

## PART 2

### [Introduction to Part Two](#)

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

Sessions with our late teacher were always full of blessings and benefits. I, this humble being, always appreciated the value of these meetings, and have thus recorded them. I particularly benefited from meeting with ‘Allamah during the four months he was residing in Tehran,<sup>1</sup> and have recorded the questions he was asked and his answers. I present some of these questions and answers here so that everyone can benefit from them.

In God’s hands is the bridle of every affair, and from Him I seek assistance. There is no movement and no power save by Allah, the All-Supreme, the All-Magnificent.

‘ALLAMAH. The Honourable Messenger of Allah had an immense intimacy with the Noble Qur’an, such that when someone recited a verse, he would respond by reciting the following verse.

The Prophet was also the source of mercy and compassion. On one occasion, the Prophet had issued a death sentence to someone for committing a crime. That person resorted to Imam ‘Ali and asked, ‘O ‘Ali! What should I do so that the Honourable Messenger of Allah pardons me?’

Imam ‘Ali instructed him to go to the Prophet and recite this verse:

***...By Allah, verily Allah hath preferred thee above us, and we have certainly been wrongdoers.***  
(12:91)

Joseph’s brothers said these words when they recognised Joseph, whereby they asked for pardon with embarrassment. That man did the same, and the Messenger of Allah immediately recited the next verse:

***...No blame is on you today! May Allah forgive you, for He is the most Merciful of the merciful.***  
(12:92)

This was Joseph's response to his brothers, whereby he announced their pardon. Thus, this verse became the verdict of that man's pardon.[2](#)

[1](#). That was from Safar to Jumada al-Ula 1400 (or December 1979 to March 1980).

[2](#). See Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983), 22:259; Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh (Beirut, 1965), 2:243.

### 3. Qur'anic Discourses

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

**'He frowned and turned away \* Because the blind man came to him.'**

STUDENT. Some Sunni exegeses consider the Messenger of Allah to be the subject of these verses:

***He frowned and turned away \* Because the blind man came to him. (80:1-2)***

And so the subsequent verses would also be about him:

***And thou knowest not, perchance he would purify [his soul] \* Or take heed, and the reminder benefit him. As with one who thinketh himself self-sufficient \* Thou turnest thy attention to him \* And it is not thy concern if he doth not purify [his soul] \* But as with one who rusheth toward thee \* While he fears [Allah] \* Thou art distracted from him. (80:3-10)***

If so, these verses would rebuke the Messenger of Allah for frowning and turning away.[1](#)

'ALLAMAHAH. That is not so. First of all, many such rebukes in the Noble Qur'an appear to be directed at the Messenger of Allah while he clearly did not do the reprimanded action. For example, consider these two verses:

***And when thou seest those who [insolently] plunge into Our signs [and verses], turn away from them until they engage in some other talk; and if Satan causes you to forget, then sit not with the party of offenders once thou rememberest. (6:68)***

***And He hath already sent unto you in the scripture that when you hear the signs [and verses] of Allah being repudiated and derided, sit not with them until they engage in some other talk; you would otherwise be just like them! Truly Allah will gather all hypocrites and disbelievers in hell. (4:140)***

If we compare and match the two verses, it becomes evident that the second verse refers to the command in the first verse. On one hand, it addresses the believers, and on the other hand, it refers to the revelation of the first verse. Thus it is deduced that the first verse is also addressed to the believers, even though it is apparently addressed to a single audience (the Noble Messenger).

And these instructions for the people were aimed at the Messenger of Allah because he was responsible for reaching out to the entire community. This is a form of literary elegance (*fasahah*) and eloquence (*balaghah*), and is also quite common in everyday language. Many times the sultan addresses the vizier while the address applies to the common people.

***... And We have sent down to thee the Remembrance [the Qur'an], that thou mayst make clear to mankind what hath been sent down to them, and that haply they may reflect. (16:44)***

Here, the Messenger of Allah is the channel for delivering these commands which have been decreed for all people.

## **Verses of Chapter 74 (al-Muddaththir) about Walid ibn Mughirah**

'ALLAMAH. The person really meant in these two verses, the one who repudiated and derided the signs and verses of Allah, was Walid ibn Mughirah.<sup>2</sup> Allah relates his account in Chapter 74:

***Leave me with him whom I created alone \* And provided him with abundant wealth \* And children that are in his presence \* And I arranged for everything for him \* Then he desireth that I do more [for him] \* Never! For indeed he was obstinately inimical to Our verses \* I will constrain him to a severe ascent \* He contemplated and reckoned \* So be he killed; how he reckoned! \* Again be he killed; how he reckoned! \* Then he reflected \* Then he frowned and scowled \* Then he turned away arrogantly \* And claimed, 'This [Qur'an] is nothing but a sorcery from the yore \* This is nothing but the word of mankind' \* I will soon enter him into [and burn him in] saqar \* And thou knowest not what saqar is \* [Such fire that] it doth not spare [anyone] and doth not leave out [any limb] \* It transforms the skin's colour \* Nineteen [guarding angels] are at it. (74: 11-30)***

So Walid made these blasphemous statements and called the Qur'an 'a powerful sorcery'.

Walid, Abu Jahl, and their friends used to get together and scoff at the Qur'an. When the verse, 'Nineteen [guarding angels] are at it' was revealed, Abu Jahl contemptuously told a party of the Quraysh, 'May your mothers mourn your deaths! I have heard from Ibn Abi Kabshah [referring to the Messenger of Allah] that there are nineteen guards assigned to hell. But there is a whole crowd of you! Are there not ten of you, only ten, who can attack the guards of hell, knock them down and tightly capture them, and thus liberate this hell that Muhammad describes from these nineteen guards?' Abu al-Asad ibn Usayd ibn Kaldah Jumahi<sup>3</sup> replied, 'Since I am a brave man and a robust hero, I can alone take on seventeen of them; you guys cover the other two!'

So the above verses are about the derision and disbelief of those like Walid and his companions. The believers are told not to sit with such offenders or listen to their blasphemies.

## The second reason why ‘He frowned and turned away’ does not refer to the Messenger of Allah

‘ALLAMAH. A few verses later, Allah says:

***May man be killed; how ungrateful he is! \* From what did He create him? \* He created him from a sperm-drop and then proportioned him \* Then made the path easy for him \* Then He maketh him die and burieth him [in a grave] \* Then, when He wills, He will resurrect him \* No way; he hath not accomplished what He ordered him. (80: 17-23)***

All Shi’a and Sunni exegetes concur that this curse of Allah is apparently upon the person who frowned and turned away; this is evident from the trend of the verses.

Given how the Qur’an addresses him elsewhere, such words could not be aimed at the Messenger of Allah. Therefore, the Sunni exegetes who presumed the first verse was about the Messenger of Allah had to give up the apparent sense that these verses are connected. They claimed that these verses were revealed on a different occasion and were two independent parts which were later joined together.

Such a claim denies the eloquence and uniformity of the Qur’an, and it is only a result of claiming that the verse ‘He frowned and turned away’ refers to the Messenger of Allah.

Thirdly, everyone, whether Shi’a or Sunni, agrees that Chapter 68 (*al-Qalam*) is one of the ‘ancient chapters’ (*al-suwar al-’ata’iq*), the first chapters to be revealed in Mecca. In particular, Chapter 68 was revealed at the beginning of the prophethood, after the revelation of Chapters 96 (*al-’Alaq*), 74 (*al-Muddaththir*) and 73 (*al-Muzzammil*). There, Allah praises and describes His Messenger:

***And indeed thou art of a magnificent character. (68:4)***

If the Messenger of Allah was such at the beginning of his prophethood, he should only have risen to higher stages of excellence. So how could he do such an act? How could he frown and turn aside only because he saw a blind but self-restrained believer in order to attract the heads of Quraysh to Islam, and appeal to the hearts of the self-indulgent and haughty people among the Arabs? Not only is such conduct not typical of the Prophet of Islam, but it is also not typical of the rest of Allah’s prophets and friends. In fact, no devoted, self-restrained, and vigilant believer would behave like that.

From what I know, the subject of ‘He frowned and turned away’ was ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, who turned his face away when the blind Ibn Umm Maktum approached the Messenger of Allah. Narrations also confirm this, as it has been narrated that he was ‘a man from the Umayyads (Bani Umayyah).’[4](#)

## Tiwal ('lengthy'), mi'in ('hundreds'), and mufassal ('extended') chapters

STUDENT. There is a tradition from the Messenger of Allah:

I have been given the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters in place of the Torah, the *mi'in* ('hundreds') chapters in place of the Gospel, and the *mathani* ('repeated') chapters in place of the Psalms. And I have been favoured above them by the sixty eight *mufassal* ('extended') chapters. That [the Noble Qur'an] encompasses the other books [of the previous prophets].<sup>5</sup>

In this narration, what is meant by the *tiwal*, *mi'in*, *mathani*, and *mufassal* chapters?

'ALLAMAH. *Tiwal* chapters refer to the seven long chapters at the beginning of the Qur'an. They are Chapters 2–7 and Chapter 10. However, when collecting and putting the Qur'an together, 'Uthman positioned Chapters 8 and 9 (al-Anfal and al-Tawbah) before Chapter 10 (Yunus). That was because he considered Chapter 9 to be a continuation of Chapter 8, and not an independent chapter, since it does not start with 'In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate'. Since he took them as one chapter, they were counted among the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters. And he had no answer when the objection was put forth that the Messenger of Allah had placed Chapter 10 (Yunus) after Chapter 7 (al-A'raf) and had considered it among the *tiwal* chapters. He only said, 'I was not aware of that arrangement of the Messenger of Allah.'<sup>6</sup>

Then the *mi'in* chapters are those that contain approximately a hundred verses. The Qur'an is conventionally categorised into three parts: the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters, the *mi'in* ('hundreds') chapters, and the *mufassal* ('extended') chapters. The chapters from Chapter 78 (al-Naba') to the end of the Qur'an are also called the *qisar* ('short') chapters.

## Mutashabih (analogous) and mathani (repeated)

'ALLAMAH . As with *mathani* (double, repeated), to the best of my knowledge, it is not the name of any particular group of the chapters of the Qur'an. The root of the term (*thana*, *yathni*) means to bend and fold. Since many verses of the Qur'an relate to the other verses, it is as if those verses have appeared twice: once in the verse itself, and once through its implication in the other verse. And the other verse also comes up twice: once by itself, and once through the other verse to which it relates and which it explains. Since the verses of the Qur'an relate to one another, the whole Qur'an may be called *mathani* (repeated).

***Allah hath revealed the best speech, a Scripture that is analogous and repeated [in verses]; by which the skins of those who fear their Lord shiver, then their skins and hearts soften by [or for] the remembrance of Allah. That is Allah's guidance by which He guideth whom He wills; and***

***whomever Allah misguideth, for him there is no guide. (39:23)***

In this verse, the term *mathani* refers to the whole revealed book which is the best speech.<sup>7</sup>

And the term *mutashabih* (analogous) in this verse means that some parts of the Qur'an are similar to some other parts, and they all have a common basis. This meaning of *mutashabih* is different from *mutashabih* as ambiguous, which is the opposite of *muhkam* (solid, clear). The latter is referred to in:

***He it is Who hath sent down upon thee the Scripture; wherein are solid verses – those are the substance of the Book – and others [that are] ambiguous.... (3:7)***

Here, *muhkam* is that which is clear and apparent in meaning, while *mutashabih* is not. Thus *mutashabih* in this verse refers to those verses that require interpretation and commentary.

## Chapters with disjointed (muqatta'ah) letters

STUDENT. Some chapters of the Qur'an start with disjointed (*muqatta'ah*) letters such as *alif-lam-mim*, *ha-mim*, and so on. Has the real meaning of these letters been identified so far, so that one could be certain in translating and interpreting them?

'ALLAMAH. Generally speaking, these letters are connected with the contents of the chapter. Hence, chapters with the same disjointed letters at their beginning discuss topics of a similar nature.

Six chapters of the Noble Qur'an start with *alif-lam-mim*. They are Chapters 2 and 3, which follow one another, and Chapters 29 to 32, which are also grouped together.

Seven chapters start with *ha-mim* and are known as '*hawamim*'. They are Chapters 40–46. As with the *alif-lam mim* chapters, these chapters are also similar in topic and are in sequence.

Then there are the five 'glorification chapters' (*musabbihat*), which begin with 'glorifies' (*yusabbihu*) and 'glorified' (*sabbaha*). They are: Chapter 57, 59, 61, 62, and 64. Although Chapter 87 (al-A'la) also starts with 'glorify' (*sabbih*, in imperative form), it is not considered one of the 'glorification chapters'. It is included among them in one narration, but a more reliable narration identifies the 'glorification chapters' as the five chapters mentioned above.

It is narrated that the Messenger of Allah used to recite these five chapters every night before going to sleep. When asked why, he replied: 'There is a verse in each of these chapters that is equivalent to a thousand verses of the Qur'an.' And according to another narration, whoever recites the *musabbihat* at night before sleeping will see the Honourable Messenger before death, and he will show him his place and station in paradise.<sup>8</sup>

Chapters 10 to 15 start with *alif-lam-ra*. These six chapters are also consecutive and have a similar tone and style:

And there are three chapters that begin with *ta-sin*. These chapters too are in sequence and similar in tone. They are Chapters 26 to 28.

Chapter 7 (al-A'raf) starts with *alif-lam-mim-sad*, and incorporates the tone and style of both the *alif-lam-mim* chapters and Chapter 38 (Sad), showing that, as we said, the disjointed letters at the beginning of the chapters of the Qur'an are brief, hidden allusions to all of the topics revealed in that chapter. Thus the *alif-lam-mim* at the beginning of Chapter 7 (al-A'raf) indicates its similarity with the *alif-lam-mim* chapters, and the *sad* indicates that it shares the tone and style of Chapter Sad.

