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Chapter 4: What is the way towards perfection after knowing that it is possible?

We say: The relation of the realities to what exists in this material realm and the physical self is the relation of the outward (*zahir*) to the inward (*batin*).

Every existing characteristic connected with the outward is in reality attached to its inward and to the outward itself by its accident and in conformity with it. Thus, the self-evident perception of the self in relation to itself is primarily and in reality related to its inward aspects, and then by accident and concordance (*agreement*) related to its self.

The reality which is the inward aspect of the self is more immediately perceived by the self than the actual self and is more self-evident than it, and that which is inward to this inwardness is even more prior and evident than this inwardness, and this continues until it reaches a reality to which all realities culminate.

This reality is the precedent of all things known and the most evident of all self-evident things.

Considering that existence in it is sheer and undifferentiated, a second for it or another kind of it cannot be conceptualized, therefore, regarding the perception of this existence, there is no place for a refuter to refute or a denier to deny. This argument is of course complete and flawless.

We then say: Every existing reality necessitates that it be complete in its self, both in its essence and accidents, and this is a necessary self–evident premise, but it is in need of complete conceptualization (*tasawwur*).

So, if we were to suppose a reality, **A**, which has accidents **B**, **C**, and **D**, then this reality necessitates, in its essence, that **A** should not be lacking in **A**, for if **A** is deficient in **A** it would no longer be **A**, given that we have supposed it to be **A**.

Moreover, it also necessitates that accidents B, C and D, be their very selves, which, if they were lacking

in **B**, **C** and **D**, given that we have already supposed them to be **B**, **C** and **D** and nothing more, as is apparent.

This is what every reality necessitates in its essence and accidents, and this is what we call perfection (*kamal*) and happiness (*saadah*)

The reality of every perfection is that which is not qualified in its essence by a qualification of non-existence, for this would be a deficiency (*naqs*). This is because every perfection in its essence has its essence. Thus there is nothing missing from its existence other than from the aspect of a qualification of non-existence (*i.e.* the quiddity that circumscribes that existent and distinguishes it from other) that accompanies it of necessity.

Therefore, the reality of **A**, for example, has that which would be assumed for **A**. Thus the separation in existence of this individual instance of **A**, from that instance of **A** could only be because of the existence of qualifications of non-existence in each of the two individuals. A deficiency in the reality of **A** in both of them would require a deficiency of something from their essences and not from their accidents.

This would be impossible as it will necessitate a reversion (inquilab) or be self-contradictory (khulf) with reference to the essence of **A** which we have taken as given in its essence. Thus the factor that is lacking (i.e. the qualification of non-existence) for the particularity of this individual instance of **A** is the particularity of that individual instance of **A**.

Therefore, the reality of **A** has two levels: One level is its essence where it lacks nothing concerning that essence. The other level is the level of the individual, which with respect to the other individual, something of its perfection will become deficient.

Of course, this does not mean that this is a result of gradation in any way, because if we were to suppose one of the levels of **A** for the individual, it would also be **A**, and this would turn to being impossible. Rather when a reality is supposed for an individual, it will become this particular individual, and when we do not suppose that reality there would be nothing.

So, nothing will stay with it other than the non-existence qualification. This reality is itself with the individual and nothing less than that, and there is nothing in the individual other than reality, while the individual is something non-existent, imaginary and nominal.

This meaning is what we term as manifestation (*zuhur*), so understand.

From here it becomes evident that the reality of all perfection is that which is absolute, unqualified and permanent. The closeness of every perfection to its reality is according to the degree of the manifestation of its reality in it, meaning its connection to qualifications and limits since the more qualifications there are, the weaker the manifestation will be, and vice versa.

It also becomes clear that the Almighty Truth is the ultimate reality for all perfection, as He has the

sheerness (*sirf*) of every perfection and beauty (*jamal*), and the proximity of any existent to Him depends upon the extent of its qualifications of non–existence and limits.

It is concluded from this that the attainment of every existent to its real perfection necessitates its annihilation (*faana*), since this necessitates the annihilation of the qualifications and limits in its essence or in its accidents alone. The opposite is also true, where the annihilation of every existent necessitates the subsistence of its reality only in its self. Allah the Almighty said:

"Everyone on it is ephemeral; yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, Majestic and Munificent." Quran 55:26-27.

The real perfection for every possible existent is that which will perish within its self. So, the real perfection for the human being is what becomes absolute and free from any restrictions, and hence the human being will be annihilated and have nothing of perfection other than this.

It has already been mentioned in the previous argument that the human being witnessing his own very essence is in fact his essence witnessing all its realities and its ultimate reality, and while being annihilated in that station he will also be witnessing his own annihilation.

In other words: The reality of the human essence is the witnessing of its self while the human being is being annihilated.

Real human perfection is its achievements of its real perfection in its essence and its accidents, meaning its achievement of its ultimate perfection in its essence, attributes, and actions, which is its annihilation in essence, attributes and actions in the Almighty Truth.

This is the meaning of monotheism (Tawhid) of the essence, of attributes and of actions, which is the ability to intuitively witness that there is absolutely no essence, no attribute and no action other than Allah the Almighty, according to what is befitting the sanctity of His Eminence, may His Greatness be magnified. Of course, this is without it becoming incarnated or undergoing divine unification, may He be exalted from such.

This argument is one of the endowments of Allah the Almighty, mentioned specifically only in this treatise, and thanks is to Allah.

The conclusion from the argument mentioned in the beginning of this chapter is that the witnessing of these realities and knowing them is embodied in the witnessing of the self and knowing it.

The closest way there is for mankind is that of knowledge of the self, and it has already been mentioned that this can be accomplished by abandoning anything other than Allah and turning towards Him the Almighty.

Addendum

If we were to observe the Quran and traditions and deeply contemplate them, we will discover that the criterion of reward and punishment is obedience and submission, and rebellion and obstinacy.

