

Part 1: Ground Work

1) Introduction and the First Aspect: a study of Theology and the Science of Gnosis

May Allah give me success in completion of this book, by the blessing of Muhammad, his pure family and progeny. Praise belongs to Allah, Who has illuminated the hearts of His slaves by the knowledge of the truth, tasting and witnessing, Who has cooled their eyes with the antimony of His divine grace and love from eternity, Who has brought them to the highest stations of witnessing in the world of pre-existent form and spiritual unveiling, and Who has enabled them to establish proof based on the intellect and clear evidence based on the traditions by way of the higher levels of the purified soul and the illuminated intellect.

May Allah bless the one who guides to such stations by means of the lights of inner vision and who indicates the path leading to these divine gnoses; may He bless the one who has made clear the meaning of the *shari`ah*, that is the merciful code of behaviour incumbent upon every Muslim. May He bless too his progeny, companions and family – the continuation of the lineage of the Prophet; it is in accordance with man's enmity or love of them that the different levels of the Garden and the Fire are apportioned in the hereafter.

Only the slaves of abundant excellence and of penetrating knowledge will be able to arrive at the Divine Presence and to fulfill the exigencies of the subtle divine states; such slaves alone will be able to come close to the Reality of Oneness and will be able to extinguish their own essence in the stations of unity after traversing the names and attributes of the Real by means of the station of oneness and arriving at knowledge of the higher and lower manifestations, together with the manifestations within the self and in the cosmos as a whole.

Only these slaves will achieve the level of angelic attributes by their understanding of the most imperceptible of signs along the spiritual path, by their struggle and perseverance in the search for meanings, by their purification and refinement of behaviour and their capacity to free the self from the veil of animal urges. Only these slaves will be able to break the chains of bodily desires and the fetters of material bondage.

None will comprehend the nature of travel on this path but those experienced and knowledgeable in the science of true divinity and the stations of unveiling – that is the stations of the *awliya'* (the saints or intimate friends of Allah), the prophets and the greatest amongst the men of wisdom.

The spiritual gnoses and the rules of behaviour embodied in the *shari`ah* have come down to us from the Divine Presence by means of the Muhammadi reality; together they convey the blessings of the prophetic example and the stations of elevation. It was this important fact which spurred me to write a book expounding the way of perfection, which is the way of those able to unite what is separate by their gnosis and by applying the *shari`ah*.

Moreover, I have composed this book with the view to comparing the way of the sincere Sufis and the way of the Imamiyah sect in the light of the divine insights and in accordance with each of the three levels of unity, namely the *shari`ah*, the *tariqah* and *haqiqah* of the Prophet, Mustafa ('the chosen one'). These three levels embrace the totality of the stations of the Muhammadi way, that is, both the inner and the outer stations. They embrace too all the degrees of perfection belonging to the prophets and the saints – who are the caliphs of Allah and the vicegerents of divine Lordship.

In writing this book I have followed the path of the *shari`ah*, the path of specific duties and service made incumbent by Allah on His slaves. I have traveled lightly along this path with the minimum of hindrance and impediment, so much so it may be construed as an omission or negligence on my part. I have traveled thus along the spiritual path on seeing that this age and this country are devoid of men of excellence; I did not take upon myself this great task except after perceiving the absence of men of perfection and the absence of spiritual 'poles' (a group of spiritual guardians, appointed by God and specific in number) and after seeing the door to spiritual travel closed.

If we accept that knowledge is bestowed by Allah on certain of His slaves, then it is not surprising that He may store up this knowledge for certain of the later generations of gnostics. Thus it may be that understanding of that which was difficult for many of the earlier generations becomes easier for later generations. I feel there is no saying more apt than that of the one who said 'So much has been left by earlier generations to their successors. May Allah grant us refuge from envy which closes the door of justice and bars the way to attainment of man's finer qualities.' There are no more fitting words than those of Abu I-'Ala al Mu'arra on the same topic:

By your father's life, the man of nobility is never attributed with generosity
As long as the Generous Himself exists in the world; But if the land becomes barren and the crops
wither,
Then one pastures on the dry stubble.

We should note too the famous words of the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali), words which have been related in an unbroken chain of transmission: 'Even if one does not attain everything, one does not abandon everything,' and 'Do not abandon what is easy because of what is difficult.'

Thus I composed this book and named it 'The Light of the Truth, the Stations of the Way and the Mysteries of the Revealed Law'. In doing so I sought from the Good, the Generous, that He grant us success by it and that He grant me success in its composition – success in delineating the spiritual path of right guidance – and that He enable us to avoid any mistakes in the exposition of the various topics under discussion; surely He is the Most Generous of those Who bestow goodness.

Before embarking on this study however I should present an introduction encompassing the numerous benefits awaiting the reader of this book; it is necessary that I provide the key with which to unlock the treasures contained therein for those desirous of such knowledge. Know therefore that this introduction includes an explanation of *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*, together with a clarification of their various degrees according to the intellect, the body of traditions and the states of unveiling. Most of the elite and the common of this time think that *shari`ah* is at variance with *tariqah* and *tariqah* is at variance with *haqiqah*; they imagine that there are real differences between these various levels and they attribute certain things to each of them which are inappropriate, in particular to the group which affirms the Oneness of Allah, namely the group known as the Sufis.

The reason for this is their lack of knowledge of the various spiritual states of each of the three groups and their deficient understanding of their beliefs and principles. Thus I desired to make clear these different states to those who had misconceptions about them; I desired to reveal to them these spiritual states in a way that would enable them to gain true knowledge of each of the groups, in particular the people of Allah. I wanted to bring them to a realization that *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* are synonyms for one truth, albeit in different terms.

By this means I desired that they abandon their conflicts with the people of Allah, including the elite amongst them, and they leave off disputing with the masters of the science of divine unity. I desired that, as a result, they would rid their hearts and souls of the darkness of ill-conduct and corruption and depart from the realm of doubt and misgiving. Thus my clarification would be a purgative medicine for their petrified minds and their coarse natures: it would cause them to get rid of noxious waste material and corrupting humors, with the result that they would acquire a capacity to listen to words which they had previously been unable to digest, and they would be able to accept the beliefs (of the abovementioned groups) whenever anyone gave expression to them.

The words of the scholars, for example, confirm the prophetic code of behaviour and the divine rules imposed on man. Indeed each of the three levels, namely prophethood, delivery of the message (*risalah*) and saintship or divine authority (*wilayah*) is a pre-requisite of the other levels and all are interconnected. Thus, *shari'ah* is the pre-requisite of *risalah*, *tariqah* is the pre-requisite of prophethood and *haqiqah*, is the pre-requisite of *wilayah*. This is because *risalah* is the term for the transmission of that which was revealed to the Prophet giving his period of prophecy; it is the Prophet's instruction of the people in jurisprudence, politics, social behaviour and divine wisdom – and this is precisely the nature of the *shari'ah* as a whole. Prophethood is also the expression of that which manifests during the state of *wilayah*, that is it is the perception of gnoses which arises from the Essence of the Truth, through His names, attributes, actions and laws.

It is an expression of the state of those who take on His attributes and His code of behaviour – and this is precisely the nature of *haqiqah* itself. The totality of this wisdom is dependent upon one person, namely the messenger, or upon one reality and that is the *shari'ah*. This concurs with our earlier statement that the prophetic code of behaviour and the divine body of laws imposed on man is one truth which encompasses all three levels and that the different names are synonyms for this one truth.

There are many examples of this in other spheres of investigation: the names *'aqi* (intellect), *qalam* (pen) and *nur* (light) all indicate one reality, namely the reality of the Cosmic Man – as in the authoritative traditions which say, 'The first thing created by Allah was the *'aqi* and 'The first thing created by Allah was the Pen' and 'The first thing created by Allah was My light.' Likewise, Allah's use of the words *fu'ad*, *qalb* and *sadr* all refer to one reality, namely the reality of the lesser man: 'The *fu'ad* or heart was not untrue in making him see what he saw' and 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it, upon your heart (*qalb*)' and 'Have We not expanded for you your breast (*sadr*) and taken off from you your burden'.

Thus there is no dispute between the prophets and the messengers with regard to the basic question of truth and reality, namely the question of the religion of Islam and its pillars or foundations. Allah says: 'He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and that which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus, that you keep to obedience and be not divided therein' and 'The same did Abraham enjoin on his sons and (so did) Jacob.

O my sons! Surely Allah has chosen for you (this) faith, therefore die not unless you are Muslims' and His words on the tongue of His Prophet: 'And (know) that this is My path, the right one, therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will lead you away from His way; thus He has enjoined you with that you may guard against (evil)' and finally His words: 'That is the right religion, but most people know it not.' With these words Allah is indicating the right way – the way of Muhammad – whereby man must establish the three pillars of the *shari'ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* and fulfill the demands of each, according to the different levels. The fact that 'most do not know' is because of their ignorance and blindness.

If one understands that there has never been any dispute amongst the prophets and messengers with regard to the foundations and pillars of Islam, then one should realize too that if differences do occur in the details and branches of the law, then these differences are of quality or quantity and do not indicate any difference in the essence or reality.

Thus the reality of the *shari'ah* has been the same in all ages and locations; indeed it is untouched by contention and difference. What variations in law and rule there are arise because of the diversity of situation and time or because of the difference of degree in people's spiritual rank and understanding. Thus Allah has said: 'We make no difference between any of His apostles.' On further investigation we realize too that this divergence results from the complexity of the creational order and harmony and as such could not be imagined otherwise. Thus it has been said that there is no more perfect a creation in the realm of the possible than the creation of this world, since if there were a creation more intricate in workmanship and He were storing it up, then that would imply meanness on His part and a deficiency in His generosity; it would also imply incapacity and a negation of His power.

Moreover, if existence were not organized and arranged to this degree of sophistication, then it would not be possible for any of His slaves (that is all of creation) to attain their own individual reality in accordance with their own individual capacity: it is clear that it would be impossible to channel all the varying capacities into one single path and at one simple level. Allah Himself says: 'For every one of you did We appoint a law and a way.' Thus these differences are in accordance with the nature of existence and a state of affairs other than this would not be possible.

The expressions and indications of the Sufis to describe these degrees and levels are difficult to understand; indeed their profundity of meaning is not intended to be comprehended by all. Thus the teaching shaykhs strove always to advise and guide their disciples in such matters, saying for example, 'Do not be duped by the diversity of the terms; surely when those in their graves are raised up and what is in their breasts becomes known, when mankind comes before Allah on the Day of Resurrection, then of every thousand so raised up, nine hundred and ninety nine will be killed by the gnostic terms or be slaughtered by the swords of gnostic signs: they will be covered in blood and wounds through their neglect of the meanings and their abandonment of the principles of this matter.'

If this point is understood, then the reader should also realize that the ultimate intention of this study is to explain that all these names refer to one reality, albeit using different terms; thus there is no fundamental difference between them. Moreover, we must have recourse to the three aspects of *shari'ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* in order to demonstrate this fact in more detail. We must explain, first, that these three names are, in fact, aspects of one reality; secondly, that the people of *haqiqah* are greater than the people of *tariqah* and the people of *tariqah* are greater than the people of *shari'ah*, and that between them there exists no essential divergence; and thirdly, that an explanation of the *shari'ah* must be based on the intellect and the intellect on the *shari'ah*. This third section will also contain a study of other related

matters.

With regard to the first aspect – to its definition and its reality as a unified whole – then know that the *shari`ah* is the name of the God-given path which lies before man in his life in this world; it encompasses both the principles and the branches of the religion; it encompasses both the duties and prescriptions which admit of a certain degree of choice for man in their method or time of undertaking and also the obligatory duties; it also encompasses all those actions which are most excellent in the eyes of God.

As for the *tariqah*, it is the way of maximum prudence, the path of the best and surest action: thus any path which leads man to the best and surest in speech or action, in the attributes he acquires or the states he experiences, is called *tariqah*. As for *haqiqah*, it is affirmation of –the existence of Being, either through unveiling and vision of its substance, or experiencing spiritual states, or affirming the Oneness of God. It has also been said that the meaning of *shari`ah* is that you worship Him, *of tariqah* that you attain His presence, and *of haqiqah* that you witness Him. Furthermore, it has been said that *shari`ah* means that you are maintained in existence by His command, *tariqah* that you carry out His command and *haqiqah* that you exist by and in Him. This meaning is supported by the words of the Prophet who said: 'The *shari`ah* is my words, *tariqah* my actions, *haqiqah* my states, gnosis is my capital, intellect the basis of my religion, love my foundation, passion my mount, fear my companion, knowledge my weapon, forbearance my friend, trust my cloak, contentment my treasure, truthfulness my residence, certainty my refuge, poverty my glory – and by it I attain to an honour above the rest of the prophets and messengers.'

Likewise the words of the Prophet (on the occasion when he asked Harith 'How are you this morning?' and the latter answered: 'I have become a true believer'): 'For every truth there is a reality, so what is the reality of your belief?' He replied: 'I saw the people of the Garden visiting each other and the people of the Fire howling at each other; I saw plainly the throne of my Lord.' He then said: 'You have spoken correctly, so persevere.' Thus his true faith in the unseen was his *shari`ah*, his unveiling and consciousness of the Garden, the Fire and the throne was his *haqiqah* and his doing-without in this world and the actions undertaken by him such that he merited this degree were his *tariqah*. Moreover all three levels are encompassed by the prescribed laws of Islam and are in no way outside of it: we have seen earlier how the Islamic code includes all of them.

It has also been said that the Islamic code is like the almond nut, which consists of the oil, the kernel and the shell: the almond as a whole is the *shari`ah*, the kernel is the *tariqah* and the oil the *haqiqah*. A similar meaning has also been applied to prayer: 'Surely prayer is service, a coming closer and an arrival;' the service corresponds to the *sham`ah*, the coming closer to the *tariqah*, and the arrival to the *haqiqah*. Moreover, the word prayer includes all three of these. Allah Himself has referred to these three degrees by the phrases: '*ilm al yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty), '*ayn al yaqin* (the vision or experience of certainty) and *haqq al yaqin* (the truth of reality of certainty) – an explanation of these terms will follow

later in this work.

On investigation we realize that *shari`ah* expresses man's affirmation of the words of the Prophet in the heart and man's acting in accordance with the laws of Islam; we realize that *tariqah* is the fulfillment and realization of these laws together with the prophetic pattern of behaviour and the putting into practice of this way (or *tariqah*) by the taking on of the appropriate attributes; we realize too that *haqiqah* is the witnessing through unveiling of the states and stations of the prophets – for as Allah has said: 'Certainly you have in the Apostle of Allah an excellent exemplar.' Attainment of this degree of *haqiqah* is only possible by taking upon oneself the attributes and behaviour pattern of the Prophet and by perception of prophetic knowledge through unveiling; indeed one only attains to this model of behaviour through establishing the duties of the Islamic code. This meaning is also indicated in the words of the Sultan of the Saints and Spiritual Inheritors, the Commander of the Faithful: 'I am going to attribute what has never been attributed to Islam by anyone before: Islam is submission and submission is affirmation and affirmation is certainty and certainty is constancy and constancy is performance and performance is righteous action. Thus whoever wishes to model himself on his Prophet as is fitting, then he should take on all these qualities and not reject any of those who themselves have taken on these qualities in their behaviour because...[1](#)

By its nature the essential cannot be separated from the essence. Allah's words 'And they shall continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them' confirm, this insomuch as differences in the outward arise from differences in the inner realm of meaning and differences in the meaning arise from differences in the realm of truth—and substance. Truth and substance, however, are not established in time by the Creator; thus what is meant by 'He created them' is not that they are coerced in their distinct creational form, but rather that they are bestowed existence in accordance with their original substance and reality. This bestowal is not an in-time initiation of something on the part of the Creator, for in reality they are non-existent and in annihilation, and that which is non-existent and in annihilation is not a creation of the Creator, rather it is inherent and inseparable from His knowledge.