Chapter 19 (Maryam) starts with *kaf-ha-ya-'ayn-sad*, and has its own special tone and style. Chapter 50 (Qaf) has a particular form, and that form and mode is distinct in all of the Qur'an, as do Chapters 20 (Ta-Ha) and 36 (Ya-Sin). However, many have considered 'Ta-Ha' as a single word and one of the names of the Messenger of Allah. The same has been said about 'Yasin'; this is verified by the verse:

***Peace be upon il-Yasin [Elias] (37: 130)***

where *il* is an abbreviation for **اٰل** ('family', so *il-Yasin* would mean 'Yasin's family'). In fact, in an uncommon (*shadhdhah*) recitation, this verse is pronounced as **اٰل-ي ياسين** (Yasin's family).<sup>9</sup>

Therefore one may say that in the first verse of Chapter 36 (Ya-Sin), the two letters are actually two words: the first one is used when someone is being addressed, and the next letter is a name of the Messenger of Allah. But *ya* and *sin* could also be two disjointed letters, like the other disjointed letters in the Qur'an that refer to the contents of the chapter. At the same time, these letters could also be references to the Messenger of Allah. That would be just like Chapter 20 (Ta-Ha), where *ta* and *ha* are two letters, but in addition to referring to the contents of the chapter, they also designate the Messenger of Allah.

Note that Chapter 42 (al-Shura) begins with '*Ha-mim. 'Ayn-sin-qaf.*' It is characterised by the *ha-mim* chapters, but it also has some of the tone of Chapter 19 (Maryam), which has '*ayn*' among its disjointed letters. In addition, it incorporates the tone of Chapter 36 (Ya-Sin), which has the letter *sin* in it, and Chapter 50 (Qaf), which has the letter *qaf*.

In general, the disjointed letters indicate the contents of the whole chapter. Thus one should study these chapters with thorough reflection and attention, and deduce the commonalities between the chapters by comparing the chapters that start with the same disjointed letters with each other and also against the other chapters. Of course, such a study is very difficult and precise; nevertheless, it leads to important results.

The different tones of the chapters and the connection between the disjointed letters and the content of the chapters are among the miracles and wonders of the Noble Qur'an. All praise is to Allah, the Lord of all beings.

## The Messenger of Allah was himself a miracle

STUDENT. It is very astonishing that even though the Messenger of Allah would not record the verses himself, as he never wrote anything, he used to recite the revealed chapters of Qur'an without a single letter out of place. Whenever he received revelation, he must have summoned the scribes right away and recounted the verses for them. His entire life, he was never seen taking a pen in his hand or writing anything.

Is it plausible to merely call this the power of memory? Has anything like this been observed throughout the whole history of mankind? Without recording his words in writing or audio, has any speaker or lecturer, even the most talented lecturer with the strongest memory in the world, been able to repeat even two minutes of his speech precisely as delivered before, without adding, missing, or misplacing a single letter? This in itself is certainly a very amazing and peculiar miracle.

'ALLAMAH. Yes, indeed it is so! The Messenger of Allah used to recite the verses of the Qur'an without misplacing, adding, or dropping a single letter. In fact, sometimes those who used to memorise the Qur'an checked their memorisation with him.

Besides the Qur'an, he also used to exactly repeat the phrases that he had stated many years back, just as if he were composing them right at that time. When he was on his deathbed, Hadrat Fatimah was very sad. 'O, woe on us,' she was crying. There he told her, 'O, Fatimah, do not say that! [Instead,] say the same words that I said upon the death of my son Ibrahim:

The heart grieves, and the eyes weep, yet we say not but the truth. And we are certainly sorrowful because of thee, O Ibrahim. [10](#)

Notice that the Noble Prophet was going through the difficult phases of death. His illness had intensified, and his condition had become heavy and difficult. Yet he repeated the exact words that he had said many years ago at the time of Ibrahim's death. This is a strange miracle. This is due to having dominance over the Divine Realm (*malakut*) and supremacy over the Spiritual World (*ma'na*). It is not about the corporeal power of memory – that is the power of memory within the body and coupled with it, though the actual power of memory is immaterial.

STUDENT. There is so much difference between this statement of yours, in meticulously analysing and verifying a simple sentence of the Messenger of Allah at the difficult state of death, and 'Umar's statement that 'Pain has overcome him; this man is indeed hallucinating.' [11](#)

## The meaning of ahqaf

STUDENT. What is meant by *ahqaf* (sands) in the verse:

***And make mention of the brother of 'Ad [tribe] when he warned his people in ahqaf [sandy***

**deserts] – and verily warners came and went before and after him – saying, ‘Worship none but Allah. Lo! I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day.’ (46:21)**

‘ALLAMAH. *Ahqaf* refers to certain villages between Iraq and Yemen, where the Prophet Hud called to the people of his tribe, ‘Ad. They did not accept his message, so Allah exterminated them by sending poisonous or hot deadly winds (*samum*). Nowadays nothing of their towns is left, as all have disappeared.

## **The verse, ‘And of the earth like them’**

STUDENT . The last verse of Chapter 65 (al-Talaq) is:

***Allah is Who created seven heavens, and of the earth like them. The command descendeth amidst them, so that you may know that truly Allah is All-Powerful over everything and that truly Allah has encompassed everything in knowledge. (65: 12)***

What is meant by ‘And from the earth like them,’ and how are there seven earths like the seven heavens?

‘ALLAMAH. There are two interpretations here. The first one is that just like Allah created seven skies, He also created seven earths, and therefore we have seven heavens and seven earths.

The second meaning is that, *from* the earth, He created a being which is like the seven heavens, and that is the human being. This latter exegesis is apparently narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas. Some have maintained that every human being includes in himself ‘the seven firm ones [i.e. heavens]’ (*sab’an shidada*, 78:12) and all their powers. They are all under the rule of mankind. And this human being, in whom all the seven heavens are integrated, is created from the earth. [12](#)

But this interpretation does not sound quite plausible. Of course it is justifiable to identify man as being ‘from the earth’ because his creation essentially emanates from the earth. It is after growing from the earth that man develops and achieves a status of an immaterial soul and spirit:

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

Nonetheless, the first interpretation seems more appropriate, and is also confirmed by some narrations and supplications.

## **‘And His Throne goes back on water’**

STUDENT. In your treatise on eschatology (*al-Insan ba’d al-Dunya*), you have mentioned the verse:

***The day [when] the earth is changed to other than the earth, and [the same with] the heavens, and they come forth to Allah, the One, the Dominant. (14:48)***

There you have written:

In the explanation of ‘The day [when] the earth is changed to other than the earth,’ it is reported from Imam Sajjad:

It means [the earth changes] to an earth on which no sin is committed, and is all seen to have no mountains or vegetation on it, as it was [created and] expanded the first time. And His Throne [God’s status of power and authority] goes back onto the water as it was at first. Thus Allah will be All-Independent in magnificence and power. [13](#)

And there you have made a side note:

His [Imam Sajjad’s] phrase, ‘Independent in magnificence and power’ is the explanation of His Throne’s being established on water. The Qur’an indicates that water refers to the source of all life, power and magnificence. If water adopts and is given the forms of the creatures, then the beings emerge; and if the forms are removed, the Throne goes back onto the water. [14](#)

Here, is water the selfsame *al-wujud al-munbasit* (‘expansive being’, the Universal Soul)?

‘ALLAMAH. First of all note that it is a verse of the Qur’an, and so we cannot be a hundred percent sure about our interpretation. What seems apparent from the verse is that on that day (the Day of Resurrection), water, which is God’s power and life, will take on the status of God’s Throne and authority. Thus it will take over all existents. However, concerning the reality of that power and life, we have no idea.

At any rate, the verse conveys the idea that in the beginning, there was some broad reality that was under the rule of God’s Throne in place of the universe, and God’s Throne governed over it. Afterwards, these forms and shapes emerged from that broad reality, but then again these forms will disappear and fade away. Thus the universe will return to that broad reality once again, without any forms and shapes. But what is that broad reality? There are different possibilities; it could be ‘the Merciful’s Breath’ (*al-nafas al-rahmaniyyah*, the first manifestation of the Truth in creation), ‘the Sacred Diffusion’ (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*), ‘the expansive being’ (*al-wujud al-munbasit*), or what is referred to in a narration as ‘the light of your prophet, O Jabir’. [15](#)

STUDENT. Are they different possibilities or are they different names for the same reality?

‘ALLAMAH. For me they are different possibilities, and for the one who is asking, they are only names (for a single reality).

*However, the one who was asking knows the fact of the matter! I am wretched; what do I know? What do I know of the Book of Allah?*

## 'Then a wall will be set up between them...'

*... Then a wall will be set up between them wherein is a door; its inside containeth mercy, and its outside is toward punishment. (57: 13)*

STUDENT. In your treatise on eschatology, you have discussed this verse:

'This wall is a single thing with an inside and an outside. Allah's mercy is for those who achieve the felicity and salvation of the inside, and His punishment is for those who perish in the outside. It seems that if those who are outside pass through and reach the inside, they will achieve Allah's blessing and great bounty (*ni'mah, na'im*), and the divine mercy will take them under its cover.'

It is as if there is only one thing that separates the believers from the infidels. Their difference is only in what they conceive, just as it was in this world (*dunya*). Their difference is in the route that they take toward Allah. The believers follow on the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) and the non-believers go astray and follow diverging paths. These verses are along the same lines:

***And the dwellers of the Paradise will call unto the dwellers of the Fire that 'We have found that which our Lord promised us true; have you [also] found that which your Lord promised you true?' They will say, 'Yes.' Thereby a herald will proclaim between them: Allah's curse be upon the oppressors \* [Those] who debar [people] from the path of Allah and want [to make and present] it crooked and are disbelievers in the hereafter. (7:44-5)***

There is only one path to Allah; it belongs to Him and goes toward Him. The journeyer toward Allah follows that path properly and with forbearance. But one who does not journey toward Allah bends the path and follows a distorted way. This idea repeatedly comes up in the Noble Qur'an, both explicitly and implicitly. For example:

***They know an appearance of the present life (dunya), while of the hereafter they are heedless \* Have they not pondered within themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth and what is between them except with truth and for a destined end. (30:7-8)***

Later you say:

One of the most expressive verses on this subject is:

***Hast thou not seen those who exchanged the bounty of Allah with ingratitude, and settled their people in the abode of loss? \* [It is] hell, that they exposed to, a dreadful dwelling. (14:28-9)***

As discussed earlier, *ni'mah* (bounty, boon) refers to guardianship (*wilayah*), and guardianship is the very path toward Allah. Contrary to this path is *kufr* (infidelity and ingratitude), which is the same as the abode of loss (*dar al-bawar*), the house of fatality, being set afire in hell, and settling in that dreadful

place. So the journey of the infidels ends in loss and ruin, which consists of sticking to the outward (*zahir*) and ignoring the inward (*batin*). However, clearly the outward is perishable and fading, but the inward is stable and lasting. [16](#)

Why have you identified this verse (14:28) as the most expressive verse on this subject?

## In the Qur'an, ni'mah always refers to wilayah

'ALLAMAH. The term *ni'mah* (bounty) occurs in several places in the Noble Qur'an. It is deduced from these verses that this term refers to guardianship (*walayah* and *wilayah*), by which is meant the *wilayah* of the Household of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt). And that is to follow the path they followed to reach the Threshold of their Lord, the Supreme Allah, which is the path of sheer servitude (*al-'ubudiyyat al-mahdah*).

The above verse is one of those verses. It describes the change of Allah's bounty to ingratitude, and thus entry into the hellfire. Thus *ni'mah* is in fact the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) and the shortest distance that a servant can take toward his God, whereby he attains the status of absolute and sheer servitude. To exchange this *ni'mah* with *kufir* is to abandon the straight path for distorted routes which diverge from the destination, and therefore thrust the traveller into hell.

Perhaps a more expressive and explicit verse is in Chapter 102 (al-Takathur): ***'Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty.'*** This chapter refutes all pluralities (*katharat*) in a strange and astonishing – yet clear and lucid – style. It calls everyone to the Realm of Unity (*'alam al-wahdah*). It questions man and holds him accountable for *na'im* (great bounty), which is the selfsame *wilayah* (guardianship):

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

Commenting on this chapter, Imam Sadiq said that *na'im* (great bounty) is not things like bread and cheese so to speak, but it refers to the high stages of servitude and sincerity in the path of *tawhid* (monotheism) and *wilayah* (guardianship). Once, when he encountered Abu Hanifah, Imam Sadiq asked him about this verse and the meaning of *na'im* for which the people will be questioned and held accountable. Abu Hanifah replied, 'It refers to these [everyday] bounties that Allah has bestowed on the people, such as foods, fruits and their likes.' Then the Imam told him:

Is it really like a munificent host to provide his guests with all these boons and bounties that cover them from head to toe, so that they may eat and drink and satiate all their needs, but then have an agent who

interrogates them upon exiting [from the feast], ‘What did you eat and drink?’ Would they be held accountable for that, so that they would reply, ‘We had, say, bread and dates and so on?’ That is not the case. Rather, *na’im* denotes the guardianship of us Ahl al-Bayt. [17](#)

So people will be asked, ‘On your way toward Allah, to what extent did you follow the approach, practice, and way of your Imams? And to what extent did you achieve the status of absolute and sheer servitude?’

And the Garden of Great Bounty (*jannat al-na’im*) that is mentioned [several places] in the Qur’an refers to the same idea. [18](#) It means the paradise of guardianship, which is the selfsame paradise of the chosen and intimate friends of Allah (*mukhlasin* and *muqarrabin*). It is the paradise of those who attained the station of God’s Unity of Essence, those who were annihilated in the realms of the Divine Attributes of Beauty and Majesty, and those who entirely renounced every facet of their existence and submitted them all to the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. Allah).

## Ni’mah and na’im mean wilayah

‘ALLAMAH. Thus, one can infer from the verses of the Qur’an and the traditions that bounty (*ni’mah*) is an allusion to guardianship (*wilayah*). Though it appears that *ni’mah* means bounty and blessing in the general sense, in these cases it refers to the bounty of *wilayah* in particular. But let us try to not base our interpretation on the narrations. Instead, let us see if we can infer this from the Qur’an alone.

Note that first, the chapter considers rivalry in pluralities (*takathur*) as something distracting. And one who attains the knowledge and the vision of certitude (*‘ilm al-yaqin* and *‘ayn al-yaqin*) will see this distraction as hell and burning fire. Then the Noble Qur’an contrasts this rivalry in pluralities with *na’im*. Here, the Qur’an identifies *na’im* as the biggest asset which is worthy of one’s being held accountable for and questioned about. So *na’im* is the Station of Unity (*maqam al-tawhid*), which manifests in a servant and is referred to as sheer servitude (*al-‘ubudiyyat al-mahdah*). Therefore one should detest and reject *takathur*, which is the view of plurality and multiplicity, and instead return to *na’im*, which is the approach of unity.