What is indisputably understood from the Quran and Traditions is that the commission of sins, even major sins, does not necessitate punishment if it is performed by someone who does not realize that he is committing it, or any case similar to this. Obedient acts do not necessitate reward if they are performed without the intention of sincerity or submission to Allah, unless the deed is something that cannot be separated from submission, like certain noble and moral acts.

Furthermore, the commission of sin by someone who is not conscious of it being a sin, if done with the intention of an obedient act, will be considered a good deed; and also doing something obedient with the intention of being *rebellious* or being vain will be considered wrong. The levels of obedience and sin also differ according to the difference between submission and rebellion, which exists on both sides.

It is said in a tradition:

"The best of deeds is the hardest of them."

This has been narrated in many traditions on different aspects of the subject of obedience and sins, the different levels of virtue and vileness, and the reward and punishment for them, which the sound intellect also confirms. Most Quranic verses direct people to what the intellect prescribes them to do, and the scale and criterion according to the intellect is obedience to the truth or rebellion against it and nothing else. These are by necessity two different things according to their levels.

In addition, as happiness and wretchedness are related to these two scales, they therefore have an expanded indication in accordance with the levels that exist in obedience and rebellion.

It becomes evident here that happiness for a person who has accepted the True religion is the attainment of perfection, but absolute happiness is not only for those who have accepted the True religion, rather it might be found in someone who has not accepted the religion if he has some kind of obedience or does not have some kind of rebellion on whatever level it might be.

This is what the intellect prescribes and is apparent in religion, for religion designates the limits of what the intellect has judged, as the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) says in the famous tradition:

"Verily, I was sent to complete the noble traits of character."

It has been narrated that the ancient Persian king Kasra and the Arabian Hatim Tai will not be punished because they had in themselves the traits of justice and generosity.

It is mentioned in al-Khisal, narrating from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) from His father, from His grandfather,

Imam Ali (a.s.) who said:

"Heaven has eight doors. One door in which the prophets and righteous will enter, a door that the martyrs and pious will enter and five other doors which are for those who follow and love us. I will continuously be standing on the sirat, supplicating and saying: "O Lord, protect my followers, lovers, companions, vicegerents and those who had been devoted to me in this world."

Then a call from within the Throne will be heard, saying: "I have accepted your prayer and intercession for your followers."

Every one of my followers and those who are devoted to me, defend me, and who fight those who fight against me by actions or by words will also intercede for seventy of their neighbors and relatives. And there is another door that will be used for the rest of the Muslims who testify that there is no God but Allah and there is not even the size of an atom of hatred in their hearts towards us the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)."

It is stated in Tafsir al Qummi, narrating from Durais al-Kanani who asked Abu Jafar [al-Bagir] (a.s.):

"May I be sacrificed for you, what is the state of the monotheists who acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) who are sinning Muslims and die and do not have a leader and do not know your authority (wilayah)?"

The Imam (a.s.) said: "As for these people, they will stay in their holes [graves] and will not leave them. As for those who have righteous deeds and have not shown hatred, He will trace for them a path to heaven which He created in the west. The soul will stay in its hole until Judgement Day comes and it will meet Allah and He will judge its good and bad deeds, so either to Heaven or to Hell. These people are awaiting the Order of Allah."

He then said: "The weak, the foolish, the infants and the children of the Muslims that have not reached the age of puberty will also be treated the same way.

As for the Muslims who are hostile towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), a path has been made for them all the way to Hell which Allah created in the east. Flames, sparks, smoke, and boiling liquid will all be thrown with them until the coming of Judgement Day and then after that their destiny will be Hellfire."

It says in the Supplication of Kumail, narrated by Imam Ali (a.s.):

"So I declare with certainty that were it not for what you have decreed concerning the chastisement of Your deniers and what You have foreordained concerning the everlasting home of those who stubbornly resist, You would make all of the fire cool and safe, and no one would have a place of rest or abode within it. But You, holy are Your Names, have sworn that You will fill it with the unbelievers, both jinn and mankind, and that You will place those who stubbornly resist therein forever."

Most of the Quranic verses make a promise to those who have been informed with evidence and proof

and it confines disbelief to the act of denying and obstinacy.

Allah the Almighty said:

"As for those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of Hell." Quran 5:10

"So that he who perishes might perish by a manifest proof, and he who lives may live on by a manifest proof." Quran 8:42

In general, the whole criterion for happiness and wretchedness, and reward and punishment is the sincerity of the heart and the purity of the self.

"...the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart." Quran 26:88-89.

"...on the day when the secrets are examined." Quran 86:9.

All divine religions aim to train people in a particular way. This is indisputably seen in their dispositions and what they taught, and this is also what the previous divine philosophers advocated.

As for the shariah of Islam, it is much clearer concerning these matters, however, as was stated towards the end of chapter two, Islam calls to any kind of happiness possible, but knowledge of the Lord by way of knowledge of the self is the closest way and brings the most complete result. This way is the most effectual way and it is the way that Islam emphasizes. The Quran and traditions both have this aim and call to this way in every possible language.

He Almighty says:

"O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and let every soul consider what it sends ahead of tomorrow, and be wary of Allah. Allah is indeed well aware of what you do. And do not be like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors." Quran 59:18–19.

This is the obverted contra positive of the following saying of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.), as has been narrated by both schools of thought:

"He who knows his self knows his Lord."

He the Almighty said:

"Take care of your own souls. He who goes astray cannot hurt you if you are guided." Quran 5: 105.

Al-Amudi has narrated more than twenty traditions regarding knowledge of the self in his book al-

Ghurar wa al-Durar which is a compilation of the short sayings of Imam Ali (a.s.)

"A clever person is someone who knows his self and does things with sincerity."

