

Introduction: The Straight Path is one which combines the Exoteric and the Esoteric

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

May the choicest of blessings be upon the immaculate spirit of the Apostle of the ultimate era, Muhammad al-Mustafa, and his noble *wasi* (legatee) and the possessor of the greatest *wilayah*, 'Ali al-Murtada, and his glorious descendants, the Pure Imams, especially the Pole of the contingent realms, the *Baqiyatullah* and the *Hujjah*, son of al-Hasan al-'Askari, *arwahuna lahu al-fida*.

The religious urge and the appeal of the realms of the Hidden (*ghayb*) and the quest for the mysteries of that which lies beyond the natural realm are part of the innate instincts of the human being. This urge may be considered as arising due to the attraction of the contingent world, especially the human being, its noblest existent, towards the loving Lord, who draws it towards His own infinite and absolute station. The magnet that draws the soul is that very Soul of souls, which is referred to variously as the Beloved (*janan*), the Reality of all realities, the Eternal Principle, the Mainspring of Beauty, the Source of Being, and the Ultimate Perfection.

الْكُلُّ عِبَارَةٌ وَأَنْتَ الْمَعْنَى يَا مَنْ هُوَ لِلْقُلُوبِ مِغْنَاطِيْسٌ

The universe is a writ and Thou art its meaning,
Thou! Who art the magnet of the hearts¹.

The effect of this real magnetic pull is to break the bondage of nature, permitting one to transcend the ego and set out toward the realm of immaterial and absolute reality, and, ultimately, toward annihilation

(*fana'*) in the Act, Name, Attribute, and Essence of the Sacred Source of sources and End of ends and life (*baqa'*) in the Being of the Worshipped One. This pull is more sublime and subtle than anything that can be conceived.

جَذْبَةٌ مِنْ جَذَبَاتِ الرَّحْمَنِ تُوَازِي عِبَادَةَ الثَّقَلَيْنِ

An attraction of the All-Beneficent equals the worship of all men and jinn.

Man discovers this attraction towards this cynosure of all quest and the end of all worship and aspiration at the core of his essence and innate nature, and, as a result of this innate divine urge, he sets out on a journey towards it, being drawn toward this destination with all his being. Therefore, in the course of this journey, all his members and organs must participate in this movement.

His body and corporeal faculties, which constitute his physical nature (*tab'*); his mind and imagination, which constitute his imaginable realm (*barzakh*); and his intellect and spirit, which constitute his reality—all of them should participate in this journey and share in its effort.

The body should face the Ka'bah in the state of prayer and assume the postures of *qiyam* (standing), *ruku'* (kneeling), and *sujud* (prostration); the mind, shutting out its thoughts, should pin its attention on the Farthest Lote Tree (*sidrat al-muntaha*); the spirit should bathe in the lights of Divine sanctity and lose and abandon itself in the sanctuary of the One.

It is here that one finds how far from the real goal, and how cut off from the vision of His Beauty are those who preoccupy themselves solely with the outward, confining themselves to bodily movements in respect of worship and good conduct, and are satisfied with the crest, foregoing the kernel and the essence.

Similarly, those who are solely after spirituality and who evade the rites of worship and good conduct as prescribed by the *Shari'ah*, are far from the reality. They are content with the metaphorical, having abandoned the literal, and with fancies and fantasies, while missing the real.

Is it not the case that the light of God pervades all manifestations of the realm of contingency? If so, why should the body be excluded from worship, and why should this world of particularity be considered devoid of the rays of Divine effulgence, and why should we confine ourselves to such terms as communion (*wusul*), kernel (*lubb*), essence, and inner worship? Would that not be a one-sided worship?

However, 'the middle position' (*al-namaf al-awsat*) and 'the median community' (*ummat wasat*) are represented by those who combine within themselves the outward and the inward and who have summoned all the levels and planes of their being to the worship of the Beloved and submission to Him, having equipped themselves adequately for the journey of the spirit.

They have taken the exoteric as the designation for the inward and the inward as the soul and reality of the outward, mingling them with each other as sugar and milk. To them, the outward is the means for attaining to the inward, and they consider an inward devoid of the outward as

"dust scattered" (haba'an manthura; 25:23).