From the verses alone, one can deduce that *na’im* is something truly prized and valuable. In fact, it should have been the most valuable end and objective of the creation. And as the Imam said, it is seemingly very unlikely for Allah to question one’s reality and essence, of all the bounties that he has seen and benefited from in his life, from beginning to end.

This means that throughout life, amidst all the bounties that Allah has bestowed upon human beings, they must diligently and vigorously strive for and acquire that one real and genuine bounty: guardianship, which is the bond between the created world and God, between the created and the Creator, between the originated (*hadith*) and the Primordial (*qadim*), between the contingent (*mumkin al-wujud*) and the Necessary (*wajib al-wujud*). Guidance is to acquire that bounty, and everything else is misguidance.

Everyone in the world lives, communicates, marries, eats, rests, and sleeps. They all do the same careers of trading, manufacturing, gardening, and farming. However, some of them only see the outer side of these matters and miss out on the interior; they are the ones **'Who exchanged the bounty of Allah with ingratitude.'** And some others seek that single reality within these numerous and multiple matters; and that is the great bounty (*na'im*).

## **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'**

***And fruits and abb \* For the benefit of you and your livestock. (80:31-2)***

STUDENT. It is narrated from Imam 'Ali that the verse 'For the benefit of you and your livestock' is an explanation for the verse before it: **'And fruits and abb.'** Therefore the meaning of *abb* (fodder, pasture) will be clear, as it would refer to the food for the livestock. So it is the same as the fodder and hay that they feed on.<sup>19</sup> The verse, **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'** has also come up in Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at):

***From it [the earth] He brought forth its waters and its pastures \* And the mountains He set firm \* For the benefit of you and your livestock. (79:31-3)***

However, obviously it is not appropriate to consider **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'** as an explanation for **'And the mountains He set firm.'** Does the fact that we cannot consider **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'** as an explanation for its previous verse here mean that we also cannot do so in Chapter 80?

'ALLAMAH. It is reported that when Abu Bakr was asked about the meaning of *abb* in the verse in Chapter 80, he had no answer. And some have considered this as an objection to Abu Bakr, for how could he not recognise the meaning of *abb* despite being a native Arab?

*Abb* is the fodder with which animals are typically fed, like alfalfa and such. If considered in a broader sense, it could perhaps be applied to human and animal nourishments that mainly consist of herbs and vegetables. It is quite clear that in Chapter 80, **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'** is an explanation for **'And fruits and fodder.'** This is an example of when previously noted subjects are expounded on in the same order (*al-laff wa al-nashr al-murattab*).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the meaning of 'fruit' (*fakihah*) is obvious, and we know that fruits are not feed for the livestock, but are rather specifically for the benefit of mankind. Therefore 'For the benefit of you' will be an explanation for 'fruits'; and consequently, 'and [for] your livestock' will be an explanation for '*abb*'. Hence it is evident that *abb* is fodder and hay for the animals.

However, in Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at), **'For the benefit of you and your livestock' (79:33)** is an explanation for the sentence **'From it [the earth] He brought forth its waters and its pastures' (79:31)**. And this is not based on ordered (or even disordered) expounding of previously noted subjects.

It is rather an overall explanation meaning, 'Allah has provided benefits and sustenance for you and your livestock through the water and vegetation that grow on the earth.'

The word *mar'a* means *ri'y*, which means plants, and is not specifically for animals. But note that the verse '**And the mountains He set firm**' (79:32) is a separate sentence (*istitradiyyah*) that has appeared between the explanation and the explained. The middle verse (79:32) is mentioned in order to describe the earth's stability. It asserts that 'Allah restrained the earth from agitation and deviation by means of firm and stable mountains, so that it may grow plants and bring out its water, so that the sustenance of you and your livestock is provided.' This is how I see it, and Allah knows best.

## **The Qur'anic addresses starting with qul (say)**

STUDENT. In many verses of the Qur'an, the orders to the Messenger of Allah start with 'qul' (say, tell). For example:

**Say: He, Allah is One. (112:1)**

**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind. (114:1)**

**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the disjunction [between night and day]. (113:1)**

**Say: O disbelievers. (109:1)**

**Say: certainly all of the predecessors and the successors \* Will indeed be gathered for the tryst of an appointed day. (56:49-50)**

**Say: I am only a human being like you.... (18:110)**

**Say: obey Allah and the Messenger.... (3:32)**

**Say: Allah has spoken the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the upright.... (3:95)**

**... Say: the good of this world is little; while the hereafter is better for he who restrains.... (4:77)**

And many other verses, which would make a long list. Obviously, what the Messenger of Allah was commanded was not the literal phrase, but rather the content and the message. That is, when he is told, 'Say: He, Allah is One,' he is ordered to say, 'He, Allah is One,' not to say, 'Say: He, Allah is One.' Saying the latter would not be following Allah's order and instruction. The point is to express the message and content of the order, and this is quite obvious! For example, if someone tells us 'Go in between the people and say: Allah is One!' then we must go in between the people and say, 'Allah is One,' not 'Say: Allah is One.'

In these cases, the order to 'say' serves as means for the actual message that is to be said. It should not

be viewed as an independent order by itself. In the above example, saying, 'Allah is One' is carrying out the order, while saying, 'Say: Allah is One' is not. It is the content of the order that is meant to be said, not the whole set of instructions.

Therefore the Messenger of Allah should tell the people, 'He, Allah is One.' And so is the case with the other verses; he should only convey the content of the order. However, we see throughout the Noble Qur'an that the phrase 'Say' is also included in the verses, and the exact words that addressed the Prophet appear in the Qur'an.

'ALLAMAH. There are two things to be discussed here. The first one is about Allah's command to His Prophet, his duty, and how he carried out the instructions in general. With regard to this, it is certain that the Messenger of Allah used to follow Allah's command and perform the orders just as they were. Even in the very addresses that begin with '**Say**' (*qul*), the Noble Messenger has expressed the content of the order. Allah's commands to His Messenger to say something are just like His other commands without the phrase, 'Say'. For instance:

***Proclaim that which thou art commanded, and turn away from the polytheists \* Truly We have sufficed thee against the scorers. (15:94-5)***

In following this order of Allah, the Prophet would publicly announce the unity of Allah and would turn away from the polytheists. Similarly, in the example with '**Say: He, Allah is One**,' he would tell the people 'He is Allah, He is One.'

The second point is about how Allah's orders appear in the Qur'an in particular. This is a different story. As we know, the Qur'an is a divine revelation (*wahy*), and a divine revelation should be conveyed without the addition or omission of anything, not even a single word or letter. Hence, the Qur'an reflects the exact message that addressed the Messenger of Allah. And this is how the Qur'an should be (as a divine scripture).

If the phrase 'Say' (*qul*) is dropped in '**Say: He, Allah is One**' or in '**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind**,' and thus one says, 'He, Allah is One,' and 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,' then that would not be Qur'an anymore. That would not be the words of Allah, but would rather be the words of the Prophet who is saying, 'Allah is One.' Since the Glorious Qur'an is the exact revelation, it cannot be without the phrase 'Say'. This is just like the other orders of Allah that do not begin with the phrase, 'Say,' like the verse mentioned above: '**Proclaim that which thou art commanded, and turn away from the polytheists**.' There we see that the Noble Qur'an literally mentions the whole command word-by-word.

In addition, in the divine addresses to the Messenger of Allah in the Qur'an, the Noble Messenger acts as a mirror for all Muslims, rather for all mankind. So in fact it is the people that are being addressed as the audience of the commands. It is only that the address to the people is through the channel and mirror of the soul of the Messenger of Allah, who – due to his capacity and breadth – encompasses all

the people of the nation, rather all humankind. He has covered them all under the breadth of his knowledge and existence. This idea is clarified quite well in the verse,

***... And We have sent down to thee the Remembrance [the Qur'an], that thou mayst make clear to mankind what hath been sent down to them, and that haply they may reflect. (16:44)***

The Messenger of Allah only elucidates the contents of the divine revelations that were sent to the people.

## **Ayat al-Kursi is just the first verse**

STUDENT. Does the so-called *Ayat al-Kursi* (The Throne Verse, 2:255) refer to only one verse, which ends with:

***... And preserving those two [the heavens and the earth] doth not tire Him; and He is the Supreme, the Magnificent. (2:255)***

Or does it also include the next two verses, which end with:

***... They are the dwellers of the Fire; they are there forever! (2:257)***

'ALLAMAH. It ends with '***And He is the Supreme, the Magnificent.***' That is why this verse, which contains the word *kursi* (chair, throne), is called the Verse of the Throne. The following two verses are not part of the Verse of the Throne. And the first verse (i.e. 2:255) is sufficient for supplications and optional prayers that involve recitation of the Verse of the Throne.

## **'Say: each behaves according to his formation'**

***And when We bestow blessings upon man, he balketh and turneth aside; and when evil toucheth him, he is in despair. Say: each one behaveth according to his formation; and thy Lord knoweth best who is most guided in his way. (17:83-4)***

STUDENT. This verse describes two different states of mankind. First it talks about man's initial formation (*shakilah*), disposition, and character. It says that when We bring about ease and expansion for man and bestow blessings on him, arrogance and heedlessness overwhelm him. His haughtiness, self-conceit and egotism cause him to turn away from Us, balk, and deviate. And when an evil – like stress, trouble, tension, or poverty – touches him, he suddenly loses hope and becomes disappointed, abject, and distressed. The second state is how some people are guided to Allah. They find the straight path and leave behind the initial formation. For some of them in particular, this condition develops further; their guidance intensifies and their path becomes brighter and straighter.

Does that mean that the nature and formation of all people is according to that first state, which involves

balking and turning aside from God upon receiving blessings, and losing hope of God's mercy upon evil and unfortunate events? And does it mean that those who achieve guidance, take up the path of Allah, and seek salvation, actually exit that initial and inherent nature? Do they take a shortcut out of their initial path and nature? Or is it that the guided individuals are still on their initial nature, formation, and character, and that their guidance is also based on their innate nature and formation?

The verse seems to suggest that they abandon their initial nature since their case is mentioned as an unconnected exception (*al-istiithna' al-munqati'*). If so, then what would it mean to abandon one's nature (*fitrah*)? How can a being completely abandon its initial makeup, exit its existential form, and adopt another nature and formation? Besides, as we know, the nature of mankind is based on *tawhid* and the truth, not on misguidance.

The other solution is to say that the mentioned guidance is also according to one's nature. That means human nature has two states: the state of turning away, disobedience, despair and distress; and the state of exiting this condition and achieving foresight and guidance on the straight path. This would mean that the exception in the second verse is connected to and a part of the first verse (*muttasil*). But that would be against the apparent sense (*zahir*) of the verse, because the verse says that each behaves based on his formation. One's turning away and despair is based on his formation; thus guidance should be beyond and outside the formation (the makeup of man's being).

'ALLAMAH. It seems that formation (*shakilah*) here refers to one's initial makeup and tendency prior to undergoing any education and training, which would manifest and actualise his hidden capacities and talents. Man is a dynamic being, and is capable of growth and perfection. Therefore its initial nature and formation is sheer talent and absolute capacity. If that talent is left to its own in the world of nature (*tabi'ah*) and multiplicity (*kathrah*), it develops into 'He balks and turns aside' and 'he is in despair.' However, if the person is trained and shown the path, it passes this stage of weakness, lassitude, and indolence, and reaches the highest stations that one can achieve.

This capacity and aptitude is hidden within the nature of man; the capability and strength is latent in him. So one might appear to be a disappointed and ungrateful being, yet oceans of luminous beams of truth pervade him, and that is not separate from his nature. However, those beams only emerge as a result of training and discipline.

Man is an intricate being with various stages, which are all included in his nature. One cannot achieve a stage that is beyond and outside his nature. In the above verse, 'man' (*insan*) does not denote the sacred soul (*al-nafs al-qudsiyyah*) or the rational spirit (*al-ruh al-natiqah*, i.e. the intellect).<sup>21</sup> Those are hidden stages of one's being, and they are achieved by Allah's guidance and one's diligence in His way. Instead, man (*insan*) denotes ordinary people with common thoughts and undeveloped aptitudes. Then of course what is seen from one at that stage of his formations is only diversion, turning aside, despair and ingratitude. And the person who is led and delivered out of this formation by Lordly guidance exits only this [particular] state of nature, as opposed to exiting his nature and formation altogether.

## 'Truly man was created intolerant..... save those that pray'

'ALLAMAH. The idea in the above verses (17:83-4) is quite relevant to the verses in Chapter 70 (al-Ma'arij):

***Truly man was created intolerant (halu') \* Fretful (jazu') when evil toucheth him \* And grudging when good toucheth him \* Save those that pray \* Those who are constant at their prayers \* And those in whose wealth there is a right known \* For the beggar and the deprived \* And those who confirm the Day of Judgment \* And those who are fearful of their Lord's punishment \* Indeed, from their Lord's punishment, none can feel secure \* And those who protect their private parts \* Save from their wives and the maids that they own, for which they are not blameworthy \* But whoso pursues beyond that, they are the transgressors \* And those who keep their trusts and covenants \* And those who stand by their testimony \* And those who observe their prayers \* They will be in gardens, high-honoured \* Then what aileth those who disbelieve to keep staring at thee [or stretch their necks toward thee] \* From the right and from the left, in groups? \* Doth each of them hope to enter a Garden of Great Bounty? \* Not so... (70: 19-39)***

These noble verses also seem to maintain that the initial creation and nature of man consists of being *halu'*, which means intolerant, anxious, rash, and agitated. This involves one's being *manu'* (acquisitive for one's own self and not giving to others) when God gives him some wealth, power or position; and being *jazu'* (complaining, whining and clamouring) upon evil and unpleasant events or when he loses some riches.

It is only the performers of prayer who are excluded from this general rule about mankind's initial makeup. Who are these performers of prayer? They are described in the verses that follow: they adhere to prayer and almsgiving, are fearful of Allah's retribution, believe in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection, restrain themselves from adultery and shameful deeds, keep their trusts and maintain their covenants, and are firm and stand by their testimony. Here the Noble Qur'an mentions all good deeds one by one and does not spare anything.