"Knowledge of the self is the more beneficial of the two forms of knowledge."

"A Knower (*arif*) is someone who knows his self, and releases it and repels it from anything that would farther it away [from Allah]."

"The greatest of ignorance is a person's ignorance of his self."

"The greatest of wisdom is a person's knowledge of his self."

"People who have the most knowledge of their selves have more fear of their Lord."

"The best of the intellect is a person's knowledge of his own self. So, whoever knows his self will be more knowledgeable and he who is ignorant of his self will fall astray."

"It surprises me that someone who has lost something searches for it while he has lost his self but does not look for it."

"It surprises me that a person is ignorant of his self. How can he know his Lord."

"The goal of knowledge is for a person to know his self."

"How can one who does not know others know his own self."

"It is sufficient in knowledge for a person to know his self."

"It is sufficient in ignorance for a person to have ignorance of his self."

"He who knows his self will become immaterial."

"He who knows his self will struggle with it."

"He who is ignorant of his self will neglect it."

"He who knows his self knows his Lord."

"He who knows his self will increase in status."

"He who is ignorant of his self will be more ignorant in knowing others."

"He who knows his self will be more knowledgeable of others."

"He who knows his self has reached the ultimate goal of every knowledge and science."

"He who does not know his self will become far away from the path of salvation and he will fall into aberrance and ignorance."

"Knowledge of the self is the most beneficial form of knowledge."

"Those who gain knowledge of the self will have achieved the greatest triumph."

"Do not be ignorant of your self, for the he who is ignorant of knowing his self is ignorant of everything."

I say: As you can see, these traditions prove the falsity of the interpretation of some scholars regarding the Prophetic (s.a.w.s.) saying, 'He who knows his self knows his Lord' that it is impossible to know the self, because it is related to knowledge of the Lord, which is impossible. The literal understanding of the previously mentioned traditions refutes this, and furthermore, so does the saying of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.):

"The more knowledgeable you are of yourself the more knowledgeable you are of your Lord."

If knowledge of Allah the Almighty is considered to be impossible, then it would be conceptual knowledge by way of thought and not by way of intuitive witnessing. Given this impossibility, it would mean that one cannot have absolute comprehension of Allah the Almighty, but knowledge within the contingent capacity of human beings is not impossible.

On the whole, knowledge of the self is the best and closest path to perfection, and this should not be doubted. However, it is the method of proceeding on this path that is the issue of discussion.

Some have claimed that the way to journey on this path has not been explained in the shariah and some writers have even claimed that this spiritual path in Islam is similar to the monastic way the Christians innovated, which was not designated as a divine law, but Allah Almighty accepted it from them.

Allah Almighty said:

"But as for Monasticism, they innovated it —We had not prescribed it for them —only seeking Allah's pleasure. Yet they did not observer it with due observance." Quran 57:27.

They say (in summary): "The path to knowledge of the self has not been stated in the shariah; however it is an acceptable way to perfection."

It is possible from here that there might exist among some of the people of this path different kinds of exercises and certain ways that do not exist in the Quran and in the traditions nor have they seen in the way of life of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) and the Imams (a.s.) from his household.

This is all in accordance with what was previously mentioned that the objective is to pass and reach in any way possible after maintaining the goal.

In addition to this are the methods that are used by non-Muslims, like the transcendent philosophers and the people of spiritual exercises, as is evident to those who refer to their books or to what is known about them.

However, the reality that is upheld by the people of the truth – which is evident from the Quran and traditions – is that the shariah of Islam does not permit one who journeys towards Allah to turn in any way towards anything other than Him the Almighty, and it does not permit one to seek reliance on anything other than Allah the Almighty, unless it is a way the shariah has ordered to be observed and followed.

Indeed, the shariah of Islam has not neglected the slightest thing with regard to happiness and wretchedness without explaining it and did not exclude anything from the necessities of journeying towards Allah the Almighty, whether easy or dangerous, without clarifying them. Therefore, whatever [good] every soul earns is to its benefit, and whatever [evil] the soul incurs is to its harm.

Allah the Almighty says:

"We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things."

Quran 16:89.

"Certainly we have drawn for mankind in this Quran every [kind of | parables." Quran 30:58.

"Say, 'If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you." Quran 3:31.

"In the apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good example." Quran 33:21.

There are many more examples from the Quran illustrating this point and likewise, the traditions narrated from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) with reference to this meaning are abundant, or rather they are recurrently transmitted.

What is evident here is that the amount of perfection every person has is in accordance with how much he follows the shariah, and as you already know, this perfection is something that is graded by having different levels. What an excellent expression it is when some of the people of perfection say:

"The tendency of turning from the shariah towards observing difficult spiritual exercises is actually running away from the hardest to the easiest."

Indeed, following the shariah is a continuous killing of the self and this is gradual and consistent as long as the self exists, and difficult exercises are a swift killing and are much easier.

In general, the shariah has not neglected the explanation of how to journey [to Allah] by the path of the self.

Explanation: Worship can be divided into three kinds:

One: Worship out of greed.

Two: Worship out of fear of hell.

Three: Worship solely for sake of Allah, without fear or greed.

There is another kind of worship different from the third: this is where the goal of worship is to succeed in gaining comfort, or to flee from punishment, as the ultimate goal of this kind is to attain the desires of the self.

Therefore, attentiveness to Allah the Almighty in worship is only to satisfy the cravings of the self, and accordingly the Almighty Truth made worship become a way to achieve one's desires.

This way or this medium, inasmuch as it is a medium, is not sought after or intended primarily, but is in pursuance and correspondence to it, as this in reality will be nothing other than the worship of desire itself.

The third kind remains which is real worship, and this type of worship has been expressed in different names and ways.

It says in Al-Kafi, narrating from Harun who narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) who said:

"Worshippers are of three kinds:

One group worships Allah the Glorious out of fear, and that is the worship of slaves.