A dispute of vast dimensions exists concerning this subject, namely the nature of the beginnings of things and whether or not they are created by the Creator. This question is of utmost importance with regard to the science of *tawhid* (unity); indeed a proper investigation of the truth of divine unity is not feasible without an understanding of these beginnings. Since the scholars involved in this argument continue to infer and deduce other matters related to this question, and they continue to accuse each other of misinterpretation and deception, we decided to set out in this book the basic conclusions arrived at in this matter by the people of Allah and their elite together with the conclusions of the people of the outward and the inward. We desired to undertake this task in order to remain true to the condition imposed upon ourselves at the opening of the book, namely that we undertake a comparison between the outer and the inner, for the station of joining between these two is the highest of stations and the

ultimate goal.

With this in mind we would quote the words of Allah: 'And if Allah had pleased He would have made you (all) a single nation, and they shall continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them.' It should be borne in mind that we are clarifying the meaning of the differences which exist in the realm of realities and substances – the differences existing in the essential realities of people and in their opinions and beliefs. Moreover, it should be noted also that this study has particular recourse to Allah's words, 'And they shall continue to differ.'

At this point a note of introduction is needed: substances and essences are, according to the belief of some, brought into existence by the Creator, while for others this is not so. The first belief belongs to the people of the outward that is those scholars who demand that the common people imitate their example in the execution of religious duties.

The second is that of the people of Allah that is the men of gnosis, those who affirm the all-encompassing Oneness of God and certain of the philosophers. As for the first group, they quote the fact that Allah is All-Knowing and Wise and that He does not act except on behalf of what is good and beneficial and in accordance with His knowledge and wisdom; they also quote that 'He cannot be questioned concerning what He does and they shall be questioned.'

Thus, in the light of this approach, the differences in the substances and the essences exist in relation to His knowledge and wisdom; likewise, the bringing into being of these substances and essences in the outer realm and their creation in the world of vision and witnessing spring from His knowledge of them from before eternity: thus the act whereby He brings into being any creational form corresponds to that which is contained in His knowledge. This is referred to in His words: 'He does what he wishes' and 'Allah orders what he desires.'

At this point, however, we should note that many dispute the validity of this argument; their disagreement lies in the fact that any substance or essence may protest with a voice issuing from a station of spirituality or with the voice of outer learning saying 'Why have You brought me into being in such and such a form?' or 'Why did You not create me in that form?' Thus the unhappy person – with respect to the happy and fortunate person – will say: 'Why did You create me in an unhappy state? Why did You not create me in a happy state?' The same might be said by the ignorant person with respect to the one of knowledge, the poor person with respect to the rich person. They would, in effect, have an argument against Allah – and not Allah against them – although Allah Himself says: 'Then Allah's is the conclusive argument.' Moreover, there is no escape from this accusation and there remains nothing to be done in this state of affairs but to submit and to be content with what has been decreed: one must accept that the matter depends on

His knowledge and wisdom and things depend wholly on His will and desire. There is no doubt, however, that this belief is neither reasonable nor acceptable. It is for this reason that He says: 'Do not

put questions about things which, if declared to you, may trouble you.' In truth, then, their belief is not consonant with the facts.

As for the people of the second group, they say that the realities, the substances and the essences are not brought into being by the Creator – rather they are part of His knowledge from before eternity. It is not permitted that these knowledges be brought into being because, if these knowledges were 'created', then either knowledge of what becomes known would be necessary prior to this within a specific time, or lack of knowledge of these knowledges would be implied – before He brings them into existence. Both ideas, however, are totally fallacious. The only possibility left is that His knowledges are not in-time creations on His part.

Moreover, it has been established in the principles of logic that knowledge depends upon or 'follows' what is known: thus, the existence of a dependent thing, namely knowledge, without the existence of the thing upon which it depends, namely the thing known, is impossible. Knowledge is not affirmed as a knowledge except if it corresponds to that which is known. If this is not the case, then it is called ignorance – may Allah be exalted above this. Thus, their aim in saying this is to establish that knowledge must be in accordance with what is known, since any knowledge which does not correspond to the known in the realm of the outward is ignorance. Based on this premise, therefore, it is not permitted that His knowledge from before eternity be part of His creation, or be conceived of as having been brought into being by Him; if this is not the case, then His knowledge cannot be affirmed and imperfection of knowledge is imputed to Him as we have seen above.

The commentator of *Al-Fusus* says: 'Since pre-material forms and realities are conceived in the realm of imagination, they cannot be described as creational or brought into being; what is imagined does not have existence in the phenomenal world and only something which is created or brought into being can be existent. Likewise, something pictured in the imagination, or the mind's eye, through one's knowledge of that thing cannot be described as having been brought into being as long as it is not seen to exist in the phenomenal world; otherwise impossibilities would also be capable of being brought into visible existence.'

The commentator mentions a still more striking example when he says: 'Know that the names possess rational forms in the knowledge of Allah – since He is knowledgeable by His very essence of His own Essence, His Names and Attributes. Thus those rational forms existing in the realm of knowledge are actually the Source and Essence itself, made manifest by their establishment in the realm of specificity; the latter is also called the realm of the pre-existent source-forms, irrespective of whether these forms are of a general or particular nature, according to the terminology of the people of Allah. According to the theorists, however, the general or universal forms are called substances and realities and the particular are called essences.

Thus the substances are the universal forms defined through the names residing in the Presence of His

knowledge – and as such these forms flow out from the divine source by an outflowing on the level of sanctity and purity; they emanate from the First Manifestation by means of the essential Love and through a seeking of the keys of the unseen whose outward manifestations and perfections are only known to Him.

This divine overflowing may be divided into two types: that is, the overflowing from the greater sanctity and that emanating from the lesser sanctity. From the first arise the pre-material forms and from the second the phenomenal manifestations of the forms with their relative qualities and characteristics. This theory is based on the premise that the doer and the one who receives the actions are one and the same: there is nothing in existence except Him and His perfections; thus, He is the Doer from one aspect and the One who receives from another – just as the philosophers have said that the intellect, the one who uses that intellect and the notion conceived of by that intellect are in reality one thing, although described in different ways.

Likewise this could be said of love, the lover and the loved one. The Great Shaykh (Ibn 'Arabi) has also referred to this in *Al-Fusus* when he says: 'It is impossible to admit of another equal to Him in respect to the divine laws: all bodies receive the divine spirit by way of Him and by means of His breath; this is nothing other than their gaining the capacity of receiving the constant, never-ending outpouring of divine manifestations while existing in those forms.' The receiver can only exist by this very outpouring of purity and sanctity. Thus everything from the beginning to the end is from Him, everything returns to Him just as it began from Him.

With this in mind, it is not permissible to say that the pre-material forms, the substances and the beginnings are created by the Creator – if we suppose that the Creator and the Receiver of the created forms are one and the same and if we suppose that the Doer is His Essence and the Receiver is His Names and Attributes. If we call the first the Absolute Essence and the Reality and the second the dependent existence and creation, if we call the whole a manifestation of His Names, His Attributes and Actions, if we accept that the pre-existent forms, the substances and the realities are images of His pre-eternal primal knowledge, then this Existence would not bring something into being which was dependent and related to His Essence and Perfections – for He has always been the same and how, one may ask, could He become otherwise? Change is not possible, in particular with respect to the Necessary of Existence.

Indeed, there is nothing whatsoever which brings itself into being – and this applies equally with respect to His essential Perfections and those particularities associated with His Names. Besides, no thing can be devoid of both aspects: either it is necessary by its essence or possible by its essence. If it is necessary by its essence, then His perfections, His particularities and everything based upon these things come about by the essence: thus it cannot be that they are ever brought into being, in time. If it is possible, then its substance in the realm of knowledge and its pre-existent form in the realm of rationality are not brought into being in time by Him or any other, rather, they arise out of the pre-eternal

divine knowledge, as has already been established.

As for the possible, it is nothing but the 'request' – in the terminology of the people of spiritual stations – for outward existence in accordance with that thing's capacity, a request which is made to the Real Actor and in accordance with existence in the realm of knowledge. This, then, is the aim of our study. Thus He says: 'And He gives you of all you ask Him' meaning with the tongue of your capacity and receptivity and in accordance with existence in the realm of knowledge, that is uncreated and out of time. If we accept this, then He does not bring anything into being from that Existence, but from the existence in the outward, as we have already made clear; moreover, it is not true to say that anything is 'brought into being' except within the sphere of this outward existence. Understand this point well – it will be of great benefit on many occasions on reading this book.

The subject of our study contains secrets of the greatest order with respect to the question of predestination; it is therefore necessary at this point that we investigate further into this matter and we shall begin with some appropriate examples, which will increase understanding and clarify the matter. Know then that a simile of the possible pre-existent forms and possible substances within the realm of the Real's knowledge is that of the pre-form and source-form of the letters in the mind of the writer: their establishment in the mind is not because the writer brought them into being – the writer has only knowledge of their existence and their essences, that is their existence in the realm of knowledge and their essences and various shapes as mental pictures. It is clear that knowledge itself has no influence over that which is known.

Thus, from this aspect, these letters are not brought into being by the writer, although it is true that they are brought into being by the writer when he brings them into outward existence (by the act of writing) in accordance with what is in his mind. This same metaphor may be applied to the Real: if He brings something into outward existence, in accordance with what is in His knowledge from before eternity (and which is obviously prior to the existence of that thing), then it is called 'created' or 'brought into being.' If, however, it was in His 'essential' knowledge from before endless-time and part of His primal knowledge, then it is not called created or brought into existence. Thus we arrive at the desired conclusion, namely His knowledges from before eternity are not brought into being; 'And (as for) these examples, We set them forth for men, and none understand them but the learned.'

There is also another example worthy of mention: it is that the pre-material source forms and substances are related to the never-ending perfections hidden in His Essence, which are also known as Attributes and Names. These expressions are similar in their metaphorical nature to the branches, leaves and fruits which are all 'perfections' of the tree itself, which in its state (while in the realm of knowledge) within the essence of the seed is not called by the name tree and is not called 'an existence' in the outward. Rather this knowledge is called the knowledge of the seed together with its essential perfections and its inherent degree of 'treeness'.

Likewise knowledge, with respect to the seed, for example – together with details of its essential perfections in the forms of its leaves, branches, flowers and fruits – is not related to the action of its coming into being. Similarly, knowledge of the Real, together with details of His essential perfections in the form of His names, attributes, actions, manifestations and emanations, does not presuppose its creation in time. Thus He Himself says: 'When He intends anything, He says: "Be, so it is", meaning that if He wishes to bring something into outer existence from those things existent in the realm of knowledge, then He indicates this by making it manifest in existence after its non-existence, thereby making visible that which was hidden. As He Himself says in the Qur'an, 'And His are the most exalted attributes in the heavens and the earth.' His words: 'Shall I guide you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not?' seem to indicate the Absolute Tree of existence, which is the world with all its ramifications, since its branches, leaves and flowers are the dependent existent beings: anyone who witnesses this tree together with its perfections, names and attributes will be in a 'kingdom which decays not.' This same meaning is also expressed in the language of the scholars of this science inasmuch as they relate existence in the realm of knowledge to the pre-material source forms and existence in the outward realm to the various manifest creations.

Moreover, they relate the first to the first emanation of the Essence and the second to the second emanation of the Attributes. They affirm that the first emanation is the essential emanation, that is the emanation of the Essence alone within its own essence – and this is the presence of Oneness – there being no attribute or form – within this realm, since the Essence (which is the Absolute Existence of the Real) is pure Oneness. Any existence other than this is nothing but absolute non-existence, namely, pure nothingness.

Thus the Essence in its oneness is in no need of singularity or specificity to distinguish it from another essence nor has it any need to distinguish itself from anything else at all. Indeed its unity is its essence and this unity is the source of its singularity and uniqueness. It is essence by itself and of itself and thereby I mean that it is not dependent on anything; the Absolute encompasses its own being, there being no thing co-existent with it: this is in effect complete singularity. The realities in the essence of singularity are as the tree within the seed, hidden within the hidden. The second emanation makes manifest the pre-existent source forms which are the very workings of the Essence; this is His reception of form in the world of creation. The Real descends by means of this emanation from the Presence of Singularity to the Presence of Uniqueness through His relationship to the Names. It should be noted that this notion is in complete accord with the direction of our discourse above.

The aim of using quotations and supporting examples from the works of the distinguished saints of Allah is twofold: the first is to reassure the heart of the reader and to aid him in removing doubt; the second is to repulse the sayings of the ignorant and those who reject the people of Allah, as far as we are able. If this objective is not met, then there are many other studies one may refer to; it is not fitting, however, that we reproduce them here.

The aim of this introduction is to comment upon the meaning of Allah's words: 'And they shall continue to differ.' Given that this is understood and accepted as a principle, then we must also realize that these words are an indication of the essential differences in the realm of inner meaning with respect to the source-forms within the Presence of the Unseen and with respect to those of His knowledge. They are at the same time an indication of the differences in outward form which correspond to those differences in the Presence of the Unseen and the Sphere of Witnessing.

Moreover the meaning of these words presupposes that the source-forms and related substances are pre-eternal and not created. As for His words: 'Except those on whom your Lord has mercy,' they refer to those known by your Lord to be people of guidance and kindness who have remained faithful to their own harmonious being and to their finer, subtler creational form. It refers then to the people who keep away from the people of argument, misguidance and perversion and take no part in their disputes. In truth the whole of the matter rests on the exigencies of the essence of the being in question. Allah has, in His own way, knowledge of what is to be in the future. But as we have seen knowledge itself has no influence in the matter. His words, 'And for this did He create them' means in fact 'for by reason of these differences did He create them' – they are as diverse in image, shape, opinion and belief as they were in their essence, substance and primal reality. He gives them outer existence in accordance with their existence in the realm of knowledge such that His knowledge does not contradict His action and His hidden unseen aspect does not contradict His witnessing. Moreover, there is no one who objects saying 'Why did you create me in such and such a manner?'

This state of affairs is as it is because the Actor does not give existence to the receiving creational forms except in accordance with their true natures. This existence is 'sought' by means of the speech of spirituality from the Actor. This same meaning has already been referred to with the metaphor of the writer, the writing and the letters (and their existence both in the mind and the concrete world).

These source-forms and substances are non-existent in the phenomenal world but they exist in the realm of knowledge and are constantly seeking outer existence by the tongue of spirituality and their own capacity. The Actor, for His part, requires from His Essence a constant outpouring of existence, by means of the substances and source-forms. He is the One of Absolute Generosity and so the constant Outpourer of Good, be it in the realm of existence, of attribute, of knowledge, of speech or action. Thus, if one of the source forms demands of Allah, the true Actor, by the language of spirituality that it be given outward existence, then the Real has no option but to bestow on it that required existence in accordance with the capacity and receptivity of that particular source form.

The Absolute Actor does not, therefore, govern the receiving form in an absolute manner but rather in accordance with the aspect of that receiving form.