Then it says: what is with these infidels around you; those who are unaware and ignorant of these real virtues, of human morality, and of spiritual deeds? What do they say? And what do they want? Do they conjecture that they can reach the status of [a perfect] man and enter the Bounteous Paradise without performing prayer – with the mentioned conditions and results? No! That is not so; they will never reach such a status.

In these verses, the performers of prayer are excluded from man's initial nature – being *halu'* (intolerant), which consists of being *manu'* (selfishly restrictive) and *jazu'* (impatient, whining). This means that the idea of 'prayer', with its mentioned outcomes and effects, is a part of man's nature and formation. However, it should come to manifestation and actualisation. Man's dormant divine aptitude should be awakened. Hence, the idea that man was created intolerant refers to only one of his states and moods,

as opposed to the reality and essence of his creation and nature. So this verse describes man's ordinary and basic formation, not the origin of his sacred soul (*al-nafs al-qudsiyyah*) and rational spirit (*al-ruh al-natiqah*).

## Intercession is for the believers with major sins

**... And they [the angels] intercede not except for him with whom He is satisfied; and they are fearful in awe of Him. (21:28)**

STUDENT. In this noble verse, '**with whom He is satisfied**' implies absolute satisfaction. That is, in order for one to benefit from intercession (*shafa'ah*), Allah should be pleased with every aspect of his being, even his essence and his heart. Thus the verse refers to the stage of those who are chosen and intimate (*mukhlasin* and *muqarrabin*).

'ALLAMAH. If that is so, then there would be no need for intercession. But that is not true. Satisfaction in this verse means being satisfied with one's religion. Of course, it is mentioned *mutlaq* (with no conditions), but it should be limited to satisfaction with one's religion. The verse is about one whose religion, beliefs and approach are approved of, as opposed to all of his deeds being approved of, which is certainly not meant here. Intercession only applies to sinners, and not only that, but it only applies to those who have committed major sins (*kaba'ir*). Because if someone avoids the major sins, this avoidance will itself cover his minor sins, in which case no sin will remain to be covered by intercession. There are two noble verses that assert that if the major sins are avoided, the small faults and minor sins will be forgiven automatically:

**If you avoid the major [sins] that you have been forbidden, We will remit from you your evil deeds.... (4:31)**

**[The good-doers are] those who avoid the major sins and indecencies, save lamam [lesser offences, sinning infrequently, or errors immediately followed by repentance].... (53:32)**

And the Messenger of Allah said,

I have saved my intercession for those of my nation who have committed major sins. And as for the righteous, there is no way [of blame] against them.[22](#)

There are also many narrations about how Imam Rida interpreted the above verse (21:28):

**And they [the angels] intercede not except for him whose religion is satisfied with.**[23](#)

Here, religion means believing in unity (*tawhid*) and denying polytheism (*shirk*). However, according to Imam Musa ibn Ja'far, if someone commits a major sin and does not repent from it, then his religion is not approved of.[24](#)

## Prophet Abraham's asking forgiveness for his uncle, Azar

*There has been a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those with him, when they told their people, 'Indeed we are averse to you and all that you worship beside Allah. We disapprove of you; and there hath arisen between us and you enmity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone' – save Abraham's word to his father that 'I will certainly ask forgiveness for thee, though I own nothing for thee from Allah.' [And they supplicated:] Our Lord, in Thee we trust, unto Thee we turn, and to Thee is the return. (60:4)*

STUDENT. The above verse has been explained as follows: 'Save Abraham's word' means that you should follow Abraham in all his actions save this statement of his, for which you should not follow him. Certainly he only asked forgiveness for his father 'because of a promise he had made to him' based on his accepting the faith. ***'But when it became clear to him that he [his father] was indeed an enemy to Allah, he [Abraham] disowned him' (9:114).*** [25](#)

The above passage means that Prophet Abraham's promise to his uncle that he will ask forgiveness for him was not appropriate or commendable. That is why the Noble Qur'an has excepted this act from Abraham's perfect model.

'ALLAMA. Chapter 19 (Maryam) mentions that Prophet Abraham sent *salaam* (peace) upon his uncle Azar and promised him to ask God to forgive him. This was when Azar was a polytheist and used to warn Abraham against forsaking his deities. Abraham tells him:

***'Father, I fear lest a punishment from the All-Merciful may strike thee, and thus thou become a companion of Satan' \* He [Azar] said, 'Dost thou shrink from my gods? If thou cease not, I shall certainly stone thee. So leave me for a long while' \* He said, 'Peace be upon thee! I will ask forgiveness of my Lord for thee; indeed He hath been ever gracious to me.'* (19:45-7)**

And in Chapter 26 (al-Shu'ara'), Prophet Abraham asks forgiveness for his father as he supplicates to God:

***My Lord, grant me command and join me with the righteous \* And appoint for me a tongue of truthfulness [i.e. good name, or upright descendants] amongst the posterity \* And include me amongst the inheritors of the Garden of Great Bounty \* And forgive my father; surely he was one of those who went astray. (26:83-6)***

Of course he asked for Azar's forgiveness when it was not yet evident to him that Azar was destined for hell. So Abraham speculated that Azar might be guided and delivered. It was in such conditions that he asked forgiveness for Azar, based on his promise that 'I will ask my Lord for your forgiveness.' But when it became clear to Abraham that there was no hope in Azar's deliverance and that he was Allah's enemy, he did not ask forgiveness for him any more, but rather expressed detestation and disapproval of

him.

***It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to ask forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they are their relatives, after it hath become clear for them that they are indeed dwellers of hell \* And Abraham asked not forgiveness for his father except of a promise he had made to him; but when it became clear to him that he is indeed an enemy to Allah, he [Abraham] disowned him. Truly Abraham was very suppliant and long-suffering. (9: 113–14)***

Based on these noble verses, what is not allowed for the Messenger of Allah and the believers is to ask forgiveness for the polytheists while clearly knowing that they are among the dwellers of hell. The same is true concerning Prophet Abraham: after it became evident for him that Azar was Allah's enemy, he detested him. Abraham's asking for Azar's forgiveness was prior to this stage.

That is why Allah warns and forbids His Messenger from asking mercy for them or standing by their graves:

***And never perform prayer over [or send mercy upon] any of their dead, nor stand by his grave. They indeed disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger and died while they were evil-doers. (9:84)***

***Ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them; though thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah guideth not the group of the evil-doers. (9:80)***

So Abraham's promise mentioned in, 'Save Abraham's word to his father that "I will certainly ask forgiveness for thee"' (60:4) was at the time when Azar's enmity to Allah was not yet evident to Abraham. Nevertheless, even such an unconditional promise to an infidel is not appropriate, so long as they are in the state of infidelity. Therefore, in this verse (60:4), the believers are warned against even this specific case of asking forgiveness, which was based on a promise made, and before it became clear that the infidel was a dweller of hell. The verse recognises the detestation and disapproval of Abraham and his companions against the polytheists as a perfect exemplar, but it is not a perfect exemplar to follow them in even this type of asking forgiveness for the polytheists.

## **[Azar was Prophet Abraham's uncle and not his father](#)**

**Note:** Azar was certainly not Prophet Abraham's father, and the Qur'an bears witness to that. It explicitly states that once it became evident to Prophet Abraham that Azar was Allah's enemy, he did not ask forgiveness for him, but rather detested him. But elsewhere in the Qur'an, Prophet Abraham asks God to forgive his parents:

***Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers, the day when reckoning takes place. (14:41)***

This shows that Azar was not Prophet Abraham's father. There is a difference between *walid* (father, by birth) and *ab* (father, as guardian). *Walid* is only used for father, whereas *ab* is also used for uncle (especially when he is in charge of one's affairs after the death of his father).[26](#)

## The extermination of the tribe of Thamud and the people of Madyan

STUDENT. In your opinion, what is the most intense expression in the Qur'an concerning the punishments that have struck the oppressors in this world?

'ALLAMAH. In two parts of the Noble Qur'an, the way the Almighty Allah mentions the befallen punishment is incredible. The oppressors were wiped out in a way that absolutely no trace of them remained. It is as if they never existed, never came to this world, and never had a name or identity. The first one is in Chapter 11 (Hud), and is mentioned in two instances. One of them is regarding the tribe Thamud, who hamstrung Prophet Salih's camel:

***So when Our command came, We rescued Salih and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us from the ignominy of that day. Truly thy Lord, He is the All-Strong, the All-Mighty \* And the Cry overtook those who were oppressors, thus they dawned the day flat down (jathimin) in their homes \* As though they had not dwelt (yaghnaw) there. Lo! Surely Thamud disbelieved in their Lord. Lo! May Thamud be far [from God's mercy]. (11:66-8)***

The verb '*yaghnaw*', when used with a location, means to reside there. And *jathimin* means something that is set flat down on the floor, like a carpet. So it means that the Cry overtook them in such a way that they became even with earth, as if they had never resided in that land. The other one is about the people of Madyan (a city near the Red Sea) who used to trouble their prophet Shu'ayb and threatened to stone him:

***So when Our command came, We rescued Shu'ayb and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us. And the Cry overtook those who were oppressors, thus they dawned the day flat down in their homes \* As though they had not dwelt there. Lo! May Madyan be far [from God's mercy] as Thamud was. (11:94-5)***

The second expression is in Chapter 23 (al-Mu'minun). It is more astounding, as it says, 'We turned them into "tales"', meaning that only some story and account remained of them, without any custom or trace of them remaining. These verses are after the account of the drowning of Noah's tribe in water. The verses say that after Noah's flood, Allah created another group of people and sent a prophet for them. But they denied that prophet:

***Thus the Cry overtook them justly, and We made them as scum, so may the group of oppressors be far [from God's mercy] \* Then after them We brought forth other generations \* No nation can***

***outstrip its term, nor do they postpone it \* Then We sent Our messengers one after another. Whenever its messenger came to a nation they denied him; so We caused them to follow one another [to disaster]; and we turned them into tales; so away [from Allah's mercy] with a people who believe not. (23:41-4)***

1. See Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (al-Tafsir al-Kabir) (Beirut, 198?), 31:54ff.; Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani* (Beirut, 198?), 30:39ff.; Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafsir al-Ma'thur* (Beirut, 197?), 6:314ff.
2. Note that this was Walid ibn Mughirah, one of the two prominent men about whom the polytheists claimed 'Why was the Qur'an not revealed to one of these two?' (43:31). He is different from Walid ibn 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'it, about whom the Naba' verse (49:6) was revealed.
3. [Translator's note. He was a stout man among the enemies of the Prophet, who refused to embrace Islam until his death. The books of tafsir have mentioned different variations of his name; the above is based on al-Mizan.]
4. Fadl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan* (Beirut, 1995), 10:266.
5. Al-Najafi (Shaykh al-Jawahiri), *Jawahir al-Kalam* (Tehran, 1988), 9:401; reported from al-Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul) (Tehran, 1388/1968), 2:601, who reports through his line of transmitters, from Sa'd al-Iskaf.
6. See Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut, 1983), 4:336-7; Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur* (Beirut, 197?), 3:207-8.
7. 'Allamah has an explanation that could be one of the reasons why Allah refers to the Noble Qur'an as 'the best speech' (ahsan al-hadith): 'Among the Divine Books, the Qur'an is the only book that, first, equates man's felicitous life with a simple unadulterated life based on one's nature (fitrah); and second, unlike most or all other practices, which separate man's worship of God from his everyday life and affairs, the Qur'an considers the religious practice as the very way of life, covering every aspect of one's social and individual life. Its orders are based on true knowledge [of God and the world]. In fact, the Qur'an entrusts people to the world and the world to the people, and entrust them both to God.' *Qur'an dar Islam* (Tehran, 1350/1971): 61.
8. [Translator's note. See Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, 9:381 for both narrations. Note that the second narration is as follows: 'Whoever recites all of the musabbihat before sleeping, will not die unless he sees the Qa'im [Imam Mahdi], and if he dies [in sleep] he will reside by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family.']
9. [Translator's note. For a thorough discussion on different recitations (qira'at), see Chapter 7.]
10. It is narrated from Anas ibn Malik that 'We went to the Messenger of Allah when Ibrahim [his son] was dying, and the Messenger of Allah was shedding tears. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-'Awf said, "Even you, O Messenger of Allah [cry]?" That Honourable Messenger said twice, "O son of 'Awf, this is compassion," and continued: "Truly the eyes weep and the heart grieves, but we say not except what our Lord pleases; and indeed we are mournful for your separation O Ibrahim."'  
'Allamah Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din 'Amili, *al-Nass wa al-Ijtihad* (Qum, 1983): 294-5; narrated from Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Istanbul, 1981), 2:84-5, Bab al-Jana'iz. [Translator's note. The words of the Prophet on his deathbed have been reported with minor differences. See Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 24:263-4].
11. See the last reference in note 32 on Chapter 2.
12. Al-Mizan (Beirut, 1970), 19:326-7 and Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*, 6:374-5.
13. 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, *Tafsir al-Qummi* (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:252.
14. S.M.H. Tabataba'i, *al-Insan* (Beirut, 1989): 106.
15. Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 15:24, 25:21-2 & 54:170.
16. S.M.H. Tabataba'i, *al-Insan*: 173-5.
17. Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, 10:433.
18. See 5:65, 10:9, 22:56, 26:85, 31:8, 37:43, 52:17, 56:12 & 89, 68:34, 70:38.
19. Abu Bakr was once asked about this verse, *wa fakihatan wa abba* ('And fruits and fodder,' 80:31), but he did not know the meaning of *abb* in the Qur'an. So he said, 'Which sky will protect me under its shade, which land will shield me, and what should I do if I say something about the Book of Allah that I know not? As with *fakihat*, I know what it means, but as with *abb*, Allah knows best.' The news of this reached Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him. 'Glorified is Allah!' he said, 'Did he not know that *abb* refers to the plant and fodder on which animals graze? And that this word of the Supreme Allah expresses Allah's kindness and grace over his servants regarding the food that He provides them, and the livestock that He created,

which are used for people's livelihood and add to their powers.' Al-Mizan, 20:212; from Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Mufid, al-Irshad (Beirut, 1993), 1:200.

[20.](#) [Translator's note. This is a literary technique and style, where certain topics are first mentioned together, and then further explanations about each are presented in the same order that the topics were mentioned.]