Another group worships Allah the Almighty wanting rewards, and that is the worship of wageworkers.

And another group worships Allah the Almighty out of love for Him, and that is the worship of free people, and this is the best form of worship."

In Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali (a.s.) says:

"Some people worship Allah out of desire, and that is the worship of merchants. Some people worship Allah out of fear and terror, and that is the worship of slaves. And some people worship Allah thanking Him, and that is the worship of free people."

It is narrated in 'Ilal al-Sharai, al-Majalis, and al-Khisal, narrating from Yunis, from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) who said:

"People worship Allah in three ways: One type worships Him in desire of His reward and that is the worship of the covetous, which is greed. Others worships Him fearing hellfire, and that is the worship of the slaves, which is terror. However, I worship Him with love for Him Almighty, and that is the worship of the honorable, as He Almighty says:

"... and they shall be secure from terror on that day." Quran 27:89

"Say, 'If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you." Quran 3:31

"So, those who love Allah the Almighty, Allah will love them, and whoever is loved by Allah they will be among those who are safe, and this is the hidden status which 'no one can attain unless they are pure." Quran 56:79.

It is stated in al-Manaqib:

"He [the Holy Prophet] (s.a.w.s.) would cry until He would faint, so he was asked: "Has not Allah forgiven all your past and future sins?"

He said: "Shall I not be a thanking servant?".

I say: Both thanking and loving return to one thing. Thanking is the praising of benevolence inasmuch as it is benevolence, and worship would be attentiveness and humility towards Him the Almighty. He is the Benevolent in His Essence, and therefore it is He, the Almighty who is sought after in Himself and not for something else, as He, the Almighty said:

"I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me." Quran 51:56.

The ultimate goal in the creation of mankind, meaning mankind's existence, is the perfection of their existence, which is to worship Allah the Almighty and turn towards Him alone, and turning towards Him is a medium which is not, in its essence the goal, as He Almighty is the ultimate goal of their existence. This is why worship here has been interpreted in the traditions as being knowledge (marifat).

He also said:

"Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him." Quran 17:23

"He is the Living One; there is no god except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him." Quran 40:65.

Moreover, love is the attraction of the self towards beauty in itself, and only He Almighty has absolute beauty.

He the Almighty said:

"Say , 'If you love Allah, then follow me..."

And

"But the faithful have more ardent love for Allah." Quran 2:165.

A tradition narrated by al-Daylami will soon be mentioned.

It is mentioned in the supplication of Kumail:

"And make [O Lord] my heart enthralled with the love of You."

In the intimate munajaat of Imam Ali (a.s.), it says:

"O Allah put me among the people of your vicegerency [wali] the station of those who hope for abundance in loving You."

Love and its role have been mentioned very often in many supplications.

And if you are surprised then it would be more surprising to hear those who say: "Love does not pertain to Him the Almighty in reality, and that which has been mentioned in the traditions of the shariah is only meant in a metaphorical sense in that it means to obey, to order and to refrain from the forbidden." This claim is contrary to that which is self-evident and is obstinacy towards that which is evident.

By my soul, is there not a big difference between those who say: "Love cannot be associated with Allah the Almighty" and those who say: "Love cannot be associated with anything other than Allah the Almighty?"

Returning to the discussion at hand, we say: As worship, which is turning towards Allah the Almighty, cannot be achieved without a certain kind of knowledge, even though it itself is an introduction or a prerequisite for knowledge, observing it in its possible reality would require one to traverse through knowledge (marifat).

Knowledge and worship are even regarded as two correlative things, as is mentioned in the tradition of Ismail ibn Jabir, narrating from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.):

"Knowledge is connected with practice, so he who knows, acts and he who acts, knows."

In other words: It is necessary for worship to be based on knowledge (marifat) in order for the worship to produce knowledge, as is said in the prophetic (s.a.w.s.) tradition:

"He who practices what he knows will be granted by Allah knowledge he had not known."

This is referring to what Allah the Exalted says in the holy Quran:

"Whosoever desires the tillage of the hereafter, We will enhance for him his tillage, and whosoever desires the tillage of the world, We will give it to him, but he will have no share in the hereafter." Quran 42:20

And,

"To Him ascends the good words, and He elevates righteous conduct." Quran 35:10

Intellectual consideration also supports our arguments, as love and yearning for something makes someone turn towards it. Turning towards something, which is action and practice, establishes love, yearning, and knowledge. Moreover, it confirms the establishment of something, and if the establishment of that thing has been confirmed, its signs and traces and everything related and connected with it will manifest.

In summary: This knowledge that needs practice can be conceived as being acquired in two ways: The external journey of the cosmos, and the journey of the inner self.

The first: This way is through thinking, contemplation and reflecting on the cosmological existents that are external to the self that are the creations of Allah and His signs in the heavens and the earth. This will lead to certainty in Allah and His Divine Names and Actions, this is because these things are clues and evidence, and knowledge of the evidence inevitably necessitates knowledge of that which is experienced.

The second: This is the return towards the self, and knowing the Truth Almighty through the self. The self does not exist absolutely independently, and to know such a thing cannot be detached from knowledge of that which is independent and which maintains it. In one aspect, both types of knowledge can be considered as one here.

So, these are the two ways. However, the truth is that the cosmological journey by itself does not necessarily bring about real knowledge or real worship. This is because establishing cosmological existents will only bring acquired knowledge of the existence of the Almighty Creator and His Attributes for they are clues and signs. This knowledge is connected to propositions which have predicates and subjects, both being conceptual.

Arguments have been given that the Truth Almighty is a pure existence that does not have quiddity. It is impossible for Him to be in the mind because it will necessitate a quiddity in itself void of the two existences; existence in the mind and existing externally, and this cannot be so here.