There is a similar relationship between the One of absolute Generosity and the creational form which requests existence from Him in that He can only bestow the most complete and perfect form on the created being; I mean by this that He bestows existence on it to the full extent of its capacity without any

withholding on His part – for withholding would imply meanness, which is an impossibility with regard to His Presence, may He be exalted above such a notion. He bestows on them outward existence exactly in accordance with their capacity – no more and no less. If He were to bestow something which was above their capacity, they would not be able to accept it and so this bestowal would be futile – and such futility is impossible with respect to Allah. Likewise, if He were to bestow less than their capacity, then they would also not be able to accept it and the bestowal would again be in vain.

Thus there can never be any objection on the part of any of the existent beings – no matter what the circumstances. No being could say: 'Why did You create me in such and such a manner,' because it knows in truth that such an objection would be unjustified; it knows that its existence is in accord with the source–form and the reality and that Allah has decided by its very nature that it be created in such and such a way. Likewise, as we have seen in the example of the letters, neither the 'a' or the 'b' nor any other letter would demand of the writer that they be set down otherwise.

This notion is supported by Ibn al-`Arabi when he says: 'He does not rule over us except by us, nay, rather we rule over ourselves, albeit in Him.' It is for this reason that He has said: 'Then Allah's is the conclusive argument', that is, against those who are veiled when they say to the Real: 'Why did You do such and such a thing to us?' When something does not accord with their aims and the matter becomes difficult for them. As for the gnostics, the matter is clear for them. Moreover, the veiled think that the Real has not acted in the way they asked Him to act; this notion is of their making, however, and they only know as much as their particular creational form permits them to know, thus their argument is untenable and the conclusive argument which is Allah's remains. The famous saying of the Arabs is particularly relevant here: 'Your arms are for leaning on and your mouth is for speech.'

Thus any existence which manifests, be it in the realm of action, speech perfection or imperfection, be it beautiful or ugly, is dependent upon the source–form in accordance with the essence. Thus it is not directly dependent on Allah nor on other than Allah – although it does depend on Allah with respect to His bestowal of what was asked of Him; by this I mean that the existence of that thing is from Allah and by virtue of that 'request' made to Him. This is referred to when He says; 'Every one acts according to his manner' and also in the words of the Prophet, 'Everything lives and develops in accordance with what it has been created for.' These two statements are supported by the words of David: 'I said to my Lord: "O Lord, for what have You created the creation?" He replied, "For that which they have been created,"' meaning, for that particular capacity or receptivity, that perfection or imperfection inherent in their creation. Again Allah's words are sufficient in this matter, 'And for this did He create them', since this statement is the complete answer for the gnostic.

We have seen that the term 'creation' means the bringing into being of something: What is indicated, as we have seen on many previous occasions, is that Allah brings them into being in accordance with their source–form in the world of essences and substances; if there are any differences in the essences, then

there are also differences in the attributes; if there are differences in the essences and attributes, then there are no likenesses or similarities between them in the totality of the states. Thus he who has said that 'There does not exist any resemblance between things at all except by the Necessary of Existence' has spoken the truth and in accordance with what he has actually witnessed.

It has been established as a principle by the scholars of the science of unity that the divine manifestations are not repeated and that the Real never manifests twice in the same way, neither in the realm of form or meaning – so it has been from before eternity and so it will be to eternity. He is the One who continues from pre–endless–time and He is the One who is in constant annihilation. If we now consider the basic premise that there is none but Him in existence, and nothing but His Names and Attributes, and that All is Him, by Him, from Him and to Him, then we realize that His perfections are never–ending and yet without repetition. Indeed all existence is a never–ending manifestation of His perfections.

We realize that resemblance and equality with regard to all aspects of a thing are not possible under any circumstances; we realize, too, the meaning of His words, 'And they continue to differ' and the hidden meaning indicated in 'and for this did he create them.' And Allah is more knowing and of acuter judgment in all matters.

The following saying of the Prophet is also relevant: 'Whoever finds good, then let him praise Allah, and whoever finds other than this, then let him blame no one but himself;' so also are the words of Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al–Rida: 'Generosity on the part of the creature is to carry out what is incumbent; generosity on the part the Creator is in both His giving and His withholding;' this is a subtle statement containing secrets of great value, secrets which may only be understood by the elite, for these secrets issue from the secrets of destiny, the divulgence of which is forbidden to other than those who are worthy of them.

This idea is contained in the words of Allah when He says: 'Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners.' It is as if Allah is referring to this when He says: 'I have prepared for the righteous of my slaves something that the eye has never beheld, what the ear has never heard and what the heart of man has never perceived.' This 'something' is a special secret of the elite of the friends of Allah and the great prophets.

We have dwelt long on this question because it is one of the most important in the science of divine unity; it is a principle containing precious jewels and costly pearls of wisdom which may only be gained by those who are purified from the pollution of greed and craving and from anything which prevents them from attaining the stations of divine unity. May Allah sanctify their purified souls and bestow on them the divine illumination; may Allah grant us the light which is reflected from their perfections and emanations, after seeking help from Him for He is the Generous, the Noble.

If the reader has understood the ideas we have expounded to him – ideas which merit being written with

a pen of light on the cheeks of the maidens of Paradise, or being placed as amulets around the neck so that they may live through the ages – if he has imprinted them on his mind with the inward eye, if he has placed them in the store chests of his memory and perceiving intellect, then we shall now return to our original topic.

Know then that all the different levels of mankind, both the common and the elite and the elite of the elite are three in number; by these I mean the beginning, the intermediate and the end. Even if these levels do not contain individual characteristics and details, they encompass with respect to type and universal groups. Thus the *shari'ah* is the name of the Divine Code and the prophetic pattern of behaviour, and is also the beginning; the *tariqah* by its name and meaning indicates the intermediate stage; and the *haqiqah* by its name and meaning indicates the final stage. No level falls outside these three.

Moreover the first, the *shari'ah*, encompasses them all (as we have already discussed above); this is because it encompasses the first level, namely that of the common people, the second, that is that of the elite, and the third, the elite of the elite. The Muslims as a body – who by their acceptance of Islam take upon themselves the duties of the religion – together with the men of intellect are not outside these three levels; the levels embrace the whole and are subject to the demands of the whole – in that each level possesses laws distinct unto itself. Thus, it is not permitted to deny the validity of any of these levels, nor to reproach any of the people (who follow them). The model of prophetic behaviour, Muhammad, can only be followed to perfection when these three levels are respected.

Allah speaks about the differences of capacity and receptivity within creation when He says: 'For every one of you did We appoint a law and a way and if Allah had pleased He would have made you (all) a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you, therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds; to Allah is your return, of all (of you), so He will let you know that in which you differed.' By Allah, by Allah, if this were the only *ayah* in the Qur'an, it would be sufficient proof of what we are saying, without even considering the fact that a third of the Qur'an is laden with such examples and without having recourse to the body of authentic traditions related from the Prophet.

If we investigate further, we realize that submission, faith and certainty are the prerequisites of these three levels – and also an inherent part of these three levels. The same could be said for the three states of revelation, inspiration and unveiling, for prophethood, message and *wilayah* (spiritual guardianship), for knowledge of certainty, experience of certainty and reality of certainty, and finally for the triad of words, actions and states – all of which exist according to the three states of *shari'ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*.

All existence is contained in these levels, the three-tiered division being necessary, given the multiplicity of creational and metaphysical realities. We see this in the three levels of knowledge, the knower and the known – that is the three-tiered division of manifest individuality, the Presence of Singularity and the Divine Uniqueness with respect to the worlds of the unseen. We see also the three divisions of

knowledge, command and will with respect to the created worlds and their corresponding forms of receptivity, namely the known, the commanded and the object of one's will. Further, we witness the existence of the *mulk* (the kingdom), the *malakut* (the realm of angelic forms) and the *jabarut* (the realm of His Absolute Dominion), and then the world of the intelligences, the souls and the senses. There exists too the three-tiered level of the Muhammadi aspect – referred to when he says: 'There are three things which are dear to me in this world of yours, perfume, women and the coolness of the eye which comes from prayer' and everything else in creation accords with these classifications.

Thus it is not permitted to deny the sayings of the prophets, nor those who speak or deliver the prophetic message, particularly with respect to the people of *shari`ah* and the people of beginnings. Moreover, it is not permitted to deny the actions of the prophets, nor those who take upon themselves the prophetic attributes and act accordingly, particularly with respect to the people of *tariqah* and the people of the middle or intermediate path. Finally it is not permitted to deny the states of *haqiqah*, or to reject those who have taken on the corresponding qualities of this level together with those of the ending or final level.

In short, it is not permitted to reject any of the people of the *shari`ah*, *tariqah* or *haqiqah*. The Prophet's words 'I have been given all the names and have been sent to perfect good behaviour' is an indication of just what we have been indicating: creational realities are not such that they may be completely contained in any one level or station; rather they are as diverse as their capacities and receptivities and each must be given its rightful place in accordance with this capacity and receptivity. Thus it is that we are commanded to talk to the people in accordance with the capacity of their intellects.

You may say that according to the above argument it is claimed that each group, with its own particular way, of worship, its opinions and beliefs, is correct, but by the nature of things, each and every one cannot be right. I would say, in reply, that whoever is living according to the *shari`ah*, the *tariqah* and *haqiqah* (as defined above) and who carries out what is demanded of him in accordance with the respective levels of each, then he has the truth, is on the straight path and his religion is correct. Allah's words 'That is the right religion, but most people do not know' are another indication of this same meaning. Anyone who is not as we have described is astray, in error and a rejecter of the truth.

It is obligatory to avoid such people and this is a rule of behaviour which is always observed amongst the people of spiritual realization; indeed all the principles and branches of the religion are founded on this rule Allah indicates this when he addresses the Prophet saying: 'This is my way: I call to Allah, I and those who follow me in certainty.' The words of those who have described the shaykhs of instruction also testify to this fact: 'The shaykh is the man of perfection with regard to the sciences of *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*; they have reached the limits of perfection in each by their knowledge of the diseases of the self and the corresponding cures – provided of course the self is willing to accept this cure in the form of spiritual guidance.'

A similar division may be seen in the description of the levels of knowledge of the knower, namely in terms of the husk, the shell and the kernel. Each indicates a level of knowledge together with a corresponding awareness of the demands and claims of each level.

Thus it has been said that the husk refers to any outward knowledge which protects the inner knowledge, namely the kernel, from harm: the *shari`ah*, therefore, stands in a similar relation to the *tariqah* as the *tariqah* to the *haqiqah*. Whoever does not protect his spiritual state and path by the *shari`ah* will destroy that state and cause harm to his path, whether by desire, folly or Satanic whisperings. Whoever does not attain the *haqiqah* by means of the *tariqah* and does not protect the former by the latter will cause harm to his *haqiqah* and resort to heresy and disbelief. The shell is the intellect which is illuminated by the light of sanctity and purified of the obscurities caused by fantasy and imagination. The kernel is the very stuff of divine and sacred light from which the intellect seeks help in order to rid itself of the above-mentioned obscurities; thus the heart which is attached to this world, shut off from understanding and veiled by official learning, is not able to comprehend the higher sciences by virtue of the good which has been pre-determined for him by Allah: 'Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it.'

Know too that the laws of the *shari`ah* constitute the divine code and social order: it is incumbent on the prophets and the friends of Allah to establish this order together with its pillars¹ and to command the Muslim nation to respect and fulfil its demands. By this I mean that they are not permitted to omit any of the three levels, for this would imply an omission or deficiency with respect to their obligations, and this is impossible given that they are prophets and as such are protected from any wrong or hateful action; indeed nothing of this nature may happen at their hands. That they have always respected these three levels is clear from their various *shara'i`* (divinely-inspired codes of behaviour) and ways of worship which have been given to all the prophets from Adam to Muhammad. Again we refer here to the (above-mentioned) words of our Prophet: '*Shari`ah* is my words, *tariqah* my actions and *haqiqah* my states.'¹ The meaning of these words is also reinforced by the instructions given by Abraham to his people in the *surah*, 'The Cattle', which features the story of the star, the moon and the sun. The first instruction is for the guidance of the common people, the second for the elite and the third of the elite of the elite – in line with the three distinctions of *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*.

The first symbolizes the light of goodness which belongs to the people of *shari`ah*, the people of the outward and the common people in their search for the truth and in their going beyond. This is so because the star of this world is like the light of goodness in man.

The second symbolizes the light of the intellect and those of this station who are searching for the truth and the journeying beyond are the people of *tariqah*, the people of the inward and the elite. This is because the moon in this world is like the light of the intellect in man. The third symbolizes the light of sanctity, known as the light of Reality, and those who are seeking the Real and the journey beyond are

the people of *haqiqah*, the people of the inward of the inward and the elite of the elite.

This is because the light of the sun in this world is like the light of sanctity in man – in accordance with the words of Allah: 'What! Is he whose heart Allah has opened for Islam so that he is in a light from his Lord (like the hard-hearted)?'

Thereafter, there must follow a going beyond: by this I mean a going beyond the light of the Real. This is because the one who sees, the seen and the connecting light between them are three distinct things which would mean multiplicity. Vision and witnessing in the realm of divine unity does not admit of this; rather there must be a crossing beyond to a point where unity is attained. This point is reached by the annihilation of the knower in the known and the witnesser in the witnessed.

As for the opinion of some commentators, namely that Abraham was at the time a small child and was not able to distinguish between the star, the moon, the sun and his Lord, then it is a total falsehood, indeed a complete heresy – may the stations of the prophets and Friends of Allah be exalted above such words. This is so because the prophets and Friends of Allah are infallible and their infallibility necessarily extends throughout their whole life, from childhood to old age – with regard to their words, actions, states, religion, beliefs and all other aspects of their character whether visible or hidden. No heinous act whatsoever could possibly issue from their hand, neither from an unintentional mistake, human error or conscious oversight.

Moreover, the opinion of others – chiefly the rationalist scholars – that Abraham was then at the beginning of his path and at the outset of his intellectual and gnostic awareness is also incorrect. This we know because this incident happened during the period of his prophecy when he was calling his people to Islam; it was thus during the period of his perfection, with respect to his intellect, his gnosis and his perspicacity. How, may one ask, can such opinions be expressed when prophecy, messenger-ship and the associated knowledges are not things which are acquired and are not theoretical in nature; rather they are outright gifts from God, pure acts of giving without cause or reason, on the part of the Lord, and not acquired through any action on their part. This is indicated when Allah talks about our Prophet saying, 'He has taught you what you did not know, and Allah's grace on you is very great,' or when He says to Solomon, 'This is Our free gift, therefore give freely or withhold, without reckoning,' or when Jesus says, 'Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet; and He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and the poor-rate so long as I live,' or when He addresses John the Baptist, 'O Yahya! Take hold of the Book with strength, and We granted him wisdom while yet a child.' Let these examples suffice as an indication of our meaning, although there are numerous other examples in the Qur'an.

Know too that the laws of the *shari'ah* constitute the divine code and social order: it is incumbent on the prophets and the friends of Allah to establish this order together with its 'pillars' and to command the Muslim nation to respect and fulfill its demands. By this I mean that they are not permitted to omit any of

the three levels, for this would imply an omission or deficiency with respect to their obligations, and this is impossible given that they are prophets and as such are protected from any wrong or hateful action; indeed nothing of this nature may happen at their hands. That they have always respected these three levels is clear from their various *sharaV* (divinely-inspired codes of behaviour) and ways of worship which have been given to all the prophets from Adam to Muhammad.