اللَّهُمَّ نَوِّرْ ظَاهِرِي بِطَاعَتِكَ، وَبَاطِنِي بِمَحَبَّتِكَ، وَقَلْبِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكَ، وَرُوحِي بِمُشَاهَدَتِكَ، وَسِرِّي بِاسْتِقْلَالِ اتِّصَالِ
حَضْرَتِكَ، يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

My God, illumine my outward being with obedience to Thee and my inner being with Thy Love, my heart with knowledge of Thee, my spirit with Thy vision, and my inmost being (sirr) with the independence of attachment to Thy Threshold, O Lord of Majesty and Munificence².

From this it becomes clear that for spiritual development and for ascent through the degrees and stairs of human perfection it is not sufficient, by any mean whatsoever, to confine oneself to the mental and contemplative divine sciences such as the study of philosophy. That is because deductive and syllogistic reasoning offers the mind convincing conclusions based on sound logic and valid premises, but it does not satisfy the heart and the spirit and it does not quench the spirit's thirst for attaining the truths and intuiting the subtleties.

It is true that *hikmah* and philosophy have sound foundations and they constitute the noblest of the contemplative sciences, which have established *tawhid* (the Unity of Being) on the basis of reason and closed the way to any kind of doubt or uncertainty.

And it is on this basis that the Glorious Qur'an and the traditions narrated from *those firmly grounded in wisdom* and faith—that is, the Immaculate Imams, who are the keepers of prophesy and revelation—have prescribed thought and intellection and have advanced logical arguments and proofs based on rational premises. Yet it is quite insufficient to confine oneself to a philosophical and rational *tawhid as* conceived by the rational approach, but which is devoid of the submission of the heart and inner consciousness and lacks the vision of the inward.

To let the heart languish and to deprive the inner self of its spiritual nourishment derived from the realms of the Hidden and to shut off the malakuti lights of Divine Beauty and Glory, contenting oneself with cruising through books, libraries, schools of thought, teaching and learning, even at the highest level, amounts to nourishing only a part of one's being while allowing a higher part and organ to languish without nourishment. The right creed, the straight path, is one which observes both the aspects and completes the human being's hidden potentialities and capacities in each of the two aspects.

On the one hand, it encourages thought and contemplation, and, on the other, requires one to cultivate sincerity of the heart and its purification from the obfuscation of carnal appetites, to find peace, contentment and tranquillity of the heart, and, after pronouncing eleven tremendous and majestic oaths,

declares:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

Whoever purifies it finds deliverance, and whoever corrupts it loses. (91:9-10)

See, how these Qur'anic verses, which address the human soul and speak to man's inner self, summon individuals, from among thinkers, scholars and teachers of philosophy and ratiocination, to servitude, self-vigilance (*muraqabah*) and self-scrutiny (*muhasabah*), so that, by working sincerely and exclusively for God's pleasure—in the words of the Messenger of God—the springs of Divine teaching may sprout forth from the inner source of their heart and flow out to their tongues:

مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا ظَهَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ إِلَى لِسَانِهِ

Whoever dedicates himself to God for forty days, will find springs of wisdom sprout out of his heart and flow toward his tongue³.

So that, ultimately, the deluge of inspired thoughts and Divine intuitions (*waridat*) may pour out from the core of their being.

The pride of the philosophers of the East, or rather of the world, Sadr al-Muta'allihin Shirazi, after spending a lifetime in transcendental philosophy (*al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah*), became finally so absorbed in worship and servitude and the purification of the inward and the inmost being that he declares in his vigorous style:

وَأَنِّي لَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا ضَيَّعْتُ شَطْرًا مِنْ عُمْرِي فِي تَتَبُعِ آرَاءِ الْمُتَفَلْسِفَةِ وَالْمُجَادِلِينَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكَلَامِ وَتَدْقِيقَاتِهِمْ وَتَعَلُّمِ جُرْبَزَتِهِمْ فِي الْقَوْلِ وَتَفَنُّنِهِمْ فِي الْبَحْثِ حَتَّى تَبَيَّنَ لِي آخِرُ الْأَمْرِ بِنُورِ الْإِيمَانِ وَتَأْيِيدِ اللَّهِ الْمَنَّانِ أَنْ قِيَّاسَهُمْ عَقِيمٌ وَصِرَاطُهُمْ غَيْرُ مُسْتَقِيمٍ؛ فَأَلْقَيْنَا زِمَامَ أَمْرِنَا إِلَيْهِ وَإِلَى رَسُولِهِ النَّذِيرِ، فَكُلُّ مَا بَلَّغْنَا مِنْهُ أَمَّنَّا بِهِ وَصَدَّقْنَاهُ وَلَمْ نَحْتَلْ أَنْ نُخَيَّلَ لَهُ وَجْهًا عَقْلِيًّا وَمَسْلَكًا بَحْثِيًّا، بَلِ اقْتَدَيْنَا بِهِدَاهُ وَأَنْتَهَيْنَا بِنَهْيِهِ امْتِثَالًا لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: (مَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا) حَتَّى فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَي قَلْبِنَا مَا فَتَحَ فَأَفْلَحَ بِبِرْكَةِ مَتَابَعَتِهِ وَأَنْجَحَ

Indeed, I seek profuse pardons of God for having wasted a part of my life studying the opinions of the pseudo-philosophers and polemicists from among the theologians and their hair-splitting discussions, learning their clever tactics of speech and their arts of debate, until at last with the light of faith and the assistance of God, the Munificent, it became clear to me that their syllogisms were barren and their path devoid of straightness.

Thereafter I surrendered my affair to Him and His Messenger, the warner and the warned, putting faith in all that had reached us from him, confirming it without making any attempt to find some rational

justification or a scientific interpretation for it. Rather, I followed his guidance, refraining from what he had forbidden from and submitting to the statement of God, the Exalted:

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمُ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

"Take whatever the Messenger brings you and refrain from what he forbids you from" (59:7),

Until God opened my heart to what he opened it and it was delivered and saved with the blessing of following him (i.e. the Messenger). (Mulla Sadra, *al-Asfar al arba'ah*, "Introduction").

One must mention in this context, the best and the sublimest of the divine legists, the divine sage and gnostic at the head of the previous century, the Sign of Truth, Akhund Mawla Husaynquli Hamadani.

This great legist, a rare thinker and an august philosopher, had incorporated all these true sciences in the light of the science of gnosis and self-refinement, and had fused all of them in the lights of the Divine Face, assigning to every science its appropriate plane and place, specifying the ultimate goal as attainment to the Divine sanctuary.

He had trained many disciples and offered them to the world of gnosis, each of whom became a shining star on the firmament of human excellence and *tawhid*, illuminating a whole world within the reach of his vision and insight. Among them was the divine gnostic Aqa Sayyid Ahmad Tehrani Karbala'i and his disciple, the pride of the legists and the pearl of the gnostics, Hajj Mirza 'Ali Aqa Qadi, may God elevate their noble stations.

The pride of the exegetes and the authority of the researchers, our revered teacher Hadrat 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, may God prolong his ennobling presence, had from the first days of life been on the flight with the two wings of knowledge and action and had traversed the path, both in philosophy as well as in gnosis, under the tutelage of *marhum* Qadi.

Yet after spending a part of his life in syllogistic arguments, proofs and rhetoric and devoting himself to the advancement of the intellectual disciplines pertaining to the *Isharat*, the *Shifa'* and the *Asfar* and writing glosses on them, while at the same time devoting himself to inner solitudes and Divine mysteries and gnostic vigilance, ultimately he came to settle down at the sacred threshold of the Qur'an.

With him the study of Qur'anic verses, their contemplation and recitation, their interpretation and analysis, were a higher occupation than any other contemplative activity, and their contemplation was for him more delightful than any discursive reasoning, as if he had given up everything except total subjection and surrender to the Author of the majestic Shari'ah and his honoured successors (*awsiya'*).

Our honoured friend and eminent master, kinder than any brother, the *marhum* Ayatullah Shaykh Murtada Mutahhari, may God's good pleasure be with him, with whom my terms of familiarity exceeded

thirty-five years, after spending a lifetime in study and debate, teaching and lecturing, writing and sermonizing, and in the pursuit of research and investigation on the issues of philosophy with his brilliant mind and critical acumen, finally, in the last few years of his life, perceived that one cannot find mental peace and the tranquillity of the spirit without union with the inner self and connection with the Munificent Lord and without appeasing one's thirsty heart at the mainspring of Divine effusion and without it one can never enter the sacred sanctuary of God, or go about it, and reach the sought Ka'bah.