So, whatever the mid visualizes and conceptualizes to be necessary and judges with its predicates, like names and features, would certainly be something other than Him Almighty.

A tradition in the book, al-Tawhid refers to this meaning, narrating from Abd al-Ala who narrates from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) who said:

"He who claims that he knows Allah through a veil, a picture or an image is a polytheist, because a veil, a picture and an image are all things other than Him. He is One and united, so how can someone consider Him one if they claim that they know Him through something else? Someone will know Allah only if they know Him through Him, and if someone does not know Him through Him, they do not know

Him, they know something other than Him. There is nothing between the Creator and the created, and Allah is the Creator of all things, but these things are not from a name of His, for their names are something other than Him, and names are different to Him. The noun is different to the adjective. He who claims he believes in something he does not know is aberrant from knowledge. Creation cannot perceive anything other than through Allah, and Allah is devoid of His creations, and His creations are devoid of Him."

The Imam (a.s.) saying 'He is One and United', which means pure oneness without plurality in Him, points to the argument of the impossibility of having knowledge of something that results in the gaining knowledge of Allah the Almighty. It is like saying: 'knowledge is essentially the very same as the known', as is demonstrated in its relevant place. It is impossible to have knowledge of something which will lead you to having knowledge of something else that is contradictory to it, or else contradictory things will become one, which is impossible.

Therefore, the necessity of knowing something prompting the knowing of something else requires a kind of unity between the two things.

When we suppose two things, they would have an aspect they share and an aspect they differ in, each one would be composed of two aspects, but the Truth Almighty is One and Simple in essence and He does not have any composite nature an any way. Therefore, it is impossible to know Him through something other than Him.

This is what the Imam (a.s.) means when He says: 'There is nothing between the Creator and the created.'

His saying: 'he who claims he believes in something he does not know is aberrant from knowledge' is the continuation of what he said before, that: 'someone will know Allah only if they know Him through Him'.

His saying: 'creation cannot perceive anything other than through Allah' is the same as demonstrating an argument for Allah in that everything is known by Allah who is the Light of the heavens and the earth, so how can one know through something other than Him. He is the Constituent of every essence, but is not composite in essence, and knowledge of something that is not essentially dependent comes after knowledge of the dependent thing that it constitutes.

This is because the occurrence of knowledge requires the independence of the known by necessity. Knowledge of the non-independent follows the independent that is with it.

As this might encourage erroneous illusions of incarnationism or pantheism, far is He from such, the Imam (a.s.) added after saying: 'and Allah is devoid of his creations, and His creations are devoid of Him'.

When we say the creation's perception of everything is done through Allah, this does not contradict the beginning of the tradition which states that knowing something necessitates the knowledge of something else, because the knowledge which is in the beginning of the tradition is acquired knowledge, and the knowledge at the end of the tradition is knowledge by presence.

There are numerous traditions that describe acquired knowledge as not being real knowledge.

Concluding from the aforementioned, there is no way of achieving the knowledge of reality other than through knowledge of the self.

Knowledge of the self ends up with knowledge of reality, which is to turn towards the Truth Almighty and detach from anything that would divert or occupy one's self from oneself in order for them to see their selves as they are, and the self is essentially in need of the Truth Almighty.

If someone is in such a state, their witnessing o that person's self cannot be detached from the witnessing of His Creator, as you know. If that person witnesses the Truth Almighty he would have necessary knowledge and will then know his self through it in reality, as the self is dependent on Him Almighty and he will hence know everything through the Truth Almighty.

Imam Jafar Sadig (a.s.) points to this meaning in a tradition narrated in Tuhaf ul-Ugul:

"Whomsoever claims that he knows Allah through doubts of the heart, then he is a polytheist. Whomsoever claims that he worships the name without the meaning then he has committed slander, because the name is created. Whomsoever claims that he worships the name and the meaning then he would have ascribed a partner with Allah. Whomsoever claims that he worships through the attributes, and not through perception and understanding, then he has transferred something far from the mind. Whomsoever claims that he added the substantive to the adjective then he would have belittled something that is great."

"They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him." Quran 6:91.

Someone said to him: "Then what is the way to monotheism (Tawhid)?"

He (a.s.) said: "The door of discussing and searching is possible, and accessibility to the path exists. Verily, knowledge of the witnessed and present comes before its features, and knowledge of the features of an absent person comes before seeing him.

They said: "And how do you know the essence of the witnessed before its featured?"

He (a.s.) said: "You will know it and you will know the signs. You will know yourself through it, and you will not know yourself by yourself or from within yourself. You will know that what is in it is for Him and by Him, as Yusuf's brother said to him:

"Are you really Joseph?" He said, 'I am Joseph, and this is my brother." Quran 12:90

So, they knew him through his self. They did not know him through something other than him, and they did not confirm him through themselves with the doubts of their hearts."

The Imam (a.s.) saying: 'and you will know its signs' means you will know Him and you will then know His signs and features through it, and you will know yourself through it and not through something else.

After contemplating on the meaning of this noble tradition which is a very distinctive tradition, especially in its portrayal of how the brothers of Yusuf recognized him, you will be able to derive all of the principles mentioned in the previous chapters from this tradition alone, and we do not want to prolong our explanation.

In general: If one wants to witness his Lord, he will know Him, and he will know his own self and everything else through Him, and hence attentiveness in worship will be bestowed upon this person in its correct place. Without this witnessing, all of our attention towards Allah will only become some kind of mental projection whatever it may be.

This visualized concept, mental projection and the conformability of this limited imagery is something other than Him, the Almighty, and therefore the worshipped will be something other than the intended.

This is the situation of the worship of those other than the possessors of knowledge [of Allah] (*arifeen*) of those who possess this knowledge (*ulama*) by Allah, and as you have come to know, the acceptance of this kind of worship is only by the grace of Allah the Almighty.

"Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy upon you, not one of you would ever be pure." Quran 24:21

This is the opposite of the worship of those who know Allah and are sincere to Him. They do not pay attention in their worship neither to a concept nor to something that is in conformity with a concept, rather they turn solely towards their Lord, may His Gratitude be exalted.

He the Almighty said:

"Clear is Allah of whatever they allege [about Him], -[all] except Allah's exclusive servants." Quran 37:159:160.

It therefore becomes clear that the meaning of the sincere is those who have purified themselves with sincerity to Allah the Almighty with no veil coming between them and Him, if not, their depiction of Allah the Almighty would not be correct. As creation itself is a veil, and as our Master Imam Musa al–Kazim (a.s.) said:

"There is no veil between Himself and His creation other than His creation."

So, they do not see creation, rather, their destination is the Truth Almighty.

It says in Tafsir al-Askari (a.s.): "Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir (a.s.) said:

"A worshipper cannot give the worship of Allah its true right unless they detach themselves from creation altogether and turn towards Him. He will then say that this is sincerely for Me, and will hence accept it with His Grace and Mercy."

Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) said:

"Allah has given no blessing to a worshipper greater than not having in his heart anything other than Allah."

Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s.) said:

"The best of worship is sincerity."

The meaning of the following verse in reference to iblees also becomes clear after what has been explained:

"By Your Might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them." Quran 38:82–83.

And:

"So they will indeed be arraigned [before Him]-[all] except Allah's exclusive servants." Quran 37: 127-128.

These are people who are immersed into Him Almighty, and do not see iblees nor his satanic insinuations. They will not be asked nor will they be judged. The following hadith Qudsi points to this meaning:

"My vicegerents are concealed beneath My cloak, [or in another tradition] My sleeve."

The past tradition narrated by Yunis also refers to this meaning.

Summary: The path to knowledge of the self is the path that will lead to this goal, and it is the closest of paths. This is achieved by absolute detachment from everything other than Allah the Almighty, and attentiveness towards Him by occupying oneself with knowledge of the self, and this can be understood from the tradition mentioned by Imam Musa Kazim (a.s.), saying:

"There is no veil between Himself and His creation other than His creation. He is veiled, but without a concealing veil, and He is covered, but without a concealing cover."

This noble tradition is the most beautiful explanation of the best path, so to start this path in order to

reach total detachment, one must begin with the means mentioned in the shariah, like repentance (tawbah), turning to Allah (inabah), taking account of ourselves (muhasabah), self-monitoring (muraqabah), keeping silent (samt), hunger (ju'), solitude (khalwah), night vigilance, and struggling with deeds and worship.

This is supported through thinking and reflection until it brings detachment from the self and attentiveness towards the Truth Almighty. Then an insight into the unseen will dawn upon one, and something of the Divine fragrance and Lordly attractions will follow which would entail love and illumination, and this is remembrance (*zikr*).

The gleams will continue to shine, attractions will appear and yearning will drive one forward, until the dominion of love overcomes the heart and remembrance reigns over the self, and Allah will reunify everything and He will seal the matter:

"And that the terminus is toward your Lord." Quran 53:42

Know that the example of such a wayfarer is like that of a person who wants to go on a trip intending to reach a certain destination. It is necessary for this person not to forget his destination, and to know the way by which he will travel and what provisions he needs to take along with him on this trip.

If this person was to forget his destination, even for a slight moment, he would wander aimlessly about and would go astray.

If the path and its scenery were to distract him, the trip would become useless and it would come to a halt. If he were to over exceed in the provisions he carried, the trip would be delayed and he would miss the destination, and Allah the Almighty is the Helper.

If you were to say: Let us accept this long explanation that the closest way to Allah Almighty is through the path of knowledge of the self. But this has not proven that the particular exposition of such a way exists in the shariah, that explains how to enter and exit this path [of knowledge of the self], the issues concerning its wayfaring with its details, dangers, fears, threats and great possibility of going astray, and its perditions.

So, where is the adequate explanation for all of these particulars and the differences between the things that save and things that cause one to perish on this path?

I would reply: We have pointed out in the second chapter of this treatise that the expositions that have been mentioned in the Quran and the traditions are all one explanation. The differences are in the way they are interpreted, and the variations are in the perception of the perceivers.

Wayfaring towards Him Almighty is also the result of understanding and knowledge, and differences and divisions come from differences in knowledge and understanding.

By my soul, this issue is very clear and evident, and we have already mentioned that people are divided into different groups, and every group understands according to the level it is on and acts according to that level.

[First group: The average people]

If were to suppose that one of the common people whose desire is this world and its allurements goes to sleep and thinks about how he can manage his profits the next day, how he can buy and sell, where he should go tomorrow and whom he will see. When he wakes up his only concern would be to manage his daily affairs and improving his situation in this world.

If he was to hear a caller to Allah who brought good news and warned of the bad, preaching forgiveness from Allah, His contentment and a heaven full of constant blessings, who warned of a hellfire in which its fuel would be people and stones and everything else Allah has prepared for the oppressors.

But because of this person's lack of interest and him making his only concern that which fills him up and quenches him, he will not find any time to delve into the signs of Allah and His words.

He only believes in that which he generally hears and he only does good deeds which do not interfere with what he seeks in this world. The world for this person is the primary concern and religion is secondary, and therefore the actions, sayings, deeds and knowledge of this person all contradict each other.

You would see him say: Allah is the All-hearer, the All-seer, but he commits all the wrong things and leaves out all the obligatory deeds. You see him believing that Allah is the Ruler and that to Him is the return, but he submits and worships every ruler other than Allah and rushes towards every satan that invites him to blazing punishment when he sees the slightest embellishment of this world.