Again we refer here to the (above-mentioned) words of our Prophet: '*Shari`ah* is my words, *tariqah* my actions and *haqiqah* my states.' The meaning of these words is also reinforced by the instructions given by Abraham to his people in the *surah*, 'The Cattle', which features the story of the star, the moon and the sun. The first instruction is for the guidance of the common people, the second for the elite and the third of the elite of the elite – in line with the three distinctions of *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*.

As for the words which testify that the incident involving Abraham took place during the period of his prophethood and his calling of the people to Islam, then the following *ayah* is one of several where this is mentioned in the Qur'an: 'And the people disputed with him. He said: "Do you dispute with me respecting Allah? And He has guided me indeed; and I do not fear in any way those that you set up with Him, unless my Lord pleases; my Lord comprehends all things in His knowledge; will you not then take heed?" And this was Our argument which we gave to Abraham against his people; We exalt in dignity whom We please; surely your Lord is Wise Knowing.' May Allah's witnessing be enough for us. If this had not been during the time of his prophecy and calling, Allah would not have said: 'And the people disputed with him.' It should be remembered that some of his people were worshipping and prostrating to the stars, while others worshipped and prostrated to the moon, and yet a third group worshipped and prostrated to the sun and other idols. Abraham would guide them according to the laws of the *shari`ah* together with teachings about the Oneness of Allah, the Creator and Originator of all existence; he would also instruct them in the science of the inward and in the witnessing of the Oneness in all existence, in witnessing the One who brings all into existence and the manifestation of Him as the Unique God. This we may see from his words: 'Surely I have turned myself, being upright, wholly to Him, Who originated the heavens and the earth and I am not one of the polytheists.'

He also asks, 'Is this my Lord?' on three different occasions – not as a genuine inquiry but rather as a question whose reply is implied to be negative. Thus the complete utterance might be: 'Is it possible that this created and phenomenal event, namely the manifestation of the setting of the star, the moon and the sun be my Lord and the Lord of all things? No, by Allah, it is not possible: it is neither my Lord nor the Lord of all things, rather it is a created thing fashioned by Allah'; or he might say: 'Is it by the light of this created and phenomenal thing, by this light which is the light of goodness, the light of the intellect or the light of sanctity or the combination of these that I know my Lord? Is it possible to gain knowledge of Him by means of these three lights? No, by Allah, it is not possible: rather it is only possible by crossing beyond them and ascending above their levels.' Arrival at true knowledge of Him and direct witnessing of His essence is only possible by Him and by His light of Reality. This is referred to in the words of the Prophet when he says: 'I have known my Lord by my Lord.' One of the gnostics of his people has also

said, 'By God one cannot arrive at Him except by Him.' Every gnostic knows that it is only possible to see the orb of the sun and its rays by the very light of the sun.

The people of *shari`ah* who seek gnosis of the Real by way of the light of goodness are like the person who seeks to see the orb of the sun in the darkness of the night by the light of the stars; as is obvious, he will never be able to catch sight of it. The people of *tariqah* who seek gnosis of the Real by way of the light of the intellect are like the person who seeks the orb of the sun in the darkness of the night by the light of the moon; as is clear, he will never catch sight of it. The people of *haqiqah* who seek gnosis of the Real by means of the light of sanctity are like the person who actually sees the sun: it is clear that he can see it, although his seeing is that of the witnesser and the witnessed, not the seeing of pure divine unity.

The subtlety of meaning expressed here is that just as anyone who sees the light of the sun by means of the light of the sun is only able to arrive at a witnessing of the sun after establishing a connection based on purity, light and perfect nobility between himself and it, so too the person who sees the Real is only able to arrive at this witnessing after establishing a connection based on the liberation of the self from other than Him, by means of contentment and affirmation of His absolute sanctity and exaltedness above creation.

Such a connection means the taking on of His characteristics, as is demonstrated by the words of the Prophet when he said, 'Make your character the character of Allah,' and by Allah's words in a sacred *hadith* (spoken directly by Allah, albeit on the tongue of the Prophet and in the latter's words): 'I was his hearing, his sight, his tongue, his hand and his foot.' It is for this reason that the gnostic has said: 'It is not everyone who sets out who arrives, and not everyone who arrives attains, and not everyone who attains attains, and not everyone who attains separates, and not everyone who separates arrives, and not everyone who arrives arrives.'

The Commander of the Faithful ('Ali) explains the relationship (between Allah and His slave) in the following way: 'Allah possesses a drink which is reserved for His intimate friends (*awliya*): when they drink they become intoxicated, when they become intoxicated they become joyful, when they become joyful they become sweet, when they become sweet they begin to melt, when they begin to melt they become free, when they become free they seek, when they seek they find, when they find they arrive, when they arrive they join, and when they join, there is no difference between them and their Beloved.'

Allah describes the lack of any distance or separation in His relationship with the Prophet when he says, 'And you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah Who smote.' The Prophet has also said, 'Whoever sees me has seen the Truth.' Others have said, 'Praise be to me, how great is my affair!' and 'I am the Truth' and other similar expressions. This station is called the station of annihilation in unity, by this I mean the station of annihilation of the knower in the known, the lover in the beloved and the witnesser in the witnessed – by way of the disappearance of phenomenal duality and the removal of

egotism which is the obstacle to arrival at Him. The following verse also refers to this:

Between myself and You is individual existence following from me. So, by Your grace, remove this individuality from between us.

The prophets, messengers, intimate friends and gnostics have all reached a point of annihilation in Him and then a continuing in Him; thus their contact with the ordinary world still exists despite the fact that they were spiritually annihilated in Him. It is necessary to understand this point well, for the annihilation of the Prophet in Allah did not prevent him from eating, drinking or getting married. His words 'I have moments with Allah which include no one, not even His most intimate of angels, nor messengers but myself are an indication of this state of annihilation.

Moreover his words 'I am a man like the rest of you' is an indication of the station of continuing in the world. Allah's words, 'And as for these examples, We set them forth for men, and none understands them but the learned' and 'Everything is perishable but He; His is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back' and 'Everyone on it must pass away. And there will endure for ever the person of your Lord, the Lord of Glory and honour' are all further indications of the same meaning.

If the meaning of the annihilation of the slave in his Lord is still unclear, then we would describe it metaphorically as the disappearance of the light of the stars in the light of the sun when the latter rises on the horizon, or as the constant breaking and disappearance of the waves in the sea. This idea has also been expressed in the following verse:

The sea is the same sea as it has been of old;
The events of today are its waves and its rivers.

Thus it has been said that the one who continues (after annihilation) into eternity and the one who is annihilated is in a state of annihilation which has not yet finished. Knowledge of certainty, experience of certainty, and truth of certainty are terms which describe the three gnoses. The truth of certainty is particular to the station of annihilation and the disappearance of the slave's features in his Lord (as the quotation above indicates).

Indeed the establishing of the station of truth is in the disappearance of these individual features; if a person does attain to this kind of annihilation, then he annihilates his existence in the existence of the Truth, his essence in His Essence and his attributes in His Attributes; if he obliterates his form, then his name falls away from him like the disappearance of the light of the stars in the light of the sun. If he witnesses the truth, by the very Truth itself, in the manifestations of its perfections and attributes, he realizes the meaning of 'Everything is perishing but Him.' If he understands the secret of His words, 'Therefore whither you turn, thither is Allah's purpose,' if he understands why the gnostic said, 'When poverty is perfected, then that is Allah' and why he said, 'Glory to myself, how great is my affair!' and

why he said, 'Who is there like myself and is there anyone but I in the two worlds?' and Allah's words, 'Our Lord! Make perfect for us our light, and grant us protection, surely Thou hast power over all things' – if he comprehends all this, then it is as a guidance which will enable him to see this light that annihilates the darkness of his own existence and brings him to his Lord by a link of spirituality, illumination and purity, by stripping away other-than-Him and liberating him from dependency on the world of form. It is for this reason that Allah says in reply to them, 'It shall be said: Turn back and seek a light.' This means: 'Return back to the original state of non-existence and to the necessary annihilation of the essences of possibility and contingent existences, leave behind the seeing of the physical eye, and extricate yourselves from the darkness of egotism and otherness, and then take hold of the light of truth – it will allow you to go on for ever and ever and will cause you to enter into the Garden of the Essence, the Arena of the Attributes and the worlds of never-ending divine emanations.'

If we examine the Qur'anic *ayah*: 'Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche...' , we realize that it alludes to the witnessing of this light according to the three levels of consciousness. The niche refers to the world of the *mulk* (the phenomenal world) and it corresponds to the *shari'ah*. The glass refers to the world of the *malakut* (the world of angelic and spiritual form) and corresponds to the *tariqah*. The lamp refers to the world of *jabarut* (His dominion) and corresponds to the *haqiqah*. The tree refers to His Presence of Power and corresponds to Absolute Existence from which all dependent form issues.

This interpretation is correct because by common agreement, light is existence and darkness is non-existence. Allah's words, 'Light upon light. Allah guides to His light Whom He wills' is an indication of the light of the hereafter – and the cause of witnessing and arrival and is also the means to the connecting relationship between Him and His slaves. Thus Allah says immediately afterwards, 'Allah sets forth parables for men' as an exhortation to His slaves to realize that attainment of the light of witnessing is dependent upon removal of the darkness of their existence (existence which is contingent and a mere reflection of the true existence).

In this *ayah* and others before it are secrets beyond the compass of the heavens and the earth. Thus, for example, He says: 'If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted, though We were to bring the like of that (sea) to add thereto.' This *ayah* and the other examples above demonstrate the validity of what we are describing concerning the attainment of this light and the witnessing; they demonstrate too the importance of the removal of the duality of the phenomenal world and the way in which the Prophet guided his people to this very light.

Thus he says in one of his supplications: 'O Allah, place light in my heart, light in my hearing, light in my sight, light in my flesh, light in my blood and light in my bones, light in front of me, light behind me, light beneath me, light above me, light to the right of me, light to the left of me and light in my grave. O Allah, increase me in light and bestow on me light and give me light, by the truth of Your Reality, O most

Merciful of the Merciful.'

It is by these examples that we recognize the prophets' and messengers' respect for these three levels of consciousness, and we see how they commanded their respective peoples to also respect them and to carry on the duties incumbent on them – whether it be by the *shari`ah*, the *tariqah* or *haqiqah*. Therefore it is obligatory for every person of sane mind to carry out these duties as far as he is able. Moreover, it is obligatory to – strive to attain perfection and bliss in each of these three levels after complete submission to the Lord: this is the belief of the people of Allah, their elite, the masters of divine unity and the chosen amongst them. Happy indeed is the slave who follows in their footsteps. `All praise is due to Allah Who guided us to this, and we would not have found the way had it not been that Allah had guided us.'

Having established that the *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* are all terms which describe the One Truth, the Divine Code, and that there exists no contradiction between the different levels, we shall begin the second aspect of our study, namely the superiority of one level over the next.

2) The Second Aspect

The Second Aspect: Description of the people of *haqiqah* (the inner truth) and how their station is higher than that of the people of *tariqah* (the way); and how the people of *tariqah* are higher than the people of *shari`ah* (the law)

Know that although *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* all describe one truth, *haqiqah* and its people are higher than *tariqah* and *tariqah* and its people are higher than *shari`ah*. *Shari`ah* is the level of beginnings, *tariqah* the intermediate stage and *haqiqah* the final level. Thus, just as perfection of the beginnings lies in the mean and the intermediate, so the perfection of the intermediate lies in the end; and just as the intermediate is not attained without the beginning, so the end is not attained without the intermediate. By this I mean that just as existence of that which is above is not possible without that which is below it – while the reverse is possible – so too existence at the intermediate level is not possible without the beginning, nor existence at the final stage without the intermediate – although the reverse is possible.

Thus *shari`ah* is possible without *tariqah* although *tariqah* is not possible without *shari`ah*; likewise, *tariqah* is possible without *haqiqah*, but *haqiqah* without *tariqah* is not. This is because each is the perfection of the other. Therefore, although there is no contradiction between the three levels, the perfection of *shari`ah* is only possible through *tariqah* and that of *tariqah* only possible through *haqiqah*. Accordingly, the perfection of perfection is the joining together of all three levels, for the sum of two things, or two states when joined together, must be better and more perfect than the two when separate: the people of *haqiqah* are therefore superior in relation to the people of *shari`ah* and *tariqah*.

Our Prophet was the greatest and noblest of the prophets since he brought all three levels together, as his words attest, 'I have been given all the names.' We are familiar with the hidden meanings of these words, but there remains one aspect we have not considered, namely that the station of joining – which is particular to the Prophet and those of his people who are seekers of *haqiqah* – is the most sublime and most noble of stations. The words of the Prophet: 'My *qiblah* (the direction of prayer, namely Makkah) is between the East and the West' also indicate the station of joining – for the East was the *qiblah* of Jesus and the West that of Moses and between the two was the *qiblah* of the Prophet. The Prophet joins the two, that is to say, the stations of the two.

At the esoteric level the East is the world of souls and spirits and the West is the world of material bodies and corporeality: between these two states is the joining isthmus, the stations of the Prophet with regard to both the form and the inner meaning. Thus the station of the Presence of Singularity is the station of both Reality and Form; this is like the state of man who joins the two worlds which are inherently manifest in him. There is likewise the state which encompasses the joining of all the meanings of the prophets and messengers, or the state which joins all the forms of the various external codes and methods of worship.

Thus the perfection of Moses and his people was in their perception of the realities of the world of materiality and corporeality together with their different degrees and levels; the perfection of Jesus and his people was in their perception of the realities of the world of the souls and spirits together with their different degrees and levels; the perfection of Muhammad and his people was in their perception of both the realities of the world of spirit and those of the world of materiality. It is for this reason that Allah refers to His Truth and Light (or Reality) as being 'neither of the east nor the west.' Allah has also said of His people: 'And thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people.'

Moreover, there exists similarity between the two worlds and between the west and the east at the levels of form and meaning. The east with regard to the realm of form refers to the place of rising of the sun, the diffusion of its light and the illumination of the sensory world; with respect to the realm of inner meaning, it refers to the rising of the sun of reality and the diffusion of its light (meaning here the spirits and the souls) in the darkness of the world of corporeality so that the bodies and forms come to life and continue in this light of reality. This state is referred to by Allah when He says, 'And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord.'

The Imam has also said: 'It is a light which shines of a morning from before eternity, its effects appearing in the realm of divine unity.' The two states referred to in the *ayah* and the saying of the Imam are thus connected in meaning. The same is true of the west: at the formal level it refers to the place of setting and eventual disappearance of the light and orb of the sun; at the level of meaning, it refers to the setting of the light of the sun of reality and disappearance of its rays (meaning here its spirits and

souls). Allah thus says, '(the sun) going down into a black sea' and 'Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for the men who understand.'

There is also a relationship between them in the sense that the light of our Prophet is not solely from the world of the souls and not solely from the world of forms. As Allah has said: 'Neither of the east nor the west;' thus he is neither of the people of the senses nor of the people of the intellect, rather he is other than these two and above them, by countless degrees. He is not absolutely of the station of prophets, which is concerned with external authority, and not absolutely of the station of the intimate friends, which is concerned with internal authority: rather he is other than these two with respect to their spiritual stations and above them with respect to his gathering and encompassing these differences.

The truth of this statement is manifest in the existence of the various legal systems and methods of worship which have been brought by the different prophets: thus Moses came to perfect the different aspects of the law, adding to this the perfection of some inward elements – this is established in the Torah which sets out the code of laws. Jesus came to perfect the inward, adding to this the perfection of some aspects of the outward – this is established in the Gospel with the exposition of the divine secrets and mysteries. Our Prophet Muhammad came to perfect both aspects and to join the two levels; hence his words, 'I have been given all the names' and 'My *qiblah* is between the East and the West.'