[21.](#) [Translator's note: The rational soul (al-nafs al-natiqah, here used with ruh, spirit, instead of nafs), is man's special form (al-surat al-naw'iyyah), and that is the intellect ('aql). The 'sacred soul' (al-nafs al-qudsiyyah) is a soul at the highest level of intuition (hads), whereby it can know certain and immediate knowledge without learning. The souls of the prophets and saints are at this highest level. See Dihkhuda, Lughatnamah (Tehran, 1993-4), under nafs natiqah and nafs qudsi].

[22.](#) Al-Mizan, 1:170 and 14:282, cited respectively from Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Amali (Qum, 1417/1996):56, and 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida (Beirut, 1984): 125; starting with innama ('My intercession is only for...').

[23.](#) See al-Fattal al-Nisaburi, Rawdat al-Wa'izin (Qum, 198?): 501.

[24.](#) 'Allamah Tabataba'i has discussed about those who will receive intercession in al-Mizan, 1:169ff. and also in vol. 14 in exegesis of verse 21:28. He has narrated relevant hadiths from Shi'a sources and also from Suyuti's al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafsir al-Ma'thur.

[25.](#) Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 12:27; from Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan, 9:448.

[26.](#) [Translator's note. In the previous verses, Azar was referred to as Abraham's ab, but in this last one (14:41), Abraham asks forgiveness for his walid, which means that his walid is different from Azar (the ab) as Abraham had renounced Azar. Also note that Abraham's asking forgiveness for his ab (Azar) in 26:86 is not concerning the Day of Judgment, as opposed to his supplication in 14:41.]

## 4. Philosophical Discourses

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

### An intellectual discussion in refutation of the Trinity

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

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

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

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

Likewise is the case of the belief in 'ayniyyah (union) of Allah's Attributes and Names (*sifat wa asma*)<sup>3</sup> with His Essence (*dhat*), Glorified and Exalted is He. This belief entails subdivision, composition and plurality of the Essence of the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*). That is because in the case of union, God's Essence would not only be predicated by the concepts (*mafhum*) of knowledge, power and life – or the concepts of knowledgeable, powerful, and alive. But the actual and external instances (*misdaq*) of these real concepts would also have to be realised and actually exist in the Essence of the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God, Glorified and Exalted is He). This entails the subdivision of the Sacred Essence of the High One into these distinct instances, which means that the One Essence is composed of the external instances of the Divine Attributes and Names. This is exactly equivalent to the Christians' concept of Trinity. In fact, it does not claim a trinity, but rather the disintegration of God's Essence into His numerous Names and Attributes. Each of His Names and Attributes will appear in His Essence distinct and separate from one another.<sup>4</sup>

## The Qur'an's rejection of the Trinity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The contradiction between unity and trinity**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apparently the Christians hold such a belief, and consider the three elements as God's attributes and manifestations – which are not distinct from God's Essence. They believe in the three principles and

elements of existence, knowledge, and life. Knowledge is the Word, the Messiah; and life is the Spirit (*ruh*). So if their belief in the Trinity means that these elements, which are God's manifestations and epiphanies, are in union with His Essence, then the concept of Trinity would result in a contradiction.[6](#)

## Real unity and plurality cannot apply to the same subject

'ALLAMAH. In other words, the belief in a Father and a Son necessarily establishes multitude (*ta'addud*), and this multitude is nothing but real plurality (*al-kathrah al-haqiqiyyah*). Now if we assume that the Father and the Son are of one species – as we do for human fathers and sons, who are one in being humans and many in being persons of that species – then we cannot consider God as One anymore. Because the arithmetical plurality of having a Father and a Son contradicts the unity of God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

reality of their beliefs. They fear that philosophy may reveal that their *tawhid* is mixed with multiplicity and has more than enough shares of polytheism.

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

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

## The true sense of God's unity of Essence

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

## The philosophers' gradation of being concerning God's unity

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

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

Being to the Fahlawiyyun is a reality,

With an all-inclusive gradation.

Different grades of richness and poverty,

Like the grades of light in intensity.

(Sabzivari)

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

Every higher plane includes the perfection (*kamal*) of its lower planes, but not vice versa. It is just like light, in that while it has a single meaning and a simple reality, it includes a long and extended chain of intensities. Its highest degree is at the sun, and its lowest degree is in the dark holes of the earth. And between these two degrees there are various degrees and intensities of light, all within the same spectrum. The brightest light is at the sun, and slightly below it, the light is a bit weaker, dimmer, and more distant [from perfection]. And thus it becomes weaker, more limited, fainter, and more distant at the lower degrees, until the last degree of light in terms of faintness, deficiency, and imperfection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

is beyond its lower plane). In relation to one another, the planes of existence compose a continuum of causes and effects.

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

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

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

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

## Gradation of being and unity of the gnostics

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

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

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

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

## Gradation contradicts the absoluteness of God's existence

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

The absoluteness (*sirafah*) of existence of God's Essence does not leave any existence for others. It does not recognise existence for them even as effects (*ma'lul*, of the higher planes). In other words, absoluteness does not unite with otherness (*ghayriyyah*, i.e. the existence of others). The claim that God's Essence comprises the perfections of Its effects still allows for some otherness, such as otherness in terms of intensity and weakness. However, any otherness contradicts the absoluteness of God's being.

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

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

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

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

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

## The personal unity of God's existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Certainly *wujud* (being) is characterised by unity of person, or as the gnostics of Allah put it, it is a

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

## **Aversion of the infidels' hearts from God's unity**

STUDENT. It is remarkable how clearly the Noble Qur'an describes God's unity (*tawhid*). It is as if the entire Qur'an was revealed in order to describe the Supreme Truth (*al-Haqq*) and everything that relates to Him. It is a textbook of *tawhid*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## [The problem with gradation of being](#)

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

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

But the advocates of gradation claim that the Essence of the Necessary Being is the highest degree of existence, and that Its supremacy, grandeur, dominance and intensity distinguish It from the other beings. The existence of the Necessary Being and that of the contingent beings are both pure and simple (*basit*), and therefore the point of their distinction is the selfsame existence, for they have nothing

but existence. This means that what distinguishes the different levels in the continuum of existence is the actual existence – whether it is the distinction between the Necessary Being and contingent beings, or between a stronger contingent being and a weaker one. This is a characteristic of graded realities, that although their elements differ from one another; this difference is due to the selfsame graded reality, not due to a nonexistent, external or essential (*mahuwi*, based on quiddity) factor.

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

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

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

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

## **Gradation of being and tawhid of the gnostics**

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

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

Essence of the Necessary Being, and this is the selfsame absoluteness of existence.

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

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

And thus the sequence goes up to the highest degree, above which nothing exists. And since this sequence cannot go up infinitely – for it is impossible to have an infinite regression (*tasalsul*) – it must reach a Maximum above which there is nothing. Then that Maximum comprises all perfections and realisations of the lower degrees put together. This is while none of the lower degrees comprise the perfection of that Highest Degree, despite their number and multitude.

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

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

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

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

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

hundred.

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

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

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

## **Real tawhid is only that of the gnostics**

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

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

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

Thus, although the inferior beings – excluding their limits – are present at the highest degree, they are outside and external to it because of involving those limits. This exclusion and being outside entails some division and detachment that separates the two existents, and this contradicts the absoluteness of

being. There should be no numbers if there is absoluteness, but here we are dealing with numbers.

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

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

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

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

## The reality of God's unity

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

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

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

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

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

Things in the world are only apparitions,

Images in mirrors, fantasy, or illusions.

(‘Abd al-Rahman Jami)

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

*Tawhid* is to drop everything that’s extra.

Being, which moves in its own perfection,

Is only determined in one’s conception.

(Shabistari)

‘ALLAMAH. I also know similar poems! But unfortunately the matter is not resolved by poetry. Of course one cannot maintain that there are various instances and persons of being. The concept of being (*qua* being, in itself) does not allow for multiple persons of being. Thus, if gradation of being requires accepting multiple persons of being, then gradation should be rejected. But if I remember right, according to my explanations in the *Risalat al-Wilayah*, which I wrote long ago, the idea that God is the highest degree of being (i.e. gradation of being) does not contradict the absoluteness of being. [15](#)

## **Adequate elucidation on the gradation and unity of being**

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

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

## **God’s Essence transcends all names, identities, and determinations**

STUDENT. Is it possible to derive many concepts from the Sacred Essence of the Truth, Exalted He is? If yes, based on what grounds and reason? And if not, how have the Names and Attributes of the High

Truth, Majestic and Exalted He is, come to be? Are God's Names and Attributes, which are certainly concepts with external instances, in togetherness (*ma'iyyah*) and identification (*'ayniyyah*) with His Essence? Or are they at a different plane from that of the Essence, and count as lower determinations and delimitations of the Essence?

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

The answer of Mulla Sadra and Sabzivari (who advocated the union of God's Names and Attributes with His Essence) is that the multiplicity of God's Names and Attributes – such as All-Knower, All-Powerful, and so on – is only a conceptual matter and a result of mental derivation. The mind ascribes these Names and Attributes to the Essence because there are aspects of knowledge and power in God's Actions – i.e. His Actions (*af'al*) exhibit knowledge and power. That is what it means when we say that God is Knowledgeable and Powerful. [16](#)

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

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

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

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

To make this matter clear, we maintain that, in general, concepts give rise to plurality. Each concept, essentially and in and of itself, is necessarily separate and distinct from the other concepts. Hence, identifying something as an instance of a concept involves some delimitation of that concept. One who reflects upon it finds that this delimitation is a necessary consequence of assuming an external instance for a concept. Equivalently, if a concept is to be identified with an instance that is unlimited in its

essence, the concept must be at a plane that is inferior and subsequent to that of the unlimited essence. We also know that the predicate (*mahmul*) is subsequent and inferior to the subject (*mawdu'*).

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

This means that the rationally proven identification (*'ayniyyah*) between the Essence and the Attributes only goes in one direction – meaning that the Essence is the same (*'ayn*) as the Attributes, but the Attributes are not the same as the Essence. By this we mean that the Essence stands on its own, but the Attributes depend on the Essence.

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

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

## **What is meant by manifestation (tajalli)?**

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

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

This does not mean that a person's existence cannot be identified with two where's or when's (two positions or times). There is a different reason for that, but that is not called recurrence in manifestation. If a substance (*jawhar*) has two accidents (*'arad*), that is not recurrence of manifestation, like Zayd's being in two times or two locations concurrently. The denial of recurrence of manifestation means that one substance does not become two substances, and one realisation of existence does not become two

realisations of existence. There is only one existential realisation (no recurrence). Number one does not become number two. Existence is one, and the realisation of existence is one. And a single realisation does not become two.

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

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

(Hafiz)

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

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

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

## Man's creation originates from the earth

'ALLAMAH.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So ‘Thereafter We produced him as another creation’ indicates that matter is set aside, and the body turns into an immaterial and transcendent soul (*al-nafs al-mujarrad*). Thus, what is inferred from the verse contradicts the stand of the ancient philosophers. They held that in creation of man, first the foetus is realised, and it develops until it reaches the capacity at which the spirit (*ruh*) can be inspired and blown into it. That is when the soul (*nafs*) is created by God right away, and is attached to the matter (the foetus).[22](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The stages of man's transformations in transubstantial motion**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Man's arcs of ascent and descent toward perfection**

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

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

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

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

If man only had his initial humanity (*insaniyyah*) and nothing beyond that, he would not have benefited from these multiplicities (i.e. the multiplicities that he engages in, in this world). Without the body, there

would have been no variety of actions and attributes for the spirit.

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

And as it reaches this realm of nature and matter, it completely becomes a material entity and sheer matter. It becomes a sperm. The transcendent spirit has descended so much that now it is only a sperm. Then as a result of transubstantial motion, it transforms and changes to different forms and quiddities, until it jumps out of matter and once again becomes immaterial. This jump corresponds to the point when voluntary movement and activity is observed in the foetus, whereby the spirit comes to be.

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

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

## Subsistence of permanent archetypes in God's Essence upon annihilation

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

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

The perfections and properties of all beings will be found once again in the realm of subsistence after annihilation (*baqa' ba'd al-fana*<sup>ʿ</sup>), just as they used to be. But in the realm of annihilation, perfection (*kamal*) exclusively belongs to God. At that stage, there is nothing other than God to have any

perfection. In other words, nothing can enter the realm of annihilation, because it is the realm of *annihilation*. There is only the Sacred Essence (*dhat*) of the Supreme One in that realm. How can Zayd go there and carry along his gatherings of multiplicities such as knowledge and scholarship?

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

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

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

(Hallaj)

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The meaning of 'inniyyah' in Hallaj's poem

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

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

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

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

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

However, there is nothing (there *can* be nothing) in the realm of annihilation. Over there, perfection

hinges on non-being; that is the biggest perfection of all. Who can view himself possessing any perfection before the Essence of the One? Since He has perfection, there is no perfection to be found anywhere else. And this is the highest rank for a person and for humankind: to regard one's self nonexistent, and see God's Essence as the sole being.

It would be inappropriate to talk about existence and perfection for others where every existential perfection and reality exclusively belongs to God's Essence. Given His existence, it would be unacceptable for one to have an identity (*huwiyyah*) or entity (*'ayn*), or to carry along his Permanent Archetype with himself. That is the station of 'He is He' (*Huwa Hu*, i.e. only He exists, so even referring to Him is beyond our conception as there is nothing other than Him). What would the Permanent Archetypes be doing there?

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

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

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

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

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

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

opposition hinge on the person's existence.

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

## The verse, 'Say: my Lord hath only prohibited indecencies, whether inward or outward'

The Messenger of Allah said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

should be something with some identity and existence that would return after annihilation.

