity and instance of existence. And there is no contradiction between their being *mukhlis* and the subsistence of their Permanent Archetypes.

The impermanence of physical and spiritual imposed movements

STUDENT. Philosophers maintain that ‘Imposed motion cannot be permanent or usual.’⁴⁵ Does the impermanence of *qasr* (imposed, forced and non-natural movement) contradict eternity (*khulud*) in hellfire? Also, is the impermanence of imposed motion only for physical movements or does it also apply to spiritual matters? And does it only apply to the moving body (*mutaharrik*) or does it also apply to the mover (*muharrik*)?⁴⁶

‘ALLAMAH. It has been argued that imposed movements do not comply with divine grace (*inayah*). Divine grace – the diffusions, perfections and blessings that God bestows upon individuals – cannot be partial or incomplete. God does not grant imperfect and unfinished bounties (*ni’mah*). It cannot be that He forcibly gives someone a bounty and then forcibly retrieves it forever. That would not comply with divine grace. Therefore God’s bounties should be assumed to be eternal. If He bestows something, it is given forever, with no restriction.

But is this consistent with eternal punishment? Eternity in hell would entail that God’s bounties on those who face eternal damnation must have been imposed [and thus impermanent]. But the existence that the High Truth creates or bestows upon a being is not restricted. It cannot be that the existent possesses it for a few days and then God takes it back, for that would contradict divine grace. God’s bounties do not reach us through unnatural and imposed ways. It is not that His bounties are given to us for a few days and then they are terminated. Thus, it must be that those who face eternal punishment did not have imposed bounties in the first place.⁴⁷

Also, imposed motions are imposed only with respect to the moved object. But with respect to the mover (the cause of the motion) the motion is natural, not imposed. For instance, when someone throws a piece of rock upward, the rock has an imposed motion as it goes up, but the action is not imposed for the person who throws the rock upward, and so is the case with other examples.

Moreover, one’s throw might be such that when he throws the rock, it moves on forever, like the spacecrafts launched every so often, that go even beyond the earth’s atmosphere. There are certain forces and causes that propel these spacecrafts, and the crafts continue moving as long as those forces and causes persist. Once the causes stop working, the spacecraft crashes, burns, or is destroyed in another way; or it enters a new gravitational field and moves accordingly in a new orbit.

And it is possible to consider a similar sense of impermanence of imposed motions for spiritual matters. That is, one may argue that imposed motion within spiritual bounties and divine mercies cannot be eternal or usual. Much like physical causes, spiritual causes always diffuse based on primary inherent motions.

¹. [Translator’s note. It seems that the author deliberately does not identify the Trinity with Christianity, but rather with the

Christians, since according to the teachings of Islam, the genuine doctrines of Christianity, as revealed by God, characterise a wholly monotheistic set of beliefs, completely in accord with Islam. And the concept of the Trinity was a deviation from that, introduced later on.]

2. [Translator's note. For instance, see the first three commandments, cited in the Bible in Exodus 20:2-7 and Deuteronomy 5:7-11. Also see Luke 4:8, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 43:10-11.]

3. [Translator's note. An Attribute of God (sifah) and its corresponding Name (ism) have the same reality, and their distinction is notional (i'tibari). When taken by itself, a quality of God is referred to as an Attribute; and when taken in its relation to and as a property of God's Essence (the noun), it is referred to as a Name.]

4. [Translator's note. What is being said here is that the belief in true tawhid and that the Essence of Allah is One contradicts the claim that the Names and Attributes of Allah are the same as His Essence, for that would entail the same incongruity that arises from the Trinity. Instead, the author advocates that the Names and Attributes are lower and manifest levels of the Essence. They emanate from and relate to the Essence, but are distinct from It. This is the view of the gnostics ('urafa'). But the philosophers and theologians claim that even though God's Names and Attributes are conceptually distinct from His Essence, they are existentially united. The topic will be expanded on in this section and is discussed more thoroughly in the author's book, Tawhid-i 'Ilmi wa 'Ayni.]

5. [Translator's note. Even today some Catholics are condemned for worshipping Mary.]