This truth is also established in the Qur'an, by the latter's inclusion of both the laws and the secrets. In truth the very name of the book – al-Qur'an – is significant: linguistically *qara'a* can mean a picking up or gathering together. The Commander of the Faithful ('Ali) has said: 'I am the Qur'an speaking and I am the Book of Allah which unites.' He is the one who unites the two levels and the two states of the outward and the inward. One of the gnostics has composed the following lines:

I am the Qur'an and the seven oft-repeated verses, and the spirit of the spirit and not the spirit of empty vessels.

He is referring here to this all-encompassing station of joining which is the Muhammadi state. Another gnostic of excellence has expressed this same meaning in his writings: 'Just as the perfection of Moses was an absolute perfection of a specific kind, so he inclined to the perfection of the most inferior part of man, namely the body; it is for this reason that the Torah is full of references of use to man in his daily life and his means of subsistence. Since Jesus was of a greater perfection than him, his perfection lay in a part of man more noble than the body, namely the soul: thus it is that the Gospel is full of references to the Day of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment.

Since Muhammad attained absolute perfection of a specific kind, his absolute perfection was in the human side of his character. As for his composite perfection, it is the perfection of all matter and form, and this is the path of excellence – this is precisely the hidden meaning contained in the abolition of

monasticism in his religion. Thus the *fuqaha'* (those trained in jurisprudence) and the Muslim scholars are similar to Moses in their perfection of the outward dimensions whereas the Muslim philosophers and their like amongst the intellectuals are similar to Jesus in their perfection of the inward dimensions; the gnostics and men of realization are similar to Muhammad in their perfection of both the inward and the outward dimensions and by their acting according to the three levels mentioned above (*shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*). This idea is reinforced by the words of the sultan of the gnostics, the Commander of the Faithful: '*Shari`ah* is a river and *haqiqah* a sea: as for the *fuqaha*; they keep to the banks of the river; as for the philosophers, they dive for pearls in the sea; as for the gnostics, they ride in boats to safety.' If this is understood, then the reader will realize that the peoples of the *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* correspond to each of these three levels: the people of *shari`ah* are like the *fuqaha'* and those of their states; the people of *tariqah* are like the scholars and philosophers and those of their stations; the people of *haqiqah* are like the gnostics and those of their station. Similarly Moses and his people, Jesus and his people, and Muhammad and his people each correspond to one of these stations.

Thus the station of joining is particular to the gnostics and men of realization from amongst the people of Muhammad – namely the people of reality. These people are higher, greater, nobler and more excellent than the other two levels. Moreover, here lies the core of our investigation. The gnostics are at times in the arena of Allah and His angels – in accordance with His words, 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining His creation with justice' – and sometimes in the arena of Allah alone – in accordance with His words, 'and none knows its interpretation except Allah, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge.'

It is for this reason that they are classed as the elite of the elite, the intimate ones and those who go before. It is they who are referred to in the last of each of the following (three-tiered classifications), namely, 'the common people, the elite and the elite of the elite,' 'the people of the right, the people of the left and the intimate' and 'the oppressor of his self, the one of moderate temperament and the one who goes ahead doing good works.' Further proof of their elite position is to be found in Allah's words, 'We believe in it, it is all from our Lord; and none of them is mindful except those with understanding.' Those who thus say 'everything is from our Lord' are the ones of realization and are no other than the elite referred to above; in contrast the Ash'arites, who believe in absolute predestination, veil themselves from this station.

Witnessing that all is from the One True Lord is realization that imperfection on His part is not admissible since His sanctity, incomparability and exaltedness over anything created are connected with the concept of pure divine unity. This unity is totally removed from the duality of the phenomenal and may be described as the unity of action, of attribute and of essence. No persons other than these attain to this degree although the Ash'arites do not believe in it. Allah's words, 'and none do mind except those having understanding' is further proof that this meaning is intended – namely that this vast and noble secret is only known, as is fitting, to those of His slaves who have understanding.

Thus, having demonstrated that the stations of the people of *haqiqah* are higher than the people of *tariqah* and *shari'ah* in all respects, let us begin with our study of the third aspect, which is a description of how the divine code is dependent upon the intellect and how the intellect is dependent upon this same code and how each is dependent upon the other. It will be a demonstration and proof which will prevent the ignorant man from imagining that the divinely revealed laws contradict the intellect and that the methods of reasoning are opposed to this divine code.

Many have made this mistake, with the result that they have themselves gone astray and have also led astray many other servants of Allah who were devoid of knowledge. This is referred to by Allah when He describes them and their adversaries during the difficult moments of the Day of Judgment: 'Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray from among the jinn and the men that we may trample them under our feet so that they may be of the lowest.' There are many examples of this nature in the Qur'an – and Allah is more knowing and of greater wisdom. He it is Who declares the Truth and Who guides to the right path.

3) The Third Aspect

The Third Aspect: the need of the intellect for the divine code of laws and the dependence of the latter on the intellect

Know that this study necessitates a passage of introduction, namely a description of how all the prophets and intimate friends or saints are doctors of the self and healers of the heart, in the same way as the doctors and physicians are all healers of the ailments of the human body. By this I mean that just as the doctors of the human body know how to get rid of physical diseases from their patients by their skill in healing and their use of potions and drugs, so the doctors of the self or the soul know how to remove the psychological and spiritual ailments of their patients by their skillful guidance and their use of knowledge and gnosis derived from the realm of reality.

Thus we read the following description of spiritual treatment in a language specific to its domain:

'Spiritual treatment is by knowledge – of the perfections of the heart, by knowledge of whatever mars these perfections through illness, and by knowledge of that which cures this illness. Likewise, it is knowledge of the methods of maintaining good health and even temperament and prevention of further "infection" with this disease.' We read too of the spiritual doctor in similar terms: 'The spiritual doctor is the shaykh, the person who has gnosis of the treatment and who is capable of giving guidance and perfection.'

As we have already seen, it has also been said: 'The shaykh is the perfect man with regard to the *shari'ah*, the *tariqah* and the *haqiqah*, having reached the limits of perfection in each by his knowledge of

the diseases and illnesses of the self and the corresponding treatment and medicine and his capacity to cure. The perfect man gives guidance to the self if it is ready for that guidance and agrees to be guided.' Just as it is not permitted for the one who is physically sick to object to the method of treatment nor the nature of the medicine given by the physician, so the person who is spiritually or psychologically sick is not permitted to object to the spiritual doctor, nor to his methods of guidance, his imposition of spiritual exercises or difficult physical tests. Indeed, objecting to any doctor, whether of the physical or the spiritual, only increases the sickness of the sick person. If the physically sick person objects to the physician, then the latter will abandon him and the course of treatment; this will result in a worsening of his illness, sudden death or a long, drawn-out, painful end. Whatever happens, the result is undesirable and may lead to loss of life.

Similarly, if the spiritually sick person objects to the spiritual doctor, then the latter will abandon him and the treatment (that is the guidance) and the spiritual illness will increase (that is, he will go further astray and Allah refers to this when He says: 'There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their 'disease') and they will die the death of meaning or the death caused by disbelief and hypocrisy which Allah refers to when He says: 'Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness whence he cannot come forth?' Either result is undesirable: it causes eternal distress and never-ending misery.

Thus, just as a physically sick person who wishes to regain perfect health is obliged to take bitter-tasting medicine from the physician, willingly or unwillingly, without objection or remonstrance, so the spiritually sick person who desires perfect health is also obliged to drink a bitter medicine, namely to accept the imposition of arduous tasks of varying degrees of severity from the spiritual doctor, – willingly or unwillingly and without objection or remonstrance. Allah refers to this when He says, with respect to the Prophet Muhammad: 'But no! By your Lord! They do not believe (in reality) until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straightness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with entire submission.'

Our aim in this introductory study is to demonstrate to the reader the truth and validity of the principles and precepts outlined herewith, with particular regard to the *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*. We also wish to show how each level is just as it should be, and that no one from any one level should object to anything from another level, or say that that thing contradicts the intellect or the narrated body of traditions. It is clear that something which is contrary to one person's intellect is not necessarily contrary to another person's intellect, particularly in the case of the intellects of the prophets and saints – their intellects are the most perfect of intellects, just as their souls are the most perfect of souls: there is manifestly a great distance between the two and whoever denies this is in sheer folly and in haughty disregard of his intellect. We are not, however, addressing such persons.

The situation is similar with regard to the body of the narrated traditions: it is not possible that one can have heard or understood all the traditions which exist. By the nature of things we do not become aware

of many of the traditions and we thus cannot be expected to comprehend them all. Allah refers to this notion when He says: 'I have prepared for My righteous slaves what the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard and what the heart has not yet awareness of.' It is also clear that the majority of the laws and prohibitions of the divine legal code are beyond the compass and perception of the intellect and sensory awareness.

Nevertheless, it is not permitted to object to any of them, since the prophets and saints would not have been commanded to enact these laws if they had not have been in accordance with their intellect; indeed, anything which is in accord with their intellects is in accordance with all intellects. It may be that the conclusion drawn in a particular subject is contrary to one person's intellect or contrary to others of like intellect, but this does not mean that it is irrational and contrary to the intellect: most intellects are incapable of understanding the divinely appointed code of laws.

Moreover, most of the profounder meanings of the laws and judgments lie outside the framework of human understanding. The Messenger did not allow the people of outward dimension to ask about the precise nature and purpose of certain things – questions, for example, concerning the reason why the midday prayer should consist of four cycles, the sunset prayer of three and the morning prayer of only two.

The same applied to the rest of the basic pillars of the legal code. As for the incapacity of the intellect to comprehend the more profound meanings of the divine system, we may cite its inability to understand the secret of the Angel of Death: the intellect does not have the power to see how one angel is able to seize the souls of hundreds of thousands of persons or animals from the four corners of the earth in one instant.

Likewise, it cannot perceive the secret of Gabriel and how he descends in one instant from the seventh heaven and from the Throne to the earth, how he reveals the revelation to a prophet and then returns in the same instant or a few moments later. In the light of these events, the best a thinking Muslim can do is to submit to the divine commands and laws; the best he can do is to affirm and believe in them without enquiring into their substance and inner reality. There is nothing in the divine code which is contrary to the intellect and, on investigation, one realizes that the whole system of legal duties and ordinances with all its details and ramifications is based on the intellect and is within the true grasp of the thinking man.

Indeed, all the workings of existence are based on the intellect and the understanding of the man of intellect: it was within these parameters that existence came into being and so will it end with the annihilation of existence. Thus it has been said: 'Glory to the One Who brought existence into being with the intellect and sealed it with the man of intellect. It has also been narrated in a *hadith* of the Prophet: 'The first thing which Allah created was the intellect. He thereupon said to it: "Come closer" and it came closer. He then said: "Go back" and it went back.. He then said: "By My power and My glory, I have not created any creation more beloved to Me than you: By you I take and by you I give, by you I reward and

by you I punish."'

The likeness of the divine code and the intellect and the dependence of each on the other is also the likeness of the soul and the body and the dependence of each on the other: I mean by this that just as the workings of the soul and the manifestation of its attributes and perfections is not possible except by means of the body (by way of its physical strength and the various limbs), so the workings of the divine code and the manifestations of its various levels are not possible except by means of the intellect and by means of the different levels and stations of the intellect.

The different levels of the intellect comprise what is called the material intellect, the intellect of action, the faculty of intellect, and the acquiring intellect. The whole of the divine code is based on these different levels: the first and the second are the levels of the common people, the third is that of the elite, and the fourth that of the elite of the elite from amongst the prophets and saints.

The object of this study is to show that the divine code is not independent of the intellect, nor the intellect independent of the divine code. Most scholars, gnostics and philosophers, among them the perfect shaykh Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Raghib al-Isfahani, agree with this. In his book *Tafsil al Nash'atayn fi tahsil al-sa'adatayn*, 'Shaykh Raghib mentions this subject in detail saying: 'Know that the intellect never guides except by the divine code and that the divine code will never be understood except by the intellect.' The intellect is like the foundation and the divine code is like the building: the building cannot be firmly established without a foundation. Moreover, the intellect is like the faculty of sight and the divine code like the rays of light: sight is of no use without light. It is for this reason that Allah says, 'Indeed there has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His will.'

Similarly, the intellect is like a lamp and the divine code the oil which fuels it: if there is no oil, then the lamp will not burn; and without the lamp, there will be no light. Allah has indicated this to us with His words: 'Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth... Light upon light.' What is referred to in the latter portion of the *ayah* is the light of the intellect which is above the light of the divine code – for the former will not shine without the latter. Besides, the divine code is the intellect from without and the intellect is the divine code from within: indeed the two are mutually supportive, indeed, united.

As the divine code is the intellect in its outward aspect, so Allah has stripped the name intellect from the disbeliever on [2](#) more than one occasion in the Qur'an, like, for example, when He says: 'Deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they do not understand.' As the intellect is the divine code in its inward aspect, Allah has said: 'The nature made by Allah in which He has made men: there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know.' In this *ayah* Allah relates knowing and the intellect to *din* – religion as a complete way of life. Allah also refers to the union of the intellect and the divine code

when He says, 'Light upon light' meaning here the light of the intellect and the light of the divine code.

Thereafter He says, 'Allah guides to His light whom He wills' referring to these two lights as one single light. If the intellect is missing, then our worship is deficient, for the divine code does not cover in detail all aspects of belief and worship; likewise, if the divine code is missing, then the intellect is incapable of dealing with many of the details of belief and worship. This is because the divine code is as the eye and the intellect as the light or vice-versa: neither of the two can do without the other.

One should realize too that the intellect of itself is hardly enough: it can perceive the universality of things, but it cannot cope with the details. It realizes the benefit of belief in the truth, in speaking the truth, in behaving well towards others, in acting justly, in being chaste and so forth, although it may not comprehend the details of these matters. The divine code encompasses both the fundamentals of belief and worship together with the details of these matters; it describes in detail man's obligations and how to conduct one's affairs in an equitable manner.

Thus the intellect does not know of itself, for example, that pork, blood or wine are prohibited, or that one should abstain from eating at specific times, or that one should not marry someone who is closely related, or that one should not have sexual intercourse with a woman during her period of menstrual bleeding. The only way of finding out these things is to refer to the divine code since it is a system of correct belief and correct behaviour: it is a means towards the best of this world and the next and whoever abandons it goes astray.

Allah indicates that there is no option for the intellect but to accept and realize this fact when He says, 'We do not chastise until We raise an apostle' and also, 'And had We destroyed them with chastisement before this, they would certainly have said: "O our Lord! why didst Thou not send to us an apostle, for then we should have followed Thy communications before we met disgrace and shame."' On another occasion Allah refers to the intellect and the divine code in terms of grace and mercy: 'And were it not for the grace of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have certainly followed Satan, save a few' – by the word 'few' Allah is indicating the elite.

As we have already seen, Allah shows that a person who does not devote himself to the divine code and worship of His Lord is neither a true man nor a person of intellect – if he is called a man, he is supposed to be a thinking person. Shaykh Raghīb has said that 'man, because of his human nature, either becomes a true man by means of his intellect or he loses his human qualities when his behaviour is no longer connected to this faculty; in fact he is reduced to being a mere shadow of a man and becomes in reality like a mindless brute.'