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

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

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

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

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

## Every immaterial species is unique

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

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

be?<sup>27</sup>

In response to this, it has been argued that the multiplicities appear as a result of the determination and entification (*ta'ayyun*) of their names. It is through these determinations that the pluralities emerge. So our notions of unity and multiplicity are not the same here. The sense of unity in the immaterial realm should not be mixed with the sense of many in the realm of pluralities. At any rate, it is not possible to establish plurality for the immaterial beings, such that they have *real* plurality (rather, the plurality applies to the descension and determination of their names).<sup>28</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nothing exists over there. That is, in annihilation by itself, there is no laughter or weeping, no sorrow or sadness, no despondence or joy; and there is no person and no Zayd. One's efforts are for God, not for one's self. He and his selfhood were nothing but a veil of illusion (*wahm*). But now, as he reaches the Truth, the illusion is gone. The sun of reality rises, and [it becomes evident that] everything belongs to God. When the names and titles are removed, the Truth will manifest. Right upon our annihilation, we are immolated and sacrificed for Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## All beings proceed to annihilation; there is nothing but Allah;

### ‘There is no he but Him’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A lover is willing to sacrifice himself for his Beloved because of his love. He wants to not see any being for himself before his Beloved’s being. This is the meaning of real love – that the lover does not see

anyone other than the Beloved, does not talk to anyone and does not hear anything. Otherwise, it would not be love, but only a pretension. And if the Beloved detects that the lover wants to retain his being and Permanent Archetype, use this love to preserve his identity and personality, and achieve some perfection for himself, then He slaps him on the neck such that ‘neither a head remains nor a turban!’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A similar idea has been said concerning the resurrection of the beings. Some have argued that, coming

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

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

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

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

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

## **'Allamah's own poems regarding annihilation in God**

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

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

The solution lies in the fact that man exists by God's being (*inniyyah*) and identity (*shakhsiyyah*). Man's

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

Annihilation means to put down the state of boundedness, not to lose existence. It means to tear up the illusion of a narrow and restricted existence and achieve Absolute Existence. And there is no room for the Permanent Archetype in Absolute Existence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

head! Only that my child may survive.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ground was wet with his tears:

O Allah, my blackness and my imagination and my whiteness have prostrated only for Thee.[34](#)

Clearly blackness (*sawad*), imagination (*khayal*) and whiteness (*bayad*) represent the three realms of being: the realm of nature (*tab'*), the imaginal world (*mithal*), and the realm of spirit (*ruh, nafs*). All these spheres have prostrated; that is, they have reached the station of annihilation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'ALLAMAH. I did not mention Muhyi al-Din's stand as evidence. There is no difference between Muhyi al-Din and others when it comes to reasoning. He has a couple of insipid poems early in his discussions, but he follows with some truly fascinating and interesting discussions. As with Ibn al-Farid, he is truly a mesmerising master in terms of the elegance and loftiness of his poems, and in conveying

mystic ideas. We can truly claim that in Arabic poetry and mysticism, Ibn al-Farid is the counterpart of Hafiz Shirazi in Persian poetry and mysticism. Both figures are matchless; one in Arabic mystic-poetry, and the other in Persian mystic-poetry.

Ibn al-Farid's *Ta'yyah* alone consists of a total of between seven hundred to a thousand verses,<sup>35</sup> and it is truly a superb and outstanding poem. According to our master, the late Qadi, Ibn al-Farid was a pupil of Muhyi al-Din (Ibn al-'Arabi). One day Muhyi al-Din told Ibn al-Farid, 'Why don't you write a commentary for your *Ta'yyah ode*?' 'O our master,' Ibn al-Farid responded, 'this *al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah* of yours is a commentary of my *Ta'yyah*.'

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

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

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

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

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

Another problem (that you mention) is that if annihilation is utter nonexistence and spares no Permanent Archetype, then what entity would the beings have upon subsistence (*baqa'*) after annihilation? There

would be nothing left after annihilation; there would be no identity for the beings to return to. In that case we would have to maintain that subsistence is not subsistence (i.e. resumption of the beings that existed prior to annihilation) but is a new creation.

These are the two problems in short. And it is not difficult to answer them. Concerning the first problem, to move from existence to nonexistence is to move from confinement and determination to unconditionality. It is like changing *dirhams* for *dinars* (i.e. changing pennies for dollars or pounds).

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

## Subsistence of the noun upon annihilation

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

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

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

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

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

Consider the sentence, 'We dropped the sugar cube in the water and it dissolved.' Once it is dissolved, there is no sugar cube anymore. So what does the conjugate form 'dissolved' refer to? It says that the

sugar cube that used to be a sugar cube before being dropped into the water, dissolved. But when it is dissolved, it is not a sugar cube any more. Its determined entity and all of its effects and properties are gone. Of course the sweetness exists, but in this sentence we are talking about 'the sugar cube', which clearly has disappeared and vanished.

It used to be a sugar cube before being dissolved, but now it is nothing there except water. Before Zayd's annihilation, he used to observe the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God). But after annihilation, Zayd does not observe the Truth anymore; it is the Truth that observes the Truth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Zayd disappeared and annihilated,' 'The droplet became water,' 'The sugar cube dissolved' – all of these have subjects. If we repudiate Permanent Archetypes, then what do these subjects represent?

These examples do not solve the problem. When there is no noun for the pronoun and no object of reference, what good can be achieved by providing examples?

It is true that no one other than the Essence of the Truth can comprehend the Essence of the Truth. But it does not require the rejection of the Permanent Archetype when we say, 'Zayd was annihilated in the Essence of the Truth.' We cannot do away with the subject of the sentence. If we do, our sentence would be incorrect, for there are many people who annihilate in the Truth (i.e. there must be some means of distinguishing Zayd from others).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of plurality. And so is the case with Zayd's annihilation.

If we look at his determinations, then he cannot be at the state of unity, for he has all those delimitations and determinations. But if we look at his state of annihilation, then he is sheer existence. And in either cases, when we look at Zayd and say, 'Zayd is annihilated,' the subject of our statement refers to the selfsame entity that *used to be* Zayd before annihilation, but is not Zayd after that. It used to be Zayd so long as it was outside God's Essence, but there is no object of reference after he reaches annihilation; there is no Zayd anymore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed there is no subject in the Essence of the Truth. And it is true that ‘There is no he but Him’ (*la huwa illa Hu*) and ‘Thou threwest not when thou threwest.’ But if you maintain that we had a Zayd at some point but not anymore, then Zayd was not annihilated, for the sentence ‘Zayd was annihilated’ has a subject. You have to take care of this issue. Take the viewpoint of plurality, or that of unity; take any perspective that you so desire; the pronoun would still need an object of reference and you have to be able to show it! But you cannot show it, and at the same time it would be wrong to conclude that there is no annihilation. Sure, we do not have this sense of annihilation, but we do have some annihilation, where Zayd’s Permanent Archetype is preserved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

now on It observes unconditionality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Glorified be Allah from that which they describe [of Him] \* Except for Allah's chosen servants.***

***(37: 159-60)***

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

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

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

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

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

## **The verse, 'And unto Him you are overturned'**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now how can we combine all these?

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

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

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

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

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

And thus is the case of the other examples, like ‘The larva flew off,’ and ‘The butterfly burnt in fire.’ Consider a fire, a heap of glowing and flaming fire! The butterfly throws itself into the fire, catches fire and burns. It becomes fire and light, unconditional and boundless. And we say, ‘The butterfly burnt and *became* fire.’ Where is the butterfly? Where is its Permanent Archetype? The butterfly was a butterfly when it had not fallen into the fire. Once it fell into the fire and *became* fire, then it is not that ‘the butterfly is fire,’ but ‘only the fire *is*.’ Whoever looks at the fire would say, ‘The fire is fire’ (without any reference to the butterfly).

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

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

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

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

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

Likewise, we strip Zayd of his determination and say, 'He is now annihilated in God's Essence.' Thus there would be no determination in God's Essence. In that realm, only absolute existence is absolute existence. In other words, that being which we used to call 'Zayd' had a determined share of existence; we dismissed that determination, and therefore only the existence remains. So existence is existence, and that is the absolute existence, which is the existence of the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He.

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

There are two verses in the Noble Qur'an:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the other examples, we say that 'The larva flew off,' or 'The butterfly became fire.' But if there is no

butterfly whatsoever, then there is no butterfly to have become fire, and it would not make sense to say, 'The *butterfly* became fire.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The sentence 'Zayd became annihilated' is no different than the other sentences. That is, the conjugate 'became' in this sentence should have the same meaning and be interpreted in the same way as in 'The butterfly became fire,' 'The droplet became water,' 'The sugar cube became dissolved,' and 'The larva in the water became a "flier".' Do we uphold the subsistence of the Permanent Archetypes of the butterfly, the droplet, the sugar cube and the larva when they – respectively – become fire, water, dissolved or a 'flier'? No, we do not. Likewise we do not uphold the subsistence of Zayd's Permanent Archetype.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If the meaning of '**And unto Him you are overturned**' (29:21) is that even the Permanent Archetype of Zayd does not persist, and that it is the Truth that observes the Truth, then why do we say, 'Zayd was annihilated'?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then if one asks Zayd after annihilation, 'Who are you, and where do you come from?' he would reply 'I

am nothing. I am not Zayd. “Where do you come from?” belongs to the realm of multiplicity, but here is the realm of unity (*tawhid*). There is no time or space here; there is no Zayd or ‘Amr here.’

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

## ‘The glass is delicate and so is the wine’

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zayd spent a lifetime as a determined being, and once he annihilates, the Truth sees Himself

unconditional and with no determination. At the end, it is *Zayd* who has grown out of determination, and so the subject remains in its position.

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

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

## The 'known provision' of mukhlasin

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

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

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

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

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

## The impermanence of physical and spiritual imposed movements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 5. Mystical Discourses

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

STUDENT. There are a few questions concerning the revelation of the Qur'an and Allah's orders and prohibitions to His Messenger (peace be upon him and his family). It has been reported that when receiving revelation, the Prophet used to pale and turn yellow or white, and his body would become heavy, like an unconscious person. Did this always happen during revelations, or only sometimes?

Also, would he recite the verses for the people and the scribes who recorded the revelation in that very unnatural state, or would he wait to recover from that condition? And did the scribes accompany him all the time so as to write down the revelation, or would they write it down later? Moreover, did the Prophet receive revelation through Gabriel, or did the High Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. God) directly reveal to him with no veil or intermediary?

'ALLAMAH. One cannot maintain that the condition of the Messenger of Allah always changed at the time of revelation. There is no evidence for such a claim. There were times when he had a change of condition, whereby he would faint like a dead person until later on when he would recover.

Also, it is not quite evident whether he used to recite the verses in that peculiar state or after recovery. It is inferred from some narrations that there were instances when he read them out before recovery. Then when he reverted from state of annihilation (*fana'*) to the state of subsistence (*baqa'*), he would check how his Companions had recorded the verses. This shows that he sometimes recited the verses in the state of annihilation and unconsciousness, and would recite them once again after returning to normal.

It is narrated that Imam Sadiq was asked, 'O son of the Messenger of Allah! Did the Noble Messenger use to faint and lose consciousness because of not having the endurance and strength to meet and confront Gabriel?' Imam Sadiq replied,

The fainting occurred when the Supreme Allah revealed, addressed, and spoke to His Messenger directly and with no intermediary.<sup>1</sup>

Otherwise, Gabriel used to stand by like a slave and serf before his master, ask for permission, and then convey the message. That was the case when revelation was conveyed by Gabriel. But those instances when the state and condition of the Prophet changed were when Allah Himself was revealing and speaking to him.

For example, it is narrated that Chapter 5 (al-Ma'idah) was revealed when the Noble Prophet was entering Medina. The revelation of this chapter was so weighty, tough, and intense that the camel on which the Prophet was mounted was about to sink down to the ground and lie down because of the pressure.<sup>2</sup>

## 'Unless through revelation or from behind a veil or by sending an emissary'

'ALLAMAH. There are different verses and narrations concerning how the chapters (sing. *surah*) of the Qur'an descended. Some imply that the Supreme Allah used to manifest and reveal with no intermediary, while it is inferred from others that the revelation was done through Gabriel. The whole story is summarised in a verse toward the end of Chapter 42 (al-Shura):

***And no human being is spoken to by Allah, except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or that He sendeth a messenger who reveals what He wills by His leave. Truly He is All-High, All-Wise. (42:51)***

Here, Allah's revelation is mentioned in parallel to His sending of a messenger. That is, 'by revelation' (*wahyan*) is on a par with 'He sendeth a messenger' and also with 'from behind a veil.' It means that Gabriel (i.e. a messenger) was not involved in cases of [direct] revelation.

This verse clearly shows that when the Qur'an was sent down through revelation, it was a direct revelation by the Supreme Truth (i.e. God) unto the Noble Messenger, and not through Gabriel. And when the Qur'an was sent down through Gabriel, there was no direct manifestation of Allah to the Prophet. This is very clear and is deduced from having an affirmation after a negation (i.e. the verse first denies God's speaking to anyone, but then affirms it in three cases: by revelation, from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger). Thus whatever is sent down through Gabriel or his associates is distinct from [direct] 'revelation'.

## Revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet

'ALLAMAH. For example, the first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed are:

***In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All- Compassionate \* Read in the name of thy Lord Who created \* Created man from a blood-clot \* Read; and thy Lord is the Most Gracious \* [He is] Who taught by the pen \* He taught man what he knew not. (96: 1- 5)***

It seems that these verses were first revealed directly by Allah, Exalted is He. That means that the revelation of these verses by Gabriel occurred later on.

Three verses in the Qur'an say that the Qur'an has been sent down through Gabriel (Jabra'il), the 'Holy Spirit' (*Ruh al-Qudus*), and the 'Trustworthy Spirit' (*al-Ruh al-Amin*):

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

***Say: the Holy Spirit hath delivered it from thy Lord in truth, that it may confirm those who believe.... (16: 102)***

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

These verses apparently imply that it was Gabriel who brought down all of the Qur'an. I have come up with an explanation that clarifies the fact of the matter and takes into account all verses of the Qur'an concerning revelation. I do not know how plausible and graspable it is, but it goes like this:

There are three stages for the process of revelation. The first stage is Allah's direct revelation upon the Prophet, with no intermediate. The second stage, which is inferior to the first, is when the verses are not directly revealed by Allah, but are sent through Gabriel. That is, Gabriel is also involved in Allah's sending of revelation, and Allah reveals *by means of* Gabriel. The third stage, which is yet lower, is when revelation is not even directly carried out by Gabriel, but by his associates and agents. In this case, revelation descends from Allah by means of Gabriel, and then from Gabriel by means of his associates. Thus, Allah, Gabriel, and his associates are all involved in this type of revelation.