6. 'Allamah Tabataba'i has elaborated on these topics in al-Mizan, 3:283ff. and 6:69ff. He says:

'What the Christians say is similar to saying, 'Zayd, son of 'Amr, is a man', which involves three things: Zayd, son of 'Amr, and man. However, they all refer to a single entity, so they are really one. But they [the Christians] have not realised that, if this multiplicity (kathrah) is real (haqiqi) and not notional (i'tibari), it entails that the noun should also involve real multiplicity. And if the noun is really and genuinely one, it entails that the multiplicity of the qualities must be notional and unreal [so there would also be one real quality]. It is rationally unacceptable to combine real arithmetical multiplicity and real arithmetical unity.

It is for this reason that many Christian preachers and advocates have themselves acknowledged that the concept of Trinity is a matter of submission (ta'abbud) that has been received from their ancestors and forefathers [and should just be accepted without question], but cannot be figured out on intellectual and scientific grounds. But they have not realised that they should ask for proof for anything that they hear [as opposed to blindly accepting it], and there is no difference in this regard between what one hears from the earlier generations and what one hears from the later generations.

One should realise that the concept of Trinity was innovated and introduced by the Christians. They included it among the principles of Christianity by altering the Gospel. Otherwise, Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) is blameless in this, as he constantly called the people to the truth. Many verses in the Noble Qur'an bear witness to this. 'Allamah Tabataba'i once drew upon the last verses of Chapter 5 (al-Ma'idah) as an incredible account of the politeness of Prophet Jesus, who presents himself as a faithful and obedient servant of God:

And when Allah saith: 'O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, "Take me and my mother as two deities beside Allah"?'

He saith, 'Glorified Thou art! It was not mine to utter what I had no right to. If I had said it Thou wouldst know it. Thou knowest what is within myself but I know not what is within Thyself. Truly only Thou art the Omniscient of things hidden. * I said not to them other than what Thou commandest me, that "Worship Allah, [Who is] My Lord and your Lord," and I was a witness over them while I remained among them. And when Thou seized me Thou wast Thyself the Watcher over them; and Thou art Witness over everything. * If Thou punishest them, they are truly Thy servants, and if Thou forgivest them, Thou art truly the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.' * Allah saith, 'This is a day that the truthfulness of the truthful benefiteth them. For them are gardens underneath which rivers flow; eternally therein forever; Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him; that is the great triumph'. * To Allah belongeth the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, and He is All-Powerful over everything.' (5:116-120)

Notice how wonderful Prophet Jesus' answer is! Such a superb speech and eloquent expression! In each and every word of his is a world of meaning, wisdom, and consideration of the Supreme Creator's status of Lordship (rububiyah). It

represents his observation of the highest degree of manners of servitude ('ubudiyah). He says: if I had said so, then first, You would have known, for Your knowledge encompasses all beings. And second, what I told people was exactly Your command: preach unity (tawhid); and I did not exceed that frontier. Thirdly, I watched over them so long as I was among them. And fourthly, Your chastisement is totally just ('adl), for they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are All-Mighty and All-Wise! Truly one cannot conceive of any statement more wonderful and superb than this.'

[7.](#) See al-Mizan, 3:297. [Translator's note. For Paul's stand against philosophy see Colossians 2:8-9 and 1 Corinthians 1:20-2, as 'Allamah has quoted in al-Mizan. One can argue that Paul was not against philosophy altogether, but he was against certain types and usages of philosophy; see Acts 1, and his letter to the Romans, Romans 1:20.]

[8.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 1. [Translator's note. Any attribute and description is a concept, and thus a mental matter with mental existence, but not an external reality. Mental concepts are all universal – i.e. they can be assumed to have multiple instances – while external realities (i.e. existence) are all particular and personal. In attribution, an attribute is identified with a noun as its external instance. Thus the predicate is a universal concept, while the subject is a particular instance, and the two cannot be wholly identical.]

[9.](#) [Translator's note. For this topic and the relevant narrations see the author's Tawhid-i 'Ilmi wa 'Ayni (Tehran, 1410/1989): 77-8.]

[10.](#) [Translator's note. Pahlavi, or Fahlawiyyun in Arabic, 'refer to the ancient sages of Persia and are derived from the writings of Suhrawardi, who saw in their teachings the perfect combination of rational and intuitive knowledge.' S.H. Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present (Albany: SUNY, 2006): 79. Also see Sabzivari, Sharh al-Manzumah, annotated by Ayatullah Hasan Zadah Amuli (3rd ed., Qum, 2005), 2:104ff.; Suhrawardi, Majmu'ih-yi Musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq (Tehran, 1976), 1:502ff. and 2:128 and 157.]