As we have seen above, the intellect is not perfected except after having taken on the guidance of the divine code. In several places in the Qur'an the disbeliever is regarded as devoid of intellect because he has failed to heed the prophetic words of guidance. Acceptance of this guidance, this divine code, is in

fact worship of Allah. Therefore the true man is the person who recognizes the truth of the message and thereby worships his Lord: it was for this very purpose that he was created. Allah says, 'And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me' and 'And they were not enjoined anything except that they should serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright, and keep up the prayer and pay the poor-rate.'

Anything which has been brought into existence for a specific task is as if in a state of non-existence if it does not fulfill that specific task. Thus, in a similar way, people discard a thing's very name if that thing is not fulfilling the function for which it was created. When they see a worthless horse, for example, they might say, 'That is not a horse;' likewise of an abject man they might say, 'That is not a man;' again they might say of someone 'he has no eye' or that 'he has no ear' if that person's eye or ear have ceased to function properly, although there may be still a trace of hearing or sight left. Allah refers to this when He talks about those who do not use their faculty of intellect: 'Deaf, dumb (and) blind for they do not understand.'

Likewise man only attains to his human nature to the extent that he attains to the worship for which he has been created: whoever worships in the correct manner perfects thereby his humanity; whoever refuses to worship is stripped thereby of his humanity and becomes the worst of beasts. Allah refers to these disbelievers when He says, 'They are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors' and also, 'Surely the vilest of animals, in Allah's sight, are the deaf, the dumb, who do not understand;' thus not only does He describe them as beasts and animals but also as the worst of their kind. Indeed, He describes their speech as non-human: 'And their prayer before the House is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands,' likening them to the birds that whistle and clap their wings.

Again Allah elaborates on this theme when He declares that man is not a man except by way of his religion: 'The Beneficent God, taught the Qur'an, He created man, taught him how to express himself.' It should be noticed that the two halves of the statement are not joined by an 'and'; one would have thought at first that in describing man Allah would have said, 'He created man, He taught him how to express himself and then taught him the Qur'an,' but Allah begins by mentioning the Qur'an and thereafter says that He created man, since he is not considered to be a man if he does not apply himself to the Qur'an.

Allah demonstrates hereby that the true capacity to articulate thoughts is attained only through knowledge of the Qur'an. Allah demonstrates these meanings in a particular order and leaves out the joining word 'and' in between, making each phrase take the place of the one preceding it. Thus the words indicate a certain progression and are not merely placed one after the other as mere additional information.

Again, in order to emphasize this point, we would repeat that man cannot be considered to be a man as long as he has no knowledge of the various acts of worship required of him, and his speech is not

considered speech unless his words are uttered in accordance with the demands of the divine code. We are not denying that the unbeliever is a human being in a general sense, but rather that, with respect to the exigencies of the intellect and the divine code, it is not fitting to call him human except in a superficial way as there appears no sign of these two things in his actions. If, however, he is called a human being for the sake of classifying him with a general name, then there is no objection to this. It is clear that many words are used in this way: knowledge of the divine code shows that some words do not in fact mean what they appear to mean. T

he Arabs use the word *ghinan* to mean abundance of wealth, but a narration of the Prophet demonstrates that this is not so: '*ghinan* is not abundance of wealth, but rather it indicates self-sufficiency and contentment of the self.' Allah Himself has said, 'Whoever is rich, let him abstain altogether' and here uses the word according to its usual meaning. In short, if a wise person uses a word of praise, it is understood as such, although the word may either be used to describe something praiseworthy or despicable, for example, if someone says someone is well-known, it can carry either a positive or a pejorative implication depending on the circumstances.

Thus it might be said that everything is described or praised in terms which are related to the nature of that thing or its kind; it is said, for example, 'such and such a person is a human-being' or 'this sword is a sword:' In an analogous manner it is said that the absolute human being is the prophet of his time.

One scholar has said that the person who says that man is ,a living being, endowed with speech and doomed to die, is correct, but the real or inner meaning of this statement is not as many people imagine. He does not live or die in the same way as animals and his speech is not the mere faculty of expressing words; rather, what is meant is that the life of the one referred to in His words 'He taught him the mode of expression' and the subsequent death of such a person is the life and death of the man who has overcome the forces of desire and anger by means of the *shari`ah*.

Thus death is here the death of the will and life is the true and natural life of the balanced man. This notion has also been expressed in the phrase 'Die the death of the will and you will live the natural life of a balanced man;' the Prophet has also indicated this kind of death with His words, 'Die before you die.' The Commander of the Faithful ('Ali) has also said in this respect: 'He has brought his intellect to life and has killed his self (*nafs*) such that his splendour manifests and his coarseness is refined; there then appears a shining radiance which lights up the way for him; he travels along that way, propelled from gate to gate until he reaches the gate of peace and the abode of rest; his step is firm and his body is tranquil, enclosed in safety and ease – and this by virtue of how he has used his heart and satisfied his Lord.'

Examples such as these are many and the reader is advised to research the matter in the appropriate books – and Allah is more Knowing and Wise; He it is who declares the Truth and guides to, the right path.

Thus we conclude our investigation of the *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*. and the need of the intellect for the divine code and the need of the divine code for the intellect; we have treated the matter in such detail and depth as befits a matter of such importance. We shall now begin another investigation which follows on from, and is a necessary complement to, the two other subjects; indeed our research cannot be completed in a fitting matter except by recourse to this third domain of investigation which is concerned with what may be called the two principles and the two rules. The first principle concerns the general duty incumbent upon the prophets, the messengers and the saints which is the duty to instruct and guide creation to the straight path.

4) The First Principle

The First Principle: the general precepts of the prophets and messengers in their instruction and guidance of mankind to the straight path

Know that the general precepts and the body of laws established by the prophets, messengers, saints and Imams from Adam himself to our Prophet Muhammad and from the latter to the Mahdi are the means of conveying every man to his own particular state of perfection in accordance with his capacity and receptivity. Moreover this body of laws is a means of bringing him out of his state of deficiency and ignorance in accordance with his strength and striving. This is indicated by Allah when He says: 'Even as We have sent among you an Apostle from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know.'

Indeed Allah's purpose in bringing creation into being is just this, as He indicates on another occasion: 'Allah is He Who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like of them; the decree continues to descend among them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah indeed encompasses all things in His knowledge.' Moreover in a sacred *With* He also says, 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known and so I created the world.' Furthermore He says, 'And were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure' meaning if it were not for Allah's generosity in revealing the Book and His mercy in sending down the messengers, none of you would be purified of their ignorance and their disbelief. The reason for this is that something which is in a state of potentiality must finally, of necessity, emerge into a state of actuality.

Perfection is potential in all created beings: if the prophets and messengers had not existed and perfected the twin forces of knowledge and action, which reside in man as potentiality, then no one would ever have been able to rise above imperfection to perfection. The words of the Prophet, 'I have been given all the names' and 'I have been sent to perfect good conduct' are indications of this. What the Prophet is saying is that 'I have been sent to perfect the good conduct which has been established by the prophets before me and the perfection of this good conduct is dependent upon my being sent into

the visible world of creation: in truth, all the prophets and messengers of the visible and invisible worlds were my caliphs, my vicegerents and manifestations of my own manifestation.' The Prophet has also said, 'Adam and those after him are beneath my banner' and 'I was a Prophet when Adam was between the water and clay.'

At this point there is need for an introductory discourse in order to explain what is meant by these notions in rational terms; thereafter, we will return to our original subject. One should realize that the speaking or rational self possesses two powers of knowledge and action and each has degrees of perfection and imperfection. The most perfect degree is what is called the acquiring intellect and it is concerned with attaining knowledge which may be learned – knowledge related to both the realm of pure knowledge and to the realm of action. The acquiring intellect is also concerned with knowledge of the correct path, namely, the path which leads to attainment of these knowledges without causing confusion or doubt with regard to one's belief and without, causing one to go astray through error. It is concerned too with the blessings of Allah, despite their boundless, basically incomprehensible nature.

There are different degrees of perfection with regard to the intellect and its knowledge. The highest of these is the level of certainty in belief within the domain of religious fundamentals: anyone who reaches this level is released from eternal torment and achieves eternal blessing and riches.

It should be realized from this that Allah acts according to a specific purpose and not in jest, may He be exalted high above any such notion. We know that Allah has no such frivolous intent since it is impossible to impute frivolity to Him: the Qur'an speaks of this saying, 'And were it not for Allah's repelling some (bad) men with others (who are good), the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder' and also, 'And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them for sport.'

Now we should pause to reflect upon two matters: the first is that lutf or divine grace and kindness is obligatory on Allah; likewise, the dutiful Muslim is closest in obedience as long as he himself possesses kindness, since kindness is related to His wisdom, generosity and mercy. By saying that kindness is 'obligatory on Allah' we mean no more than this. Anyone who requires something of someone knows that the best transactions are those performed with kindness and so he will naturally act accordingly to achieve his aim – that is as long as he has the capacity. If he does not act with kindness, then this would contradict his purpose.

Similarly, a contradiction with respect to the All-wise is impossible: the very revelation of the Book and the sending of the messengers is lutf and the imposition of the religious duties is also a kindness. It is in this way that such things are 'obligatory on Allah', that is, when we ourselves consider the matter rationally for His action cannot be at odds with His overall purpose. This is the very meaning of Allah's words when He says, 'And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me.'

The second point is the fact that Allah has created desires in man and has enabled him to fulfill these desires. The intellects of many men do not discriminate between what is good and what is bad behaviour; since ignorance reigns over most of them, this also facilitates bad behaviour and discourages praiseworthy behaviour. Indeed, by investing man with sexual desires and the means to fulfill these desires, the very fabric of society as a whole is easily exposed to destructive influences.

However, mankind is protected from corruption and brought closer to righteousness by means of the revelation of the Book, the sending of the messengers and man's very obligation to obey these messengers – it is this too which is encompassed by the term divine lutf. Thus it is obligatory on Allah in the sense that if He were not to act in this way, then He would be abandoning good action and committing bad action, and the two are both impossible with respect to Allah: He is of necessity kind and concerned for His slaves since to forego this kindness and concern would cause them to become corrupt in their actions.

It is absolutely necessary that we become fully acquainted with this kind of knowledge for it forms the basis of our present investigation. Most of this knowledge is contained in the body of reported traditions, in the books of the people of the outward and scholars of the Prophetic narrations, and is in complete accord with the aims of the people of the inward.

We shall now return to our original subject. Know, therefore, that perfection and deficiency with respect to each individual being and each kind will be explained to the reader in its proper place. As for absolute perfection, it is found in gnosis of Allah and in the performance of the different acts of worship; moreover, this absolute perfection corresponds to the various degrees and levels inherent in this gnosis and in such worship.

As for absolute deficiency, it is that which stands in direct opposition to this gnosis, that is, imperfection in its various degrees and levels of intensity. Since attainment of these various degrees of perfection and freeing oneself from the different levels of imperfection can only be achieved by the perfection of the twin forces of knowledge and action, all creation's striving is directed towards the perfecting of these two forces and the attainment of the two fundamental principles indicated above, namely, the roots and branches of the religion. All parameters of mankind's behaviour, from the divine commands to the divine prohibitions, are contained within these two principles. If one investigates we are left in no doubt or ambiguity as to the truth of these statements.

Indeed the one who said that all commands and prohibitions of Allah are contained in the two sayings of the Prophet, 'Respect and reverence for Allah's command' and 'Compassion for Allah's creation' is in total agreement with what we are saying. Anyone who acts in accordance with these two sayings – and all that they imply in the way of command and prohibition . – is in fact carrying out the whole divinely inspired code of laws. Likewise, anyone who acts correctly, in accordance with the above-mentioned roots and branches of the religion, is also carrying out the totality of Allah's commands and prohibitions

and attains thereby his own specific perfection in accordance with his own capacity.

Allah's purpose in all this is attainment of the ultimate aim inherent in His creation and His imposition of the code of duties (known as the *shari`ah*). None of this has been done in jest and without design – for this would be incompatible with the perfection and wisdom of Allah; indeed, it would be an impossibility as we have shown above.

Just as all people are contained within the three different levels, namely the beginning, the middle and the end, so their different levels of instruction and guidance are all contained within the three levels of *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah*. With respect to the essences and substances, they are likewise not restricted to one level; rather they vary in accordance with their capacity and receptivity. The wise care of Allah for His creation demands a harmonious system which allows each element to be brought to its own specific perfection. Such a system permits the raising of each element out of its state of imperfection; by means of the force and vigor inherent in each element, it then manifests (in that subsequent form).

Thus the demands and imposition (made by Allah on His slaves) vary according to each group or rather according to each species or individual – despite the fact that as a whole they are governed by one law. The duties of each of the above-mentioned groups differ from each other with respect to the law and their branches but not with respect to the pillars and fundamental principles of the religion. By this I mean that the duties and knowledge of the state of perfection of the people of *shari`ah* are different from those of the people of *tariqah*.

Similarly, the state of perfection and the knowledge of the people of *haqiqah* are different from those of the people of *tariqah*. The reader will become aware of this when reading the detailed description of each of the three groups; he will see how one is superior to the other, although they are all united in their overall purpose. In the light of this hierarchy within Allah's creation, we see that the duties of the prophets, the messengers, the saints and the inheritors of the spiritual teaching are other than those of the rest of creation: although the former still take part in the duties of the latter, the latter do not share in the knowledge of the former. This is referred to when Allah says, 'Continue then in the right way as you are commanded' and in the words of the Prophet when he says, 'The *surah* of *Hud* caused my hair to grow white.' From these two quotations we learn of the importance and high status of the prophets and messengers with respect to the rest of creation. We now should consider two further points. The first is why one particular group of persons has a higher status than others and secondly, why more duties are imposed upon the group of a higher status and of a greater position of honour. As for the first, we must realize that Allah has created the creatures and has imposed specific duties upon them, without them having prior knowledge of these duties.

Thus it is incumbent upon Allah to teach them about these duties so that they are able to fulfill them, keep to the covenant between them and Allah, and in doing so, attain the purpose which Allah has

foreseen for them since, as has been demonstrated above, Allah never does anything in jest. This teaching is called grace by the people of the outward and providence by the people of the inward. No creature has the capacity to receive these duties from Allah by himself because there is no direct relation between him and Allah; moreover there exists, by the very nature of creation and the nature of Allah, a distance between them which separates the two.

This is expressed in Allah's words, 'And it is not for any mortal that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases; surely He is High, Wise.' It is for this reason that the intellect esteems that it is incumbent upon Allah to designate a group of persons with whom He establishes a specific relationship. Such persons are responsible for transmitting these duties by means of the revelation or divine inspiration; they convey these duties to those of Allah's slaves upon whom such duties are incumbent. Thus Allah says, 'And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and we would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused.'

The prophets and the messengers are the original recipients of Allah's message, and the saints and the spiritual inheritors follow behind and continue the task begun by the former. Allah refers to this when He says: 'Surely We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah, and the prophets after Him, and as We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Issac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We gave to David Psalms. And (We sent) apostles We have mentioned before and apostles We have not mentioned to you; and to Moses Allah addressed His word, speaking (to him): (We sent) apostles as the givers of good news and as warners, so that people should not have a plea against Allah after (the coming of) the apostles; and Allah is Mighty, Wise.'

One might remark that this is an explanation of the reason for the need of a group of persons who provide a link between Allah and His creation and who transmit the duties incumbent upon the latter, and that it is not a description of the particular qualities of the group which makes them suitable for such a task. However, this question will be explained after our discourse which shows how they take on Allah's qualities – referred to when He says, 'I become his hearing, his sight, his tongue and his arm' and 'You did not smite when you smote (the enemy) but it was Allah Who smote.'