The Noble Qur'an mentions this last type, where revelation is carried out by Gabriel's associates, by saying that these divine verses are contained in certain 'tablets' carried by 'noble and righteous envoys'. That is how the verses were descended upon the Messenger of Allah:

***No indeed, it is a reminder \* And whoso willeth pay heed to it \* On high-honoured pages \* Elevated and purified \* By hands of envoys \* [Who are] noble and righteous. (80: 11-16)***

## The different types and stages of revelation were due to the different states and circumstances

'ALLAMAH. In each of these three stages, the three agents of revelation – that is, God, Gabriel and the 'noble and righteous envoys' – were all present, and revelation in every stage was done by them all. However, in some cases, the main focus was on God Himself, such that Gabriel and the envoys were not seen. Those were the cases when the state and condition of the Messenger of Allah would change. These cases are referred to as 'by revelation' (*wahyan*) in verse 42:51 (mentioned above).

And in some instances, the main focus was on Gabriel, such that the envoys were not considered, and God was considered through the 'mirror' and means of Gabriel. And in other instances, the main focus was on Gabriel's agents and associate angels – the 'envoys'. There, Gabriel and the Supreme Truth were observed through the beings and determinations of the envoys. The part of the verse in Chapter 42 that says, 'or that He sendeth a messenger' corresponds to the two latter cases, where the messenger was sometimes Gabriel, and sometimes the noble and righteous envoys who are Gabriel's agents and associates.

So based on the verse '***And no human being is spoken to by Allah, except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or that He sendeth a messenger,***' (42:51) Allah's revelation is when He speaks Himself and without employing any intermediary; that is, when God manifests and speaks directly to the His Messenger.

These stages are very comparable to death and the taking of spirits upon death. The Noble Qur'an mentions three stages for taking the spirits (*qabd al-ruh*):

***Allah captureth the souls at the time of their death, and that [soul] which hath not died [He captureth it] in its sleep.... (39:42)***

***Say: the angel of death, who hath been authorised over you, captureth you.... (32:11)***

***... Until when death cometh to one of you, Our emissaries capture him, and they neglect not. (6:61)***

There are also other verses in the Noble Qur'an similar to the last verse. Overall, it is deduced from these verses that at one stage, Allah directly seizes the spirit. At another stage, the act has been attributed to the Angel of Death (*malak al-mawt*), and at a lower stage it has been attributed to the angels and emissaries appointed to seize the spirits.

Allah – Exalted He is – the Angel of Death and the angels that seize the spirits are all involved in each of these three stages. The only difference is that in some cases, since the dying individual is inattentive of all but Allah, the Supreme High Truth seizes the spirit Himself, without any intermediary. That is, the

dying individual does not see 'Izra'il (the Angel of Death) or any other angels, even though they may be involved in the process.

And in some cases, the dying person is not at such a rank to be able to totally immerse himself in the divine lights of the High One. Nevertheless he retains certain degrees of sincerity. Therefore the process of expiration is carried out directly by 'Izra'il. And in some cases it is done by 'Izra'il's agents and subordinate angels. In the second stage, the person does not observe God; and in the third stage, he observes neither God nor 'Izra'il. So the difference between these stages hinges on the degrees and stations at which the dying individuals are. And apparently the different stages at which the Qur'an was revealed had a similar story: the three stages were due to the different states, stations and circumstances at which the verses were sent down.

### **'And he speaketh not out of desire \* It is naught but a revelation that is revealed'**

***And he speaketh not out of desire \* It is naught but a revelation that is revealed \* The Intensely Powerful hath taught him. (53:3-4)***

STUDENT. Does this verse mean that everything that the Messenger of Allah said was a revelation? Or does the primary and apparent (*zahir*) sense of the verse imply that only what the Prophet recited as Qur'an were revelations?

Drawing on the above verses, some have argued that even the regular speeches of the Messenger of Allah were revelations from God. For instance, when speaking about the Prophet's order regarding the dispatch of Usamah's army,<sup>3</sup> or his request for some paper and an inkwell at the time of his death so that the Muslim community (*ummah*) may never go astray,<sup>4</sup> they make reference to these noble verses that ***'And he speaketh not out of desire \* It is naught but a revelation that is revealed.'*** But is it true that what the Messenger of Allah said concerning personal, family and social matters was also revealed? Of course even his casual and everyday speeches were true and righteous, but is it correct to establish this by the above verses?

'ALLAMAH. The first verse – 'And he speaketh not out of desire' – is absolute and unconditional (*mutlaq*). That is, it applies not only to the verses of the Qur'an, but also to the other words of the Prophet. So one can claim that the Messenger of Allah did not speak out of desire or personal proclivity. However, the verses ***'It is naught but a revelation that is revealed \* The Intensely Powerful hath taught him'*** are about the Noble Qur'an in particular. They do not refer to the everyday speeches of the Prophet and his orders concerning personal affairs.

STUDENT. Some people refrain from using the pronoun 'I' when they talk. Instead of saying, 'I did such and such,' 'I went,' 'I said,' and so on, they use the third person pronoun, 'he' (*huwa*). They say, 'he did so,' 'he went,' and 'he ate.' Is this out of self-discipline – so as to not get accustomed to saying 'I' and to

refrain from egocentricity and ascribing actions to one's self? Or do they mean to ascribe actions to the Truth (*al-Haqq*), and want to not bring in themselves as a being alongside God? Of course such an approach would not be absolute *tawhid* (unity), because in absolute *tawhid* nothing is seen other than the High Truth, and so even if one attributes an action to himself it would be identical to attributing it to the Truth, Exalted and Bounteous is He.

'ALLAMAH. Apparently for some people it is for the purpose of self-discipline. They do not want to get accustomed to saying 'I' here and there, as a preparation for the station of *tawhid*.

And concerning *tawhid*, there is a narration from Imam Sadiq in which he shows a particular inclination and preference to identifying the term *huwa* (he) with Allah, i.e. God's Essence.<sup>5</sup> In that case, there is no 'he' (*huwa*) but Allah, and that settles the case for everyone else.

**Say: He, Allah is One. (112:1)**

***Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, thou wouldst have verily seen it humbled and cleaved asunder out of fear of Allah; and such parables We propound for mankind, haply they may reflect. \* He is Allah but Whom there is no deity, the Knower of the invisible and the visible; He is All-Merciful, All- Compassionate. [ ' Allamah added: 'There is no deity but Huwa [He].'] \* He is Allah but Whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Sacrosanct, the Peaceable, the Trusty, the Predominant, the All-Mighty, the Irresistible, the Grandiose; Glorified be Allah from what they associate [with Him]. (59:21-3)***

All this is about the *Huwa* and describes the *Huwa*.

## **Imam 'Ali's dream of Hadrat Khidr and his teaching of the Greatest Name**

'ALLAMAH. It is reported that on the night before the battle of Badr, Imam 'Ali dreamt of Hadrat Khidr and told him, 'Teach me an invocation (*dhikr*) that I may recite and thus defeat the enemy!' Hadrat Khidr told him,

Say: O He! O Who there is no he but Him.

Next morning Imam 'Ali narrated his dream for the Messenger of Allah, who told him, 'O 'Ali! Thou hast been taught the Greatest Name (*al-Isim al-A'zam*).'<sup>6</sup>

And truly such a meaningful expression it is: 'O He! O Who there is no he but Him' (*ya Huwa ya man la huwa illa Hu*). This finishes the story of *tawhid*; 'O He! O Who is He! O Who He is He! O Who there is no he but Him.'

So Imam 'Ali recited this invocation as he fought the next day, 'I was engaged in this invocation through

the battle of Badr.’ And *Huwa* (He) was indeed showing some of His manifestations! That is right, all these things around us are His manifestations. People look with blind eyes, but Imam ‘Ali looks with a different pair of eyes. All these things around us are different forms and types of manifestations of the Truth, Majestic and Exalted is He.

## The late Qadi and tawhid

STUDENT. The late Qadi was a very strange man. He was like a mountain: solid, vigorous, resourceful and talented. Yet some of his students did not learn about *tawhid* even after ten or twelve years of meeting with him, and had no share of the unity of the Supreme Truth.<sup>7</sup> Maybe this was because he used to walk at their pace. At any rate they just got engaged in the realm of multiplicity until the late Qadi passed away. But some of his other students were very quick in acquiring divine knowledge, like learning about God’s Names and Attributes, and His unity of Essence. Did the late Qadi, with whom may Allah be pleased, ever discuss and speak about subtle topics of *tawhid* (monotheism, unity) in the meetings he had with his select friends and students?

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, the late Qadi used to speak of these topics with some of his students who were quite trustworthy. The late Qadi was certainly a strange man. He treated each student in accordance to his states and aptitude. And his students were also very different. Some of them used to prosper sooner, but others had a slower progress.

Generally speaking, the late Qadi was usually accessible for ten to twenty days, during which his friends used to drop by and have conversations and discussions. Then he used to disappear all of a sudden, and was not found at all for a few days – not at home, not at school, not at the mosque, not in the Mosque of Kufa and not in the Mosque of Sahlah. There was absolutely no trace of him. Even his wives had no idea where he had gone and what he was doing; nobody knew! During these days, his friends used to search for him everywhere that they could think of, but could not find him. He was totally gone. Then he used to reemerge after some days and resume his lessons and private sessions at home and school. Likewise he had many other peculiarities and wonders, and many strange and unfamiliar states.

## Monotheistic states of the late Qadi

‘ALLAMAH. There was an account of him that I heard from quite a few scholars in Najaf. I later asked him myself and he confirmed it.

At the time, the late Qadi was ill, with an aching leg that he could not bend or move. One day he was sitting in the terrace of his house, and it was during the days when the two tribes of Dhikurt and Shimirt were fighting in the noble city of Najaf. One side of the city was fighting against the other. They had taken the rooftops of the city buildings as barricades and were firing at each other on top of the buildings.

Eventually the Dhikurts overcame the Shimirts and drove them back. Thus, the Dhikurts were advancing and taking over the rooftops house by house. Incidentally, the late Qadi's rooftop was occupied by the Shimirts, who were firing at the Dhikurts. As the Dhikurts advanced and took over his rooftop, they killed two of the Shimirts who were on his rooftop. This was while the late Qadi was sitting in the terrace watching. As the Dhikurts captured the roof, the Shimirts retreated and the fight was carried to the courtyard. So two of the Shimirts were killed on the terrace and another two in the courtyard, for a total of six.

'When they killed those two people on the roof,' the late Qadi narrated, 'blood flowed down the waterspout like rainwater. And I was just sitting there where I was and not moving at all.' After all that, which was quite a scene, the Dhikurts raided into the rooms despoiling and taking anything of their interest.

Of course, the flavour and subtlety of the story was that, as the late Qadi said, 'I did not move. I kept sitting where I had sat, and watched.' 'There was blood coming down the waterspout, there were two dead bodies lying on the terrace and another two in the yard; and [yet] I was [just] watching.' Such states and dispositions are called annihilation (*fana'*) in *tawhid*, where the wayfarer (*salik*) does not see anything other than Allah. He perceives every act and movement as a manifestation of the Truth.

There was another account of the late Qadi which I myself observed. A friend of the late Qadi had a room in the well-known Hindi Bukhara'i School of Najaf. As he was leaving for a journey, he left the room to the late Qadi so that he could use it for sleeping, holding gatherings, or any other needs and activities. The late Qadi used to go there everyday near sunset, and his intimate students used to join him for congregational prayer. They were about seven to ten students in total. After prayer, the late Qadi used to hold a discussion session until two hours after sunset, and the students used to ask him questions and benefit from his speeches.

One night, we were sitting in the room with the late Qadi, who started lecturing about God's Unity of Actions (*al-tawhid al-af'ali*). He was quite into explaining and expanding on the unity of actions when suddenly it was as if the ceiling was coming down. There was a stovepipe at one side of the room, which began to make a plunking sound, as if something was falling, and the room was filled with noise and dust. All my fellow students and I got to our feet and rushed to the door, pushing and shoving each other in order to exit.

In the meantime, it became evident that the ceiling was not damaged, and therefore we came back and sat down where we were sitting. But our late master (Mr Qadi) had not moved a bit. He had been sitting right where he was, even though the damage in the ceiling had started from above his head. 'Come! O you believers of the unity of actions!' he told us as we came back and sat down. Yes, that is right! All of the students were stunned, not knowing what to reply. Then he continued and finished his speech about the unity of actions.

That was a trial for us, because our late master was speaking about such matters and this relevant incident came up. That is why he said, ‘Come! O you believers of the unity of actions!’

Later on we came to know that the school was connected to another school, such that the rooms of the two schools were almost side by side and the replica of one another. Only a wall separated the two schools. So, on that occasion, the ceiling in the twin room had come down, and the noise and dust was from the other room, as the two rooms were connected through the heater duct. Yes, that is how we were tested.

## God’s Unity of Actions

STUDENT. There are those who argue that if a person is offered a present, he should accept it on the account of God’s Unity of Actions (*al-tawhid al-af ‘ali*), because according to the unity of actions, the [real] donor is Allah and it is not appropriate to reject a present and favour from Allah. One should choose God’s favour over his own dignity and nobility of soul (*‘izzat al-nafs*), and open a path for himself toward God’s unity of actions by accepting the gift as a present from Allah.

But others have different considerations like the nobility of one’s soul, and so they do not accept all that they are offered. In order to reach and realise *tawhid*, what should a wayfarer of the path of Allah do in this regard? Which one is more important: the preservation of one’s nobility of soul, or the view of God’s unity of actions?

In many cases, the donor offers the present as an aid or charity, with some sort of inner sense of pity. Or the gift may be a ‘semi-bribe’, so as to prepare the grounds for acceptance of a future request – whether legitimate or not. And in many cases, acceptance of gifts results in some right and entitlement for the donor, whereby he would expect and demand some attention and right in return, which could be harmful for a wayfarer’s progress. And the least is that accepting a gift involves some obligation (*minnah*). So on one hand it is not apt for a wayfarer to be indebted to others, but on the other hand it is also harmful for his spiritual journey if he detaches himself from others, disregards Allah’s creatures and rejects their requests.

‘ALLAMA. It is necessary to accept a gift, on the condition that it does not entail humiliation or illegitimate consequences. Rejecting a present is not commendable. It is reported from Imam ‘Ali that ‘Only a donkey rejects favours.’<sup>8</sup> And there are other narrations that only a hard rock or a disturbed and aberrant person rejects a favour. Of course, it seems better not to accept a present if it involves negative consequences such as humiliation, obligation, or the like. And a wayfarer in the path of Allah should take these aspects into account. But as a general rule, it should be held that accepting a gift is mandatory, for ‘only a donkey rejects favours.’ This is a general rule of thumb. But when it involves humiliation, obligation or other improper implications, then ethical considerations overrule the acceptance principle. That is because the very acquiescence of humiliation or obligation impedes a wayfarer’s progress.