[11.](#) [Translator's note. Mahiyyah (quiddity, 'whatness') of a thing is the answer to 'what is it?'. In itself, it entails neither the existence nor the nonexistence of that thing, and thus it only applies to contingent beings. It is a conceptual matter that defines and confines the existence of a being, for existence is a single reality across all existents. Thus, the assertion that God's quiddity is His existence – which is absolutely unlimited – is equivalent to saying that God has no quiddity. The only thing that can conceptually define and differentiate God from other things is His limitlessness (i.e. that He cannot be defined and delimited).]

[12.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 185.

[13.](#) See Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Nihayat al-Hikmah (Qum, 1417/1996): 73.

[14.](#) [Translator's Note. See note 145 below]

[15.](#) See Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, The Return to Being: A Translation of Risalat al-Walayah, trans. F. Amjad and M. Dasht Bozorgi (London: ICAS Press, 2010).

[16.](#) See Sabzivari, Sharh al-Manzumah, 3:546ff and 586ff.

[17.](#) See Nihayat al-Hikmah (Qum, 1417/1996): 214.

[18.](#) [Translator's note. In summary, assuming that God's Names and Attributes are identical with His Essence means that the former, which are multiple concepts, can be derived from the latter, which is absolute and simple in every aspect, and that is impossible. If the Names and Attributes are considered outside the Essence but at the same level, then that is also impossible, for there is nothing outside absolute existence. Even if the Names and Attributes are thought of as mere concepts with nothing other than mental existence, they will still be independent of the Essence and external to it inasmuch as being concepts with mental existence. Therefore God's Names and Attributes should be thought of and derived from lower planes than His Essence. And does not entail lack of any perfection in God's Essence, as every existence and existential perfection is ultimately derived from It and there is nothing external to It. This topic is very similar to how multiple effects can emerge from an absolutely simple existence – which is explained by emergence of the First Intellect, which encompasses and stands above the Second Intellect, and so on.]

[19.](#) See Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah (Beirut, 1981), vol. 3, part 2 (vol. 7 of 9): 358-9.

[20.](#) Ibid., vol. 4, part 1 (vol. 8 of 9): 347.

[21.](#) Hellenic and Islamic Peripatetic philosophers like Ibn Sina believed that the creation of the soul (nafs) is from the non-material world ('alam al-tajarrud) and separate from that of the body. The soul is bound to the body in order to perform its

actions, and in effect the body is an instrument for the actions of the soul. However, based on transubstantial motion, Mulla Sadra proved that the nafs needs the body for its original existence; that is, the nafs is realised through the body. Man is a graded being whose beginning is matter and whose end is intellect. The human soul starts as a single sperm-cell; then it evolves and passes through the stages of sensation (hiss), imagination (khayal) and conception (wahm) and reaches the stage of intellect ('aql), and thus it becomes non-material (mujarrad) and eternal.

The human soul (nafs) is like a butterfly in a cocoon, a foetus in the womb or an almond or walnut kernel at its initial stage when it is mixed with the skin. It evolves and develops with the body and then follows its own path toward perfection. The nafs is with the body for a while, but then it becomes self-supporting and independent of the body as a result of substantial perfection. It separates from the body like almond or walnut oil, or like a butterfly that exits the cocoon, or an animal that sheds its skin. Thus the soul departs the body, continues without it, and becomes non-material. See *ibid.*, vol. 4, part 1 (vol. 8 of 9): 330ff.

[22.](#) [Translator's note. Although spirit (ruh) and soul (nafs) are often used interchangeably, strictly speaking, ruh is the source and element of life, which is independent of the body. When it is attached to the body it is called nafs. The rational soul (al-nafs al-natiqah) is the human spirit, which moves toward its perfection when it is placed in the body.]