One might ask who obtained this essential relationship for them or, indeed, in what manner it came about. We would reply that there are two aspects to the answer. The first aspect is from the point of view of the people of the *shari`ah* and the outward, namely that this special relationship issues from the care and concern of Allah and His bestowal upon them of this particular station of spirituality.

Thus He says, 'He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace' and 'He cannot be questioned concerning what He does and they shall be questioned.' The second aspect of the answer is with regard to the way of the reality and truth, namely that the cause is seen to be in terms of the state of search (towards manifest forms) inherent in substances and essences; moreover the matter is also

considered with respect to whether or not these substances are brought into being by the Creator. We have already discussed above how attainment of a manifest rank or level issues from the relevant essences and substances – which in turn are determined by Allah's foreknowledge of them.

This is because knowledge is dependent upon what is known and the known only exists in the aspect which has been determined for it (in the created or phenomenal world). The many interpretations and obscure secrets attached to this subject are known only to the scholars of these sciences. We have in fact clarified the majority of these matters in the opening chapters of this work: they concern the stations of knowledge which the prophets, the spiritual guardians and the saints have warned against divulging and these stations are among the secrets of destiny.

The Sultan of the Saints and Gnostics, the Commander of the Faithful, says the following about destiny and Allah's decree: 'Destiny is one of the secrets which are guarded and protected by Allah, which are raised high behind the veil of Allah, hidden from creation and sealed with the seal of Allah's foreknowledge, removed from the knowledge of His slaves and elevated above their vision; their intellects are prevented from attaining this secret by being unable to reach it – either by the truth of Lordship or by the everlasting Power, either by the splendour of Majesty or by the force of Oneness – for this secret is an overflowing sea which belongs entirely to Allah. Its depth extends from the heavens to the earth, its breadth from the east to the west, a sea as black as the darkest night, abounding in life and fishes, alternately ebbing and flowing. At the bottom of his sea shines a sun. It is not fitting that anyone catch sight of it but by the One on Whom all depend; whoever attempts to see it is setting himself up as a rival to Allah in His wisdom, is challenging His sovereignty and is threatening to reveal His secret: He indeed becomes deserving of Allah's wrath, and his abode is hell; and an evil destination shall it be.'

There is nothing more to be added to this – and how could it be otherwise since these words are spoken by the Lord of the Friends of Allah, the Seal of the Spiritual Guardians, by he who encompasses all their stations and by he who gives them these stations in the world of light, despite his coming after them in the visible world. According to his words, it is thus impossible to envisage criticism of those upon whom such ranks have been decreed; what is indicated is that it is an obligation upon Allah to appoint such persons and single them out for special treatment, in accordance with His knowledge and wisdom; this is emphasized by His words, 'Surely We purified them by a pure quality, the keeping in mind of the (final) abode. And most surely they were with Us, of the elect, the best.'

We should now examine the actual relationship between them and the Real on the one hand, and between Him and the creation on the other. As for the first, it has two aspects: that with regard to the intellect and that with regard to the revelation of the Qur'an and the body of traditions (*ahadith*). The sound intellect is capable of perceiving, for example, that if there is no relationship between two essences or two persons, then it is not possible to imagine that any love exists between them: the first condition for the presence of love is the existence of an essential relationship – and thereafter an

incidental relationship. Such a love takes many forms and they are outlined in the books of philosophy (under the sections entitled 'love') and also in the books of the devotees of divine unity. Some of the philosophers have even gone so far as to say that it is not permitted for Allah to love anyone or for anyone to love Him since love of its nature implies a correspondence of generic state.

They argue that the 'Necessary of Existence', having absolutely no correspondence of kind with the 'possible of existence', is not permitted to associate Himself with love at all. This argument has no basis of truth: we are merely mentioning it as a warning that their theories are invalid of their system of belief. In short, there must exist a relationship of love, be it essential or incidental. This relationship is explained in the language of the people of Allah in the following way: 'Original love is the love of the essence itself for itself, a love which does not depend on any extraneous matter: this kind of love is the origin of all the other kinds of love.' Thus any link between two things is either the relationship of their two essences or a uniting on the level of attributes, spiritual states or actions. Their relationship with Allah is with respect to their sanctification (of Him) and their rising above the impurity of mankind and the polluting influence of the incidental and possible; it is also with respect to their imbuing themselves with the qualities of their Lord and with divine behaviour. If they remained in the sphere of mankind and the law of the natural world, they would not be able to achieve this relationship.

The Prophet has said, 'I have a station with Allah which is reached neither by the most intimate of the angels nor the messengers sent to man.' It is thus necessary that they divest themselves of the world of man and that they take on the divine qualities in order to establish this relationship. It has been recorded in an authentic *hadith* that if the Prophet were connected only to the world of man and had no relationship with the divine, he would not have been able to receive the revelation.

Thus it is that the Prophet had need of Gabriel (who appeared to him in the form of the companion Dahiyah or in other forms so as not to alienate him from the world of the senses or unduly disturb him) in order that he might receive the message, transmit it and then call and guide the people to Islam: on several occasions he would faint after receiving the revelation and say to 'Aishah 'Speak tome Hamira,' in order that he might return from that (spiritual) world to the world of the senses and that he might deliver the message he had been commanded to deliver. An indication of this is also contained in the station of Moses which is described by Allah when He says, 'And Musa fell down in a swoon.' His swooning was a result of his state and the fact he was a mortal and of the natural world of creation: Allah spoke to Moses while the latter was divested of his physical senses. The true relationship (between Allah and man) is thus established by the witnesser who is able to perceive the divine: it is at the moment of witnessing that he is able to speak with Allah. Moses did not attain this station until Allah asked, 'And what is in your right hand, O Musa' He said, 'This is my staff. I recline on it and I beat the leaves with it to make them fall upon my sheep and I have other uses for it.'

Likewise, the Prophet was taken from the world of mankind during the *mi'raj*, the night journey, until Allah says: 'And He revealed to his servant what He revealed.' This revelation took place at the moment

when the Prophet was stripped (of the creational world) and it occurred by way of the divine relationship with the Essence – without the mediation of any angel or Gabriel. It has been narrated that Allah revealed thirty thousand secrets in an hour or less. Gabriel says of this station, 'If I had stretched out the tips of my fingers they would have burned;' this is an indication of the nobility of man and his superiority over the angels and other creatures.

If we consider the matter with respect to the Truth, the Real Himself rather than the messengers, then the following ayah suffices: 'So when I made him (man) complete and. breathed into him of My spirit, (the angels) fell down making obeisance of him.' These words indicate two things: firstly, the relationship between Allah and his slaves and secondly, the nobility and superiority of man over the angels.

This is reinforced by a saying of one of people of gnosis: 'The essential relationship between the Real and His slave may be considered from two aspects: either that the laws governing the phenomenal_transient world of the slave together with the manifestations of multiplicity inherent in the slave's life in the created world do not impinge upon the laws of the Necessary of Existence and His unity – rather, that the slave is influenced by the latter and the darkness of his multiplicity is imbued with the light of His unity and Oneness – or that the slave takes upon himself the qualities of the Real and attains to a realization of all His Names. If these two aspects are in conjunction, then the slave has attained the goal and has reached perfection. If only the first aspect is realized by the slave, then he becomes the beloved and intimate of Allah. The attainment of the second aspect without with the first is impossible. Moreover, both aspects contain many different levels within them. As for the first aspect, there must be a total overwhelming of the multiplicity and its inherent transient frailty by the light of Oneness and the domination of the laws of Necessary Existence over the laws of human existence and over man's inherent weakness. As for the second aspect, there must be an attainment of the station of realization through all and not just some of the Divine Names. There are numerous works on this matter by past and latter-day Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite scholars of the science of divine unity; this is not however the moment to elaborate on this subject and the reader is advised to make further investigations of his own.

As for the second part of our investigation, namely with respect to the Qur'an and the narrated body of traditions, then we should refer to the words of Allah: 'Then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him, modest before the believers, mighty against the unbelievers;' we should also take into account the sacred *hadith*, 'Truly the righteous long passionately for their meeting with Me and surely I am even more passionately longing for My meeting with them' and His words, 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the world;' these words bear witness both to the love of the Real Himself and the love of the slave. Moreover this love, as we have already explained, is only attained after the establishment of a specific relationship and degree of intimacy with the divine. The words of the Prophet, 'I have a station with Allah which is reached neither by the most intimate of angels nor the messengers sent to man' refer to this. Such a station is evidently only possible after the

annihilation of his qualities in those of the Lord and the annihilation of his existence in His existence, like the merging of a drop of water in the sea or a lump of ice in water.

If the nature of these different aspects of the relationship with the divine are still unclear to the reader, then we shall give another example which will clarify this matter beyond any doubt. It is the likeness of fire: fire is light, illuminating and transparent; it may be used to cook food until it is tender and it may be used to provide light. Charcoal and firewood, on the other hand, are dark and darken by their very presence; moreover, they do not yield the benefits of fire – indeed, by their nature, these materials are cold, opaque and dry. If, however, they come into contact with fire, then they too take on the qualities of light, illumination and transparency and, in turn, become themselves the fire itself. Furthermore, one may also obtain from them all the benefits of cooking and lighting which one may obtain from fire. Connected to this likeness is the saying of the Prophet: 'Whoever sees me in a dream has truly seen me,' and the words of one of the *awliya'* who said: 'Praise! for how vast is my affair!' and the words of another: 'I am the Truth' and 'I am from my Passion and my Passion am I – we strike such likeness for the people but only the knowledgeable comprehend them.'

Up to this point we have been considering the relationship established between the prophets and the Real, may He be exalted. We shall now consider the relationship which is established between the prophets and creation. This relationship may also be considered from two angles, firstly, with respect to the intellect, and secondly, with respect to what has been narrated in the Qur'an and the *ahadith*.

As for the first, it is as we have already seen, namely, a question of the intellect's perception of the possible – incidental in relation to the transient – phenomenal, the state of mankind (as opposed to divinity) and the creation. All persons, indeed all beings, are alike in their sharing of these characteristics – for all existence is contained in the Necessary (of existence) and the possible (of existence). Moreover, the Necessary of Existence is by common accord one, that is, the One; there remains, therefore, only the possible. As scholars of this science are well aware all possible things are alike, both with regard to their essences and substances.

As for the consideration of the relationship of the Prophet with creation, with regard to the Qur'an and the narrated traditions, then we should keep in mind the words of Allah: 'I am a mortal like you, it is revealed to me that your god is one God' and His words: 'What is the matter with this Apostle that he eats food and goes around in the market.' Both these verses indicate the human aspect of the Prophet; his relationship to creation is based on human qualities and natural patterns of behaviour.

Know too that there is also a relationship between them and the angels and likewise a relationship between Allah and the angels. The following words of Allah refer to it in a general way: '(As for) those who say: Our Lord is Allah, then continue in the right way, the angels descend upon them', and again in a more particular way: 'The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him, the Lord of Strength', and likewise the

words: 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart.'

As for the relationship between Allah and the angels, it is established by their elevation above the baseness of corporeal realities and the natural abjectness of animals. This is demonstrated in Allah's words when He says of them, 'We celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness.' The angels express these words in accordance with their essential being and their station, as the following words of Allah affirm: 'And there is none of us but has an assigned place.' Again this is demonstrated in Allah's instruction of them when the Qur'an says: 'Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou has taught us; surely Thou art the Knowing the Wise.' It is clear that instruction cannot effectively take place without a relationship between the teacher and the taught: thus Allah says to Adam, on seeing the relationship between him and the angels: 'O Adam! Inform them of their names.'

Then when he had informed them of their names, He said: 'Did I not say to you that I surely know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth and (that) I know what you manifest and what you hide.' In the light of this ayah we should also consider the saints and the spiritual guardians – for they receive knowledge without any intermediary. This is demonstrated when Allah says, 'We granted him (one from among Our servants) knowledge from Ourselves' and also when He speaks of all men saying, 'Read and your Lord is Most Honourable, Who taught (to write) with the pen, taught man what he knew not' and also when he says, 'The Beneficent God, taught the Qur'an, He created man, taught him the mode of expression.' There are many other examples with respect to this subject; and Allah is More Knowing and More Wise.

As for the second matter, it concerns their not being overburdened by their duties, given the honour and nobility of their standing. There are also two aspects to this matter. The first concerns their capacity which is theirs from before eternity and which has been acquired through no causative reason or action on their part; this is based on the judgment of Allah when He says: 'Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it (the torment of hell)' and His words: 'This is Our free gift, therefore give freely or withhold, without reckoning' and His words: 'That is the grace of Allah: He gives it to Whom He pleases, and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace.'

The second aspect of this matter concerns the intensity of their striving and their exercise of physical and spiritual restraint in the performance of their acts of worship and in their seeking after the satisfaction of Allah. This is expressed in Allah's words: 'And whoever does this seeking – Allah's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward.' The Prophet's exercise of spiritual discipline and his striving, together with his war on the unbelievers and his endurance of their torments are familiar to everyone. He himself has said, 'Never has a prophet been tormented as I have been tormented.' We should remember in particular too that Allah says in the Qur'an, 'We have not revealed the Qur'an to you that you may be unsuccessful...' and the *hadith* related by 'Aishah, 'He would rise in the night to pray the *tahajud* prayer and continue until his feet became swollen from standing.' 'Aishah then said: 'O Messenger of Allah, has

not the *ayah* been revealed about you that "Allah will forgive your past faults and those to come?" He then replied to her: 'Should I not be a grateful slave?' Detailed accounts of the self-restraint and struggle of the other prophets may be known from the books (that were revealed to them) and a more general picture is available from the Qur'an. Muslim scholars know that the Qur'an is the best witness and the best proof of the veracity (of a story) – and may Allah suffice as a witness; He it is Who says the truth and guides to the correct path.

Although there are many other areas of investigation let us content ourselves with the point we have arrived at so far and begin now to consider the second principle. This second principle is concerned with Allah's designation of a (certain) perfection for each being and with the development and progression of this being with respect to the realm of form and to the realm of inner meaning and in accordance with their station of perfection.

5) The Second Principle

The Second Principle: Allah's designation of a specific perfection to each existing thing whether spiritual or corporeal – in both the phenomenal realm and the realm of inner meaning.

Know that the search after perfection is not a feature particular to man alone, but rather of all existent and created beings, be they of a sublime or base nature: they are all making for the object of their 'search'; both the Qur'an, the traditions and the conclusions of the intellect bear witness to this fact. We may cite the words of Allah: 'And there is no animal that walks upon the earth nor bird that flies with two wings but (they are) general like yourselves; We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord shall they be gathered' and His words: 'Do you not see that Allah is He Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and the earth, and the sun the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people...' and His words: 'He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification, and Allah is Cognizant of what they do' and His words: 'And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification.'

These four *ayat* are conclusive proof that all beings have had duties entrusted to them by the Creator: they have all been commanded to worship in accordance with their receptivity and capability. The first *ayah* refers to the earth and its inhabitants, the second to the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the third refers to all specific beings, and the fourth refers to all beings in an absolute way. Thus all are facing and moving towards Allah, engaged in a search for gnosis of Him.