He would not know even if he were to be told for he sees nothing other than bodies and materials, not understanding that there are things beyond these illusionary matters.

He believes that Allah has a Throne and the laws for His creation emanate from it, and that the serving angels in the heavens and earth manage it, and it is His Sovereignty.

People of reasoning among His creation are His servants while they are in their physical bodies, and He has assigned them obligations and they have free choice in this world. Allah then takes the life of human beings and obliterates them after they had existed.

Then a day will come in this world when it will be in ruins and Allah will revive His creation in it. He will gather them for the Day of Judgment and will reward the righteous with heaven and all that is in it, except for the desires of the self which were only for the worldly, and He will punish the oppressors with hell and what is in it, in which there is nothing other than blazing fires and evil.

This is all done just like a king who rules over us with all of the prerequisites of pomp, dignity, the execution of law, rewarding or punishing the subjects and the politics of a king, and there is nothing more to it than this.

So, this is one level of people and their status in actions and knowledge.

[Second Group: The ascetics and the worshippers]

Let us suppose one of the ascetics and worshippers, and they are people who look comprehensively at the annihilation of the world and its decorations, deceptions and depletions, and the everlastingness of that which is with Allah the Almighty.

They have prepared themselves for asceticism (*zuhd*) and worship and have heard the caller for Truth inviting them to escape from the lies of worldly desires and to turn towards worshipping Allah in order to acquire salvation from the pain of punishment and to gain the victory of infinite blessings and a kingdom that can never be spoiled.

The fear of Allah dominates that person's heart and he always thinks of death, and hence the love of this world and the concern for wealth are taken away from his heart and he has no concern other than to be abstemious of this world or to perform good deeds for Allah in desire of seeking His satisfaction.

He disciplines the characteristics of his self, corrects the quality of his actions and abstains with piety from all that he is confronted with and from what amounts to what Allah dislikes. All this is in desire for the everlasting blessings and being cautious of eternal punishment.

If you were to seriously contemplate the state of this person and what he seeks in his esoteric exercises, you would find that he does not want anything other than the desires of his self. He loves his self because of what he heard from the Truth Almighty in that he was created to stay forever and not to be annihilated.

He therefore loves his self and what it desires and he abstains from the world for what he sees in it of its termination and vanishing.

If the world was to continue for those who belong to it and its blessings and desires were to be everlasting and all of its discomforts were to be wiped away, the aspirations behind the strivings of this ascetic person would not decrease or change. From here you know that perfection for this person is the desires of the self for the blessings of the material world.

However, he sees this world associated with deficiencies and barriers, so he acquires the desires of its adornments, but without its disturbances, so he views the next world as a realm of the world he lives in and believes that Judgment Day is one of the days of this world.

His self has stayed within this physical realm and has not been elevated to a higher level because of the

despair the self has for anything existing above it. The only perfection he wants is physical perfection, for he does not believe in anything existing beyond that.

This is why he is below the level of knowledge of Allah and he has confined himself to the level of action, tumbling about through life with sayings, actions and good behavior. It is as if the curtains of the unseen have been taken away from him and that which is behind the veils has manifested itself for him and everything can be seen, but this is not so.

This person has no hope of being able to witness that which is beyond the veils, but will see it after he dies, for he has only righteous actions and good rewards and he will not be blessed with more than that.

"Were Allah to expand the provision for his servants, they would surely create havoc on the earth. But He sends down in a [precise] measure whatever He wishes. Indeed He is all-aware, all-seeing about His servants." Quran 42:27

This is another group and their level of knowledge and action. They share knowledge with the first group, but differ from them in actions.

[Third Group: Those who know and those who yearn]

Now let us suppose one of the yearning lovers who is someone who has been stricken by the thunder of love and enthralled by the attraction of longing to meet Allah the Almighty. His pillars have been torn down, his insides tremble, his heart I confused and its intellect has flown away. He has escaped from the world and its ornaments and he has not confined his interests only to the hereafter and its blessings. The lover has no religion other than the Beloved and he seeks no goal to aspire to other than the ultimate goal who is Allah Almighty. If he has to hear Allah the Almighty say:

"Let not the life of the world bequile you; nor let the deceiver deceive you." Quran 35:5

And:

"The life of the world is just play and diversion." Quran 47:36

He looks down upon the world and its decorations and he renounces it because Allah the Almighty has done so, and if He praises this world, this person would do so because of His Beloved, but knowing its annihilation and lowliness. If he hears Allah saying:

"But the abode of the hereafter is indeed Life..." Quran 29:64

He would praise the hereafter because He the Almighty praises it, and if He was to dispraise it, this person would do so even with its everlastingness and glory.

If he hears Allah says:

"Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things." Quran 41:53

"He surrounds all things." Quran 41:54

"And He is with you wherever you may be." Quran 57:3

"He who sustains every soul in spite of what it earns." Quran 13:33

When hearing these verses, his heart would only become attached to it and his self would rely upon it. This attachment would not be akin to a game he plays, for what would a dismayed lover do with amusements? Rather, this attachment would be because his Lord Almighty oversees all actions. He is near to him, with him, a witness over him and He encompasses him, so he strives towards Him Almighty and seek Him, but by its means and not by himself.

When this person hears Allah saying:

"O you who have faith! Take care of your own souls. He who goes astray cannot hurt you if you are guided." Quran 5: 105

He realizes that his attachment to his self is not the same as his attachment to other things, and it is his guidance to his goal, which is of course knowledge of the self. Allah Almighty has made this lover a wayfarer towards Him, as He said:

"O Man! Verily you are working toward your Lord a work which you will meet." Quran 83:6

And he hears Allah saying:

"And whosoever turns away from the remembrance of the Lord, He will let him into an escalating punishment." Quran 72:17

And:

"Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-beneficent, We assign him a devil who remains his companion. Indeed they bar them from the way while they suppose that they are [rightly] guided." Quran 43:36-37

And:

"And do not be like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls." Quran 59:19

To forget is to renounce remembrance, and it is defined as the forgetting of one's self and being attached to things, which is a sign of the forgetting of one's Lord.