[23.](#) [Translator's note. The concept of al-a'yan al-thabitah (well-translated by T. Izutsu as 'Permanent Archetypes') was first discussed in detail by Ibn al-'Arabi. Though the concept is quite similar to Platonic ideas, it is best to think of a being's Permanent Archetype as its container; the water (i.e. existence) that each being can have is subject to the shape and capacity of the container. They are the quiddities and intelligible forms of all beings that are the object of God's eternal knowledge. They are called thabitah (fixed, permanent) to be distinguished from the external existents (al-a'yan al-kharijiyyah), not that they are at some intermediate plane between existence and nonexistence, for there is no such a plane. See T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, 1984): 159ff, Hasan Zadah's annotation on Sabzivari, *Sharh al-Manzumah*, 3:574, and the translators' note on Sabzivari, *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari* (Delmar, 1977): 225, translated by M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu. In the pages that follow, the student argues against the subsistence of the Permanent Archetypes upon annihilation in God's Essence (therefore they would not be so 'permanent' after all); while the 'Allamah advocates that there is some subsistence for them even upon annihilation in God's Essence. The book leaves the debate without a conclusion, but the student finally convinces 'Allamah, at which he humbly says, 'Allah made you the means for my guidance.' Muhammad Muhsin Husayni Tihrani, *Harim-i Quds* (Qum, 1428/2007): 113-14.]

[24.](#) [Translator's note. Ghirah or ghayrah (Persian ghayrat) is often translated as 'jealousy', and ghayur as 'jealous', which is not quite accurate. As the author explains, ghirah means intolerance toward outsiders and intruders. Therefore ghirah involves a sense of protectiveness and possessiveness.]

[25.](#) [Translator's note. See al-Mizan, 8:95; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal* (Beirut, 1409/1989), 11:688; and Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Istanbul, 1981), 8:174, with minor differences.]

[26.](#) [Translator's note. See Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Bidayat al-Hikmah*, Chapters 5.6 and 12.10. In short, multiple persons of a species occur due to separable accidents (al-'arad al-mufariq), and only material beings can have accidents.]

[27.](#) [Translator's note. The realm of angels (malakut) is different from the corporeal world. Here there are many human beings that have their own distinctions between themselves, and stand parallel with respect to one another. But in the realm of angels there is only one Gabriel with no similar, and there is one Michael with no similar. There is only one intermediary for effusion of knowledge, and that is Gabriel. No other being can perform this task. Likewise there is only one Michael for effusion of power and only one Israfil for effusion of life.]

[28.](#) [Translator's note. The following example may help clarify what is meant here: consider an individual in a room covered with mirrors. There are multiple and distinct pictures seen in the mirrors, but there is only one real source for all that multiplicity. The one is entified and determined into many images, but it is one in reality, not many.]

[29.](#) See Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili, *al-Jawahir al-Saniyyah* (Baghdad, 1964): 361; Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* (Beirut, 1983), 90:376 and 102:164.

[30.](#) [Translator's note. Similar versions of this poem are attributed to Ahmad Jami and Sa'di.]

[31.](#) These are 'Allamah's own poems that are drawn upon here as evidence.

[32.](#) Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, al-Asfar, vol. 1, part 3 (vol. 3 of 9): 179; where he says, 'As one of them has said' (kama qala qa'iluhum), apparently referring to Muhyi al-Din.

[33.](#) Ibid.: 178.

[34.](#) Shaykh Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, Misbah al-Mutahajjid (Beirut, 1411/1991): 840.

[35.](#) The exact count is 761 verses.

[36.](#) Mulla Muhammad Salih Khalkhali has presented several pieces of evidence and reasons for Muhyi al-Din's Shi'ism in the introduction to his Sharh-i Manaqib-i Muhyi al-Din 'Arabi (Tehran, 1985): 9-18.

[37.](#) From the last few lines of Ibn al-Farid's Ya'iyah ode. [Translator's note. Qusay was an ancestor of the Prophet.]

[38.](#) [Translator's note. In this classification, God's Universal Names (al-asma' al-kulliyah) include both His Essential Attributes (the three Attributes of Life, Knowledge and Power) and His non-Essential Attributes (the rest of them, including those that pertain to God's Actions, and those that can be traced back to the Essential Attributes). The Particular Names (al-asma' al-juz'iyah) here refer to the particular instances of God's manifestations (i.e. His creation).]

[39.](#) See al-Futuh al-Makkiyah (Beirut, 1999), 4:221 (bk. 223).

[40.](#) [Translator's note. For the first part see al-Kulayni, al-Kafi (Tehran, 1388/1968), 1:107 and 8:94; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal, 10:370. And the second part is narrated from Junayd; see Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, al-Asfar, vol. 3, part 2 (vol. 7 of 9): 350; and A. Sha'rani's notes on Mazandarani, Sharh Usul al-Kafi (Beirut, 2000), 3:123 and 4:97. Also see Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (3rd ed., Beirut, 198?), 6:206; Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Tawhid (Qum, 1416/1995): 178-9 and 316; Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj (Najaf, 1386/1966), 2:187 and 213.]