The obeisance and prayer referred to in these *ayat* carry the meaning of worship and gnosis – and not

the prayer which is familiar to us in the code of the *shari'ah*. Likewise, their prayer and glorification are not like the praise and glorification of man; if they were, then we would understand them. That we do not understand their particular form of prayer or praise is shown in the words of Allah: 'But you do not understand their glorification.' Thus the prayer, obeisance and praise of each being is in accord with its state.

When we examine the beings other than men, we realize that their ways of glorification are in fact the natural behaviour patterns of each. This is affirmed by Allah's words: 'Every one acts according to his manner.' What is desired and sought by all is the same thing, namely gnosis of Him and worship of Him. As to gnosis it is referred to by Allah in the sacred *hadith*: 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known so I created the world.'

As for the aspect of worship, it is referred to when He says: 'And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me.' Consider how the soul of man, his body, limbs and physical strength are in prostration to Him, obeying His command and submitting to His laws. This is the prostration and prayer of inner meaning. The relationship of the whole world with regard to the soul of man is the same as we have just described for the world in its totality is the body of cosmic man or macrocosm: all its components are analogous to the members of the body; all man's praise, prayer and prostration are acts of obeisance in relation to Cosmic Man in accordance with that He prohibits or commands. The prostration and glorification of both man and the cosmic man are in truth a glorification of the Real and obeisance to Him, since the individual soul of man is the caliph (or deputy) of Allah in the body and the absolute soul of man is the caliph of Allah in the world. As Allah Himself says, 'Whoever obeys the Apostle, he indeed obeys Allah' and 'And as for these examples, We set them forth for men, and none understands them but the learned!'

In connection with the above, we should mention what has been related by one of the Imams, namely that true gratitude is the employment of each limb of the body for that for which it has been created. It has also been said, 'Every existent being, be it of a sublime or base nature, stands in relation to the greater man and acts in accordance with that for which it has been created – except man.' What we mean by this is that there is no being which contradicts His command or prohibition, no being which refuses to obey and worship but man. Indeed, he is in a state of opposition to Allah; he is not in a state of complete obedience to His command – in the same way as we are not in complete obedience to our soul and intellect.

This opposition, however, is in fact in compliance with the decree of Allah for it is in accordance with Allah's knowledge of it from before eternity to eternity. Thus one of the gnostics has commented on this matter saying: 'Whoever opposes the decree of Allah is not in fact opposing Him, and whoever opposes Him in that purpose for which he has designated is in fact in compliance with the general form in which Allah created him.'

The Commander of the Faithful has also indicated this in one of his sermons concerning Adam and his progeny: 'And Allah brought him to reside in His garden and made his food plentiful for him therein. He then warned him concerning that which He had prohibited: He taught him that if he were to approach (that which He had prohibited), he would be exposing himself to an act of disobedience and would consequently place his position in the garden in jeopardy. Adam did, however, approach what had been forbidden him – in accordance with Allah's foreknowledge – and, after Adam had turned to Him in forgiveness, Allah caused him to descend from the Garden in order that he might fill the earth with his progeny.'

The Commander of the Faithful said on another occasion: 'Know with certainty that Allah does not bestow on a slave more than what is intended for him in the foreknowledge of the Wise. Anyone who realizes this and acts accordingly is one of those who attain to the greatest ease and benefit; whoever ignores this or doubts its validity is of those who work hardest towards their own harm. Thus many a time it happens that blessings are given to him, and great ease and affluence is accorded to him (despite the obstinacy of the person), and many a time he is tried and afflicted by care.

Thus, O you who enjoy your benefits, increase your thanks, restrain your haste and be content when your provision comes to an end.' The Prophet is reported to have said, in a similar vein; 'The pen has dried and with it (has been written) whatever exists in the cosmos' and 'The growth and development of all creation is towards that for which it has been created.' Similarly, Allah says, 'And everything they have done is in the writings.' We are not, however, attempting to affirm the doctrine of predestination, nor are we trying to assert as true the saying of the one who said, 'Everything which is to occur and which Allah knows will occur must occur, and everything which is not to occur and which Allah knows will not occur cannot occur.' Rather what we mean is that nothing happens in existence which is in opposition to the knowledge of Allah – whether it be in accordance (with the divine command) or in opposition to it.

This then is just a tiny drop from the ocean of the secrets of the Divine Decree; it is forbidden to divulge this Divine Decree as we have already seen from one of the most excellent and pertinent of traditions on the subject, namely that of the Commander of the Faithful mentioned above. It is incumbent upon the reader to reflect upon its meanings and take note of the secrets hidden therein.

Know that just as it may be ascertained that every existent being has its own form of prayer, praise and prostration, so it may also be ascertained that every existent being has life, speech and knowledge – which in fact are expressions of the different degrees of perfection sought after by all. As for life, there is true life and superficial life. True life, as has been established is knowledge and gnosis of Allah and this, as we see from the following words of Allah, is possessed by all existent beings, 'And if you asked them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say: Allah.' This *ayah* affirms the divinity and Oneness of Allah – and these words alone suffice to demonstrate how man is endowed with inherent gnosis (of his Lord). The following *ayah* also affirms this: 'And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise.' Glorification of something is naturally preceded by knowledge of that thing: glorification

without knowledge of what one is glorifying is impossible – whether this knowledge be inherent in man's faculty or whether it be acquired.

As for the superficial life: it has been established that each existent being possesses life of itself and the following words of Allah testify to this: 'And We have made from water every living thing.' Moreover, it is one of the elements of the phenomenal world, for the elements and form of every compound contain water and water itself is contained in and makes up the human body. Allah Himself says, 'And He it is Who created man from the water, then He has made for him blood relationship and marriage relationship.' If we assert that it is of the simple elements, then this refers to the universal matter upon which the Throne stood before the bringing into being of the cosmos and all it contained. Allah speaks of this when He says, 'And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods – and His dominion (Throne) extend over the water – that He might manifest to you which of you it best in action.' In short, everything possesses life in accordance with its state. One may, if one wishes, call this (condition of life) knowledge of gnosis, or, if one wishes, elemental water or, if one wishes, universal matter: there is no dispute as to the general applicability of these terms.

As for speech, there is superficial or apparent speech, and true speech. Apparent speech is referred to by Allah when He says, 'Allah, Who makes everything speak, has made us speak' and by the Prophet when he says, 'Everything on earth, both green and dry, bears witness to the caller of the call to prayer (*adhan*) and all things, including even the fishes of the sea and the birds of the sky, asked forgiveness of Allah for the seeker of knowledge.' Thus these two statements are both evidence that everything possesses speech: indeed, an even clearer example of this is the occasion when the small stones in the hands of the Prophet praised Allah. These pebbles may be said to represent the mineral kingdom.

As for the plant kingdom, there is the example of the sighing of the tree and the occasion when the burnt arm spoke: all existent beings are therefore contained in these three kingdoms. As for the real or true speech, it is the understanding of the intellect as an absolute or pure process. Moreover, this process of understanding on the part of the essence of anything and of the Essence of the Creator of that thing is true speech. Besides, the proof that they know and glorify Him is that if they did not know Him, they would not be able to glorify Him – something about which one is ignorant can never be praised or glorified by anyone.

As for gnosis, there is likewise real gnosis and apparent gnosis; I mean by this an inherent or naturally created gnosis, on the one hand, and an acquired or sought-after gnosis, on the other. Inherent or real gnosis is referred to in the following *ayah*: 'And should you ask them who created the heavens and the earth they would most certainly say: "Allah"' and also His words: 'Am I not Your Lord? They said: Yes!' If the reader were to object that it is the progeny of Adam who are being referred to here and not to all existent beings then we would reply that this is correct; however, Adam himself encompasses the greater and lesser man and, in this *ayah*, what is being referred to is the greater/cosmic man or

Macrocosm, that is, the cosmos and all the existent beings contained therein. That all is descended from this cosmic man is shown by the following *ayah*: 'O people, be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two many men and many women.' What is meant here by men and women is the male and the female which exist in all created beings both of the highest and lowest orders. This is also indicated in another *ayah*: 'He has made it in two kinds', the two kinds referring to the male and the female. As for the statement of the one who said: 'In everything there is an *ayah* – or a sign – of Him which demonstrates His Oneness', it also demonstrates the validity of this explanation of inherent or created gnosis.

Acquired or manifest gnosis is something which is particular to men, angels and jinn – notwithstanding their inherent gnosis which precedes it. It has been established by the people of Allah, and supported by a consensus of opinion from amongst most of the men of intellect, that existence is one and that it is a cycle which turns about the lover and the loved one, the knower and the known, the seeker and the sought. This is affirmed by Allah's words: 'Then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him' and also His words: 'Thus I desired to be known.' We realize, on investigation, that the true Loved One is only Allah and those who love Him are all things other than Him – including thus the mineral, vegetable and animal realms and men, jinn and angels. This is expressed in the following verse:

The goodness of each elegant thing is derived from His beauty,
A beauty which is loaned to it and to all charming things

and also in the following:

Allow your heart to pursue its desire as it wishes,
for love is nothing but for the First Lover.

Thus it is true to say that all things feel love for Him and are facing and moving towards His Presence.

On examination, we realize that the one loved and those who love, the seeker and the sought, the knower and the known are one. Merely expressing this principle presupposes otherness, multiplicity and the witnessing of something which is not Him and is thus in opposition to true divine unity. As our aim is nothing but realization of this unity, it is incumbent upon us to perceive one existence, albeit expressed in two different ways. Firstly, it may be considered absolutely inconceivable to admit of another together with Him – given the Presence of His Oneness, His station of Absoluteness and Unity – and secondly, that He exists together with His Names, Attributes and Actions and the corresponding manifestations of these, expressed as the worlds of the phenomenal.

With respect to the first it has been said:

I was Time itself before the veil was raised.

I was a brother to you – indeed a rememberer of you and grateful.

So when the night lit up, I realized That You are the remembered,
the remembrance and the one who remembers.

It has also been said that 'No one loves Allah but Allah and no one knows Allah but Allah and no One remembers Allah but Allah.'

With respect to the second, it has been said, 'There is nothing in existence except Allah, His Name, Attributes and Actions: thus all is Him, by Him, from Him and to Him.' He Himself has said, 'He is the First, the Last, the Outward and the Inward, and He is cognizant of all things.' He has also said, 'Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things? Now surely they are in doubt as to the meetings of their Lord; now surely he encompasses all things.' The following verse refers to this matter:

Your beauty pervades all realities; Indeed it only veils Your majesty. It radiates to the universe from behind its veil. And by being covered is revealed.

It has also been said:

My Beloved appeared radiant to me from every aspect And so I witnessed Him in every meaning and form.

The import of all these words is one and the same, namely the affirmation that all things contain inherent paths of development and specific modes of conduct. We have thus drawn the general outlines of this subject and we shall now begin to describe these in a more detailed manner.

Know that for every existing thing there are two courses of development: that of form and that of inner meaning. As for the progress and development of form with regard to matter, it extends up to the level of the plant world in the form of coral – in the latter we see that matter possesses branches and leaves like plants and trees. As for its progression in the realm – of inner meaning, it becomes, in one way or another, part of the human body – I mean, for example, in the form of food, drink or potions.

Progression in the realm of form in regard to plants extends to the level of animals as, for example, in the case of the date–palm which possesses – like animals – a tendency and inclination for reproduction with another date palm by the force of the affinity which exists between the two. There are other aspects of the date palm which affirm this relationship to the animal world, namely the fact that if the head of the palm is cut, then the tree dies and if it is submerged in water, then it also dies, as would animals under

similar conditions. As for its progression in the realm of inner meaning, it is that it becomes part of the human body – by becoming food for man, for example.

Progression in the world of form in regard to animals extends to the level of man and acquires the faculty of speech as, for example, in the case of the monkey or the parrot. As for the progression in the realm of inner meaning, it is that it becomes part of the body of man by one means or another. Indeed the whole secret is contained herein: the perfection of all existing things below man is in their arrival at man and the perfection of man is in his arrival at the Real; thus the totality of the different worlds are directed towards man both in the realm of form and inner meaning – both with regard to the greater and lesser man – so that they may attain to their specific perfection prescribed from before eternity. Man himself is constantly aiming for the Real in order to attain to his specific perfection. The following ayah indicates this: 'And he has made what is in the heavens and what is in the earth subservient to you.' Yet a clearer indication of this meaning is expressed in the words addressed by Allah to the Prophet: 'If it were not for you, I would not have created the planets' and here what is being referred to, is the whole cosmic system and all contained therein.

As for the progression of man in the realm of form, it is that he becomes angelic, thereby acquiring purification and elevation above the outer form which clothes him and above the baser aspects of his sensory natural attributes. As for his progression with respect to the inner meaning, it is that he attains to the rank of prophethood, messengership and sainthood, arriving thereby to the station of Pure Oneness, which is the elimination of duality and multiplicity leading to the all-embracing unity referred to by Allah when He says, 'Then he drew near, then he bowed, so he was the measure of two bows or closer still.'

As for the progression in the realm of form with respect to the jinn, it is that they attain to an angelic rank by rising above the earthly and by their glorification of Him. Most people believe that the jinn are earthly angels and that they are called jinn because they are hidden from people's sight. Allah Himself says when referring to Iblis (Satan): 'He was of the jinn, so he transgressed the commandment of his Lord.' Some people, however, believe that they possess forms of fire, that their abode is the sphere of ether and that they also have access to the sphere of water, air and earth by virtue of their quality of tremendous diffusiveness. In the development of the jinn with regard to the realm of inner meaning they attain to the rank of man and to human gnosis and they believe in the code of the shari'ah and the Qur'an; this is expressed in the Qur'an itself 'Say it has been revealed to me that a party of the jinn listened and they said: "Surely we have heard a wonderful Qur'an, guiding to the right way, so we believe in it and we will not set up anyone with our Lord" '.

As for the development in the realm of form in regard to the angels, they attain to the rank of proximity, of glorification of Allah and holiness. They reach the rank of cherubim by Allah's raising them above the rest of the angels; in this way He separates one particular kind of angel from the rest, in the same manner as Gabriel and Michael are brought to prominence from amongst the rest of the angels, or as

man is distinguished from the general species of animal. In their development in the realm of inner meaning they come to a perception of some of the secrets of man which the latter has received from Allah. These are secrets which are particular to man and not shared by the angels: this is referred to by Gabriel when he says, 'If I were to reach out with the tips of my fingers extended I would certainly have burnt them.'¹ It is for this reason that the gnostic believes man to be greater and nobler than the angels: the angels have no share in the development which is particular to man, indeed, they have never tasted of man's secret in this respect.

We have now come to the end of our study of the various ranks of perfection with respect to each existent being, both of the highest and lowest orders of creation. If you have understood this science and have realized that man's perfection is of a higher and more noble rank than that of all other beings, then you should strive to attain your own perfection and to realize fully your own rank. You should avoid what is other than yourself, even if it is an angel, for being occupied with the rank of others prevents you from attaining your greater happiness and your highest rank: 'And all We relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth and admonition and a reminder to the believers;'² and Allah is more Knowing and more Wise, He it is Who says the truth and guides to the correct path.

¹. The text of the copy in my possession as well those copies in the Mar'ashi and Consultative Assembly Libraries were all interrupted here; in the book Jami 'al-Asrar, however, the text reads: (after 'because') 'the source of all, even if there are differences in the code of rules, according to circumstance and condition, is the one reality, namely the Prophetic Shari'ah and the Divine Rule imposed on man.' In all three copies there is an empty space of half a line. And Allah knows best.

². A detailed Exposition of the Two Lives of this World and the Next with respect to the Obtaining of the Two Happinesses

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