And he entered this track, like a candle that burns perpetually and dissolves, or like a moth that flings itself into the fire, or like a man of commitment and faith, passionate and ardent, who is annihilated in the shoreless ocean of the Essence, Attributes and Names of the Worshipped One and whose being grows drawing on the infinitude of the Divine Being.

Night vigils, lamentations and intimate invocations in the solitude of dawn, immersion in contemplation and remembrance, studious devotion to the Qur'an, and distancing oneself from the worldly lot and the devotees of desire, to join the people of God and the *awliya'* of the Lord—these were visible in his wayfaring, may God's expansive mercy be upon him:

لِمِثْلِ هَذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ

And for the like of this let the workers toil! (37:61)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

Indeed God is with those who are wary of Him and those who are good-doers. (16:128)

Some days ago this nondescript was asked to write something on the occasion of the anniversary of his martyrdom. This nondescript, who in truth considered himself unequal to the task, had offered apologies for his inability to accept such an assignment on account of his preoccupations.

Lately, when the demand became persistent and the spirit of that honoured friend came to my assistance, I wrote down these passages annexing them as introduction to a treatise that I had written on wayfaring, making it available, for the pleasure of that *marhum's* spirit, to the seekers of the Truth and the wayfarers of *the paths of Peace* and the way of Reality, in Whose hands are the reins of all affairs and it is His help that I seek.

As to its origin, this treatise is the essence and gist of the first round of lectures on ethics and gnosis delivered by our revered teacher, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, may my spirit be ransomed for him, in the years 1368-69 H. (1949-50) in the sacred *hawzah 'ilmiyyah* of Qum for the students of religious studies. This nondescript had written down a review of those lessons and to me its perusal was a source of spiritual illumination and consolation during times of constraint, darkness, and fatigue.

Now that it has been made ready after a revision and with some additions and clarifications, I dedicate its spiritual reward to the spirit of that felicitous friend, the late Mutahhari, may God elevate his noble station.

اللَّهُمَّ احْشُرْهُ مَعَ أَوْلِيَائِكَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ، وَاخْلُفْ عَلَيَّ عَقِبِهِ فِي الْغَابِرِينَ وَاجْعَلْهُ مِنْ رُفَقَاءِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ، وَارْحَمْهُ
وَإِيَّانَا بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ.

O God, gather him with Your intimate awliya' and be his successor in taking care of those who tarry back, and make him among the companions of Muhammad and his immaculate Household, and be merciful to him, and us, for the sake of Your mercy, O the Most Merciful of the merciful ones!

1. Sabzawari, Manzurnah, "Ilahiyyat," "fi a'alihi ta'ala," "ghurar fi anha' taqsimat li fi'l Allah ta'ala," Nasiri edition, p. 183
2. These sentences are cited from a supplication attributed to Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ('a) expounded by Hajj Mawla Kabutar-ahangi and has been published in a pocket-size edition, and Fayd Kashani mentions it in his Kalimat al-maknunah (lithographed edition), p. 61 with the words, "and it has been mentioned in their (i.e. of the Imams) supplications, may Peace be upon them ..."
3. This sacred tradition has been narrated from the Messenger of God through several chains of authorities with variant wordings but with the same meaning. It is cited in Ihya' al-'ulum, iv, 322 and its gloss on p. 191, and in the 'Awarif al-ma'arif published on the margins of Ihya' al-'ulum, ii, 265.

Among Shi'i books it is cited in 'Uyun akhbar al-Rida, p. 258, 'Uddat al-da'i, p. 170, and Usul al-Kafi, ii, 16. The tradition is cited in the 'Uyun, with the author's chain of authorities, from Hadrat Imam al-Rida, may Peace be upon him, from his father, from his grandfather, from Hadrat Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Baqir, from his father, Hadrat Sajjad, from Jabir ibn'Abd Allah al-Ansari, from Amir al-Mu'minin, may Peace be upon him, with the following wording

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ : مَا أَخْلَصَ عَبْدٌ لِيَّ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا إِلَّا جَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ عَلَيَّ لِسَانِهِ

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