If he were to abandon His remembrance and be attached to other things, it will lead him to ever-growing

torment, and there is no torment with the lovers of Allah other than the veil of separation. A companion would lead him astray from the path.

The path therefore becomes his own self and the attachment of the self is the way towards his Lord, because his Lord is with him, oversees him, and encompasses him, so he will therefore detach himself from everything other than his self and he will be attached to his self and purify and discipline it with the best of morals and good deeds.

He will guard it from sins and flee from destructive things, as Allah orders and loves. He does not do this because he is greedy for heaven, nor for fear of hellfire, except for the sake of Allah, and does not want gratitude or thankfulness for it.

This is all because, with his attachment to his self, he desires to meet his Lord and he has encircled his self, turning his heart towards it day and night, but he does not consider his self independent and does not claim it has such an ability, far be it from him. His reliance is not on the self, but on Allah.

How can one have true love for two loved things or demand the truth from two true things? The Beloved is loved for itself, and everything else he loves is only because of that real and true love. This real love is loved for itself and is also loved for others.

You know that the lover does not want anything other than the beloved and he runs away from anything that would hinder him from his beloved. He stays away from anything that would distract him from his beloved. He has no concern other than to be in solitude with his beloved and to get to the latter through all the veils that veil him from it. Every time he dwells on the characteristics of the beloved, his passion increases and the fire of his yearning intensifies. His yearning might be so much that he forgets himself and annihilates his self in the beloved, engaging himself in his Lord alone and nothing else will remain other than the Face of His Lord, the Mighty and Glorious.

This is another group and by the given explanation now you know their level in knowledge and practice.

The real distinction between these three groups, as is now evident, is the difference in their state of perception. They differ in their understanding of the content of a saying as having two or three meanings.

Therefore, this path is not related to the matters of the law rather it is the difference in understanding that separates these levels.

I have heard from some of my teachers who were asked about the path of knowing the self and why it wasn't elaborated by the shariah if it had been the closest path to Allah the Almighty.

Our beloved teacher answered: "And where in the shariah does it not aim towards this purpose and does not explain this path?"

It is here that some of the people of this group mention in their commentaries on some Quranic verses and traditions certain meanings that are very far from normal understanding.

What must be known here is that this path is composed of acting and refraining, which is to refuse anything other than Allah, and to attentively turn towards Him the Almighty, and these two are complementary to each other. It has already been explained that knowledge in Allah is the most evident of self-evident things, and the thing that veils one from Him is not ignorance, but inattentiveness and occupying the self with the vanities of the world and its vileness. So:

"Allah has not put two hearts within any man." Quran 33:4

If the heart was to occupy itself with worldly affairs it would certainly start loving it and would make it its greatest concern, and it would therefore occupy the dominion of the heart. Accordingly, the mirror of the heart will not be transparent in order for it to reflect the beauty of the Truth Almighty and acquire knowledge, for all these affairs are related to the heart.

If you would like to test the truth of what we have mentioned you can consider going to a secluded place where there is nobody and there is no light, sound, furniture or anything else. Then sit down, close your eyes and do not move at all. After you have made sure all your senses are paying attention, start focusing on an image, like imagining the image 'A'. Make sure you pay full attention to it and do not let anything else come into the picture.

You will see at first that a lot of imaginary images will interrupt and crowd your mind. They will be vague and disordered and you will not be able to distinguish many of them from each other, like your thoughts of the day and the night, your intentions and desires. After an hour you might awake and think you are in another place, or with such and such person, or you have done such and such thing. All of this and you were only supposed to imagine the image 'A', and this confusion will continue with you for a while.

If you were to continue staying in such seclusion and freeing your thoughts for a few days, you will see after a while that the interferences and preoccupations of the mind will become less and less, and thoughts and imaginations will become illuminated until it is as if you could see the thought that strikes your heart with the sense sight. They will become even less day by day until for certain there will only be the image of 'A' and no other form will be there with it.

From this example you can know the validity of what we have said, I that occupying yourself with worldly affairs will by necessity make you forget yourself and become inattentive to that which awaits us in next life.

The only way one can devote his self to an esoteric life is to abandon the exoteric life and turn towards that which is beyond it [the metaphysical]. So, as an example, if you wanted to see yourself by the method just mentioned, you would see much more of what we said in thoughts and obstacles, and they are the forms of the desires of the self and worldly inclinations.

Therefore, the only path to inner-knowledge is to purify your heart from the world and everything else that veils your sight from Allah, may His name be exalted.

All of the different methods that were mentioned, like self-observation, seclusion etc., are for the purpose of acquiring this state of the heart and then to orient the heart towards the Truth Almighty and to be blessed under His sovereignty.

This is remembrance itself and nearness to the Truth Almighty, and it is the last of the keys [levels], and Allah is the Guide.

Know that remembrance in this meaning has been mentioned many times in the Quran and in the traditions, like:

"And do not obey him whose heart We have made oblivious Our remembrance." Quran 18:28

"Then remember Allah as you would remember your fathers, or with a more ardent remembrance." Quran 2:200

And it is certainly known that verbal remembrance cannot be described as ardent (shiddat).

"Yet no one takes admonition except him who returns penitently [to Allah]." Quran 40:13

"But none takes admonition except those who possess intellect." Quran 2:269

In Dua of Kumail, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) says:

"I ask you (O Allah) by your Truth, Sanctity and the Greatest of Attributes and Names to make my times in night and day full of Your remembrance, and continuous in Your service, and make my day deeds accepted by You; so that all my actions and deeds be one united deed, and my state of servitude be eternal."

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