[41.](#) Lahiji, Mafatih al-I'jaz fi Sharh-i Gulshan-i Raz (Tehran, 1958): 75.

[42.](#) 'Abd al-Karim Jili, al-Insan al-Kamil (Misr, 1981), 2:23-4.

[43.](#) [Translator's note. No reference was found for the above statement by Bayazid, though Rumi has attributed a similar idea to him. See Mathnawi, vol. 5, the title before line 1685.]

[44.](#) While writing up these conversations, it came to this humble being's mind that annihilation in the Sacred Essence of the Truth occurs in two ways. One is annihilation prior to death, which occurs for the faithful and sincere servants who complete their journey toward God and annihilate while they retain their worldly life. This state of annihilation occurs for one as a determined entity (ta'ayyun), and therefore the Permanent Archetype subsists in this type of annihilation. It is this type of annihilation that has been referred to in the tradition: 'No servant of Mine seeks proximity to Me by anything more loved by Me than what I have made obligatory on him; and he certainly comes close to Me [gradually] by supererogatory worship until I love him. Then when I love him, I become his ear by which he hears, his eye by which he sees, his tongue by which he speaks, and his hand by which he grasps. If he calls Me I answer him, and if he requests from Me I grant him.'

According to the Sign of the Truth, the late Mirza Jawad Aqa Maliki Tabrizi, all Muslims agree on this tradition. It has been reported with different lines of transmission in major Shi'a and Sunni sources. See Maliki Tabrizi, Risalat Liqa' Allah (Qum, 1405/1985): 24; Barqi, al-Mahasin (Tehran, 1951), 1:291; Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul), 2:352; al-Hurr al-'Amili, al-Jawahir al-Saniyyah: 121; Ghazzali, Ihya' al-'Ulum al-Din (Beirut, 2004): 1349, book of 'Love and Passion for Allah'.

Apparently Muhyi al-Din's claim regarding the subsistence of the Permanent Archetype is also concerning this type of annihilation. Likewise is the annihilation of all beings in the Essence of the Supreme Truth – like the minerals, plants, trees, mountains, stars, heavens, and the earth. They are in a state of annihilation, humility and meekness while their identities and Permanent Archetypes subsist: 'There is none in the heavens and the earth but that cometh to the All-Merciful as a servant. * Indeed He hath counted them and hath numbered them exactly.' (19:93-4)

The other type of annihilation is achieved by the intimate and chosen servants of God after leaving everything behind, dying of their life of this world, and passing through the stages of the Intermediate Realm (barzakh) and the Resurrection (qiyamah). They have departed their bodies, and have gone beyond the realms of barzakh and qiyamah. Thus, they are free from matter, form (surah), and soul (nafs) altogether. They have entered the precinct of the Truth, and have passed beyond all determinations. Therefore there is no Permanent Archetype for them anymore. This might be the annihilation that is achieved five hundred years after one's death according to Shah Waliullah Dihlawi (Hama'at [Hyderabad, 1964]: 63, part 11). This type of annihilation involves an essential transformation (dhati), like when a dog falls in a salt marsh and

changes into salt, whereby the essence and the properties of the dog are totally gone.

In the above discourses, 'Allamah's stand seems to be pertaining annihilation of the first type, though some of his assertions may also be applied to annihilation of the second type.

[45.](#) [Translator's note. Quoted from al-Mizan, 1:413.]

[46.](#) [Translator's note. Qasr is the motion of an object against its will and natural tendency. In other words, it is the motion that is neither voluntary (*iradi*) nor natural (*tabi'i*). Thus it may be translated as unnatural, imposed and involuntary motion. The typical example is when a rock is thrown up; it is necessarily caused by an outside force, and the upward motion is against the natural tendency and course of the rock. The philosophical doctrine discussed here is that any such motion cannot be permanent, as it is against the natural state and trend of the object. The student is inquiring about the implications of this doctrine, especially regarding eternal damnation.]

[47.](#) [Translator's note. If one has God's bounties upon entry into hell, that person would not stay therein forever. Eternity in hell is for those who destroyed and wasted all of God's bounties upon them in this world by their voluntary actions, and so they enter hell without any of His bounties. Thus, there is no contradiction between eternal punishment and the rule discussed above. See See Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, al-Asfar, vol. 4, part 2 (vol. 9 of 9): 347.]

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