'ALLAMAH. The late Akhund Mulla Husayn–Quli Hamadani truly had an astonishing character. He trained about three hundred students, including his direct students and his students' students. Some of them were more or less perfect individuals, like the late Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i, the late Shaykh Muhammad Bihari, Sayyid Muhammad Sa'id Habbubi, and Mirza Jawad Aqa Maliki Tabrizi (may Allah be pleased with them).

It is reported that once, certain individuals (jurist scholars) conspired against the late Akhund Mulla Husayn–Quli, and wrote a petition against his mystic, esoteric, and monotheistic practice, which they submitted to the late Ayatollah Sharabyani. (That was when the late Sharabyani held the authority of [Shi'a] Muslims and was recognised as the absolute Source of Emulation.) Their objection was that Akhund Mulla Husayn–Quli was following the Sufis.

The late Sharabyani read their letter, picked up a pen and wrote underneath their letter, 'I wish Allah would make me a Sufi like the Akhund.' And with this statement, Sharabyani put an end to the matter, and all their plots fell flat.

Our late master, Mirza 'Ali Qadi, narrated that his master, the late Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i, said, 'We continually used to be at the service of Akhund Mulla Husayn–Quli Hamadani and he was totally ours (may Allah be pleased with him). But as soon as Shaykh Muhammad Bihari became acquainted with the Akhund and joined the circle of his students, he started attending his service all the time and "stole" the Akhund from us.'

The late Qadi also told us this story about his master, the late Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i: while on a journey, Aqa Sayyid Ahmad came across an illuminated and bright-hearted dervish. 'I have been ordered to let you in on two things,' the dervish told Sayyid Ahmad. 'The first is alchemy, and the second is that I will die tomorrow, and you should undertake my funeral and bury me!' The late Sayyid Ahmad replied, 'As with the first matter, I have no need for alchemy. But I will carry out your funeral.' So the dervish passed away the next day, and Sayyid Ahmad took care of his funeral, shrouding, and burial.

One of the individuals with whom the late Qadi was closely associated for many years was the late Sayyid Murtada Kashmiri, who was among the well-known ascetics and saints of the time. He was a man of clairvoyance and unique states and stations, and was a truly courteous, moral, and noble scholar. However, his field was not that of the late Akhund Mulla Husayn–Quli – i.e. the field of *tawhid* and gnosis. Nevertheless he was a very treasured and honourable character in terms of his spiritual states and conditions.

The late Qadi told us:

One day I and Aqa Sayyid Murtada Kashmiri went from the noble city of Najaf to the holy city of Karbala' to pay a visit to the tomb of Imam Husayn. As we arrived there, we headed for a room located in the school in the bazaar between the two shrines (*bayn al-haramayn*). The room was at the end of a set of stairs, which the late Sayyid Murtada started climbing, and I followed him behind. We finished climbing

the stairs, only to find out that the door of the room was locked. The late Kashmiri glanced at me and said, 'It is narrated that a closed lock can be opened if one utters the name of Prophet Moses' mother. And my mother is no lower than Prophet Moses' mother.' So he took hold of the lock and said, 'O Fatimah!' He put aside the opened lock as we entered the room.

## The Prophet's station of subsistence after annihilation

STUDENT. The Messenger of Allah had certain states and characteristics that are absolutely astonishing. On one hand, we know that he was aware of the secrets, intentions, and the plots made against him. He had full knowledge of all the things that happened inside and outside his house. His knowledge also included the events that would occur after his death: the afflictions that would happen to his dear daughter, Fatimah Zahra', and the battles of Jamal, Siffin, and Nahrawan.<sup>9</sup> For example one day he told his wives:

I wish I knew which one of you will be riding the hairy camel, barked at by the dogs of Haw'ab?<sup>10</sup>

He also spoke about the deserters of Usamah's army,<sup>11</sup> and the oppression that Imam 'Ali would face.<sup>12</sup> He was well-aware of what was going on when he requested paper and an inkwell in order to write something so that the Muslim nation may never go astray – which was prevented by some of the Companions, who said that the Messenger of Allah was hallucinating and talking nonsense.<sup>13</sup>

And on the other hand he put up with them (the hypocrites) a lot. He used to treat them leniently, did not change his manners and conduct (in response to all their mischief), and did not exhibit any violence or harshness. Instead, he was all tolerance, patience, and endurance, from head to toe. Was this behaviour and tolerance of the Messenger of Allah because he used to see these events with a view of unity of actions (*al-tawhid al-af'ali*), that all these events are from the Supreme Truth? That is, was it similar to what you narrated of the late Qadi in the case of Dhikurts and Shimirts, or the breakdown of the heater in the neighbouring room?

'ALLAMAH. No! The condition of the Messenger of Allah was far superior and more advanced than that of the late Qadi. The Messenger of Allah had reached the station of subsistence (*baqa'*) after annihilation (*fana'*). In that station, the properties and features of the world of multiplicity – such as feeling pain, disease, grief, and emotional distress – are all present. The Honourable Messenger fully displayed every aspect of the realm of plurality, and at the same time he was at the state of unity, with the signs and properties of *tawhid*. That is why when his son Ibrahim died, his eyes were shedding tears, and he described it as a sign of Allah's mercy. But at the same time he did not say anything but the truth, for the event was from Allah. He had submitted to Allah, and was pleased with His pleasure:

The heart grieves, and the eyes weep, yet we say not but the truth, and we are certainly sorrowful because of thee, O Ibrahim.<sup>14</sup>

These incidents (the mischief and conspiracies) were harder and more pressing on him as he knew what was going on. He fully realised the details and consequences of these affairs, but he was the man of **‘And certainly thou art of a tremendous conduct’ (68:4)**. So he used to tolerate and forbear, and his patience and endurance never ran out. There is a famous narration from him:

No prophet was ever bothered as I was. [15](#)

I reckon that this narration was concerning this very issue of hypocrites within the community of the Muslims, not the infidels and polytheists on the outside. No words can describe the troubles and difficulties that the Messenger of Allah incurred because of the hypocrites, both from inside and outside his house. They were those who had apparently joined Islam even though they had no inclination toward Islam or the Messenger of Allah. Save for the troubles caused by the hypocrites, the calamities of the Noble Messenger were insignificant compared to those of the previous prophets. The afflictions that the previous prophets had to face were seemingly more intense and more severe. For example, some of them were thrown into boiling cauldrons, but the Messenger of Allah was never tortured like that. Yet he says, ‘No prophet was ever bothered as much as I was.’ So it must have been the selfsame issue of the hypocrites. In this regard, the annoyance and trouble that the hypocrites caused for the Messenger of Allah is truly beyond our comprehension and description.

## [The marvels \(irhas\) of the Imams](#)

STUDENT. Did the Pure Imams achieve the unveiling of *tawhid* (the reality of God’s unity) by going through the path of perfection, taking on efforts, and finally realising their talents, or was it something inborn in them? For example, how was it that Imam Muhammad Taqi Jawad became an Imam in childhood?

‘ALLAMAH. This is known as *irhas* (‘marvel’). *Irhas* is a supernatural act that occurs before its maturity and usual time. For example, it is reported that when Hadrat Fatimah bint al-Asad gave birth to her son, Imam ‘Ali, and came out of the Holy House of Allah, the Noble Messenger came forward and received the newborn. There, Imam ‘Ali started reading Chapter 23 (al-Mu’minun) for the Messenger of Allah, from the beginning to the end. This was while he was an infant and was only a few hours old. That was a case of *irhas*. [16](#)

Other sorts of supernatural acts are either called *karamah* (‘charismatic power’) or *mu’jizah* (‘miracle’). But if it occurs prior to its time, it is called *irhas*. Our Imams had several cases of *irhas*. For instance, Hadrat Fatimah Zahra’ used to talk (to her mother) in her mother’s womb. [17](#) That is *irhas*, not *mu’jizah* (a prophetic miracle). And so is the case with Imam Jawad and many other Imams. In fact, it has more or less been with all the Imams.

## The Imams' playing games in childhood

STUDENT. Did the Imams play games in their childhood? And did they use to play the same kind of games as other children? Has this been reported in reliable narrations and valid histories and hagiographies?

'ALLAMAH. There is nothing wrong with their playing games *per se*. And there are two stories that are reported regarding Imam Jawad. The first one is that he was playing with the kids in the street, when Ma'mun (the Abbasid caliph) passed by. There, Ma'mun asked him some questions and Imam Jawad answered them. [18](#)

The second one is narrated by the Sufis. They mention that Imam Jawad was once playing hide-and-seek with Bayazid Bastami. They decided that Imam Jawad would hide and Bayazid would go and find him. So Imam Jawad hid, but Bayazid could not find him in spite of searching everywhere in the world. This story is narrated as a *karamah* of Imam Jawad. Then apparently Imam Jawad called Bayazid from deep in his heart, 'I am here! Where are you searching?' [19](#)

I do not exactly remember where I saw this account. It could have been one of two books: Ma'sum 'Ali Shah's *Tara'iq al-Haqa'iq (The Paths of Realities)* or 'Abd al-Rahman Jami's *Nafahat al-Uns (The Breaths of Intimacy)*. That is narrated by the Sufis, and of course it would make sense that Bayazid could not find Imam Jawad. [20](#)

We have two Jamis: 'Abd al-Rahman and Ahmad. 'Abd al-Rahman was more in-depth than Ahmad, and has some good books and nice discussions and poetry.

## The rise of Imam Mahdi

STUDENT. Do you remember anything from the late Qadi regarding the emergence of Imam al-Hujjat ibn al-Hasan (may our spirits be sacrificed for him)?

'ALLAMAH. Based on the narrations, once Imam Mahdi appears, he will start his call from Mecca, where he will stand between the *rukni* and *maqam*, with his back to the Ka'bah. [21](#) He will make his proclamation, and three hundred and sixty of his elect companions will congregate before him. [22](#) According to our master, the late Qadi, Imam Mahdi will give them certain instructions whereby they will all split up and spread out around the horizons of the world. And since they will all be capable of *tayy al-ard* (instantaneous self-transportation), they will search the entire world and realise that, apart from Imam Mahdi, no one else possesses the status of Unconditional Divine Guardianship (*al-wilayat al-mutlaqah al-ilahiyyah*), no one else owns the treasures of Divine Secrets, no one else is the Director of God's Command (*sahib al-amr*), and no one else has been ordered to emerge and rise. Then they (the Imam's companions) will all return to Mecca, submit to the Imam and pledge allegiance (*bay'ah*) to him.

The late Qadi (may Allah be pleased with him) once told us, ‘I know the word which Imam Mahdi will tell his companions when they all spread around the world.’ I saw the same thing in a narration from Imam Sadiq – that he said, ‘I know that word.’<sup>23</sup>

The late Qadi told us that some of the people of our time have certainly had the honour of meeting and attending the presence of Imam Mahdi. One of these cases occurred in the Mosque of Sahlah, in the Station of Imam Mahdi, known as *Maqam Sahib al-Zaman*. The person was engaged in supplication and invocation, when he suddenly saw the Imam approaching him in the midst of a very intense light. The splendour and magnificence of the light was such that he was about to die. He had one or two remaining breaths and before dying and adjured the Imam by the Majestic Names of Allah to not come any closer. And two weeks later, the same person was engaged in invocation (*dhikr*) in the Mosque of Kufa, when the Imam appeared to him, whereby he attained what he wanted: the honour of meeting. The late Qadi revealed the identity of that person: Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Amuli.

<sup>1</sup>. See Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* (Beirut, 1983), 18: 256; from Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), *al-Tawhid* (Qum, 1416/1995): 115, with minor differences.

<sup>2</sup>. Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur* (Beirut, 197?), 2:252.

<sup>3</sup>. See Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 27:334 and 30:432-3.

<sup>4</sup>. See note 32 on Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup>. See Kulayni, *al-Kafi (al-Usul)* (Tehran, 1388/1968), 1: 91.

<sup>6</sup>. The narration, reported from Imam Muhammad Baqir, continues:

And he [Imam ‘Ali] – peace be upon him – also recited Chapter 112 (*al-Ikhlās*) in the battle of Badr. When he was done with the battle, he said, ‘O He, O Who there is no he but Him, forgive me and help me against the disbelievers.’ And he used to say the same thing in the battle of Siffin as he attacked. Then ‘Ammar ibn Yasir asked him, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, what are these intimations?’

‘It is the Greatest Name of Allah’ he replied, ‘and the pillar for Allah’s unity. There is no he but Him.’ Then he recited the verse, ‘Allah, [while] standing on justice, bears witness that there is no deity save Him, and the angels and the people of knowledge [also bear witness]; there is no deity but Him, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise’ [3:18] and also the last [four] verses of Chapter 59 (*al-Hashr*). Then he performed four units (*rak’ah*) of prayer before noontime.

Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan* (Beirut, 1995), 10:486, in exegesis of Chapter 112; originally reported by Shaykh al-Saduq in *al-Tawhid*: 89. It is narrated with a complete line of transmission, from Abi al-Bakhtari Wahab ibn Wahab, from Imam Sadiq, from Imam Baqir, who reports the above narration as he comments on the verse 112:1. The Imam narrates from his father, from his grandfather (Imam Husayn), from Imam ‘Ali.

<sup>7</sup>. [Translator’s note. In gnostic discussions, what the author intends when he speaks of God’s unity (*tawhid*) should not be confused with the ordinary sense of the term. In these contexts, *tawhid* refers to the deep and subtle levels of one’s gnosis of Allah’s unity. It is not a matter of pure knowledge any more, but is a status of vision and unveiling of the limitlessness of God’s knowledge, power, and life.]

<sup>8</sup>. Kulayni, *al-Kafi (al-Usul)*, 2:659, with minor differences.

<sup>9</sup>. [Translator’s note. These were the three internal battles that Imam ‘Ali fought during the first three years of his caliphate (35–40/656–661).]

<sup>10</sup>. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* (Cairo, 1959–), 9:311; Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 32:163.

<sup>11</sup>. See note 171 above.

<sup>12</sup>. See *Kitab* of Sulaym ibn Qays, no. 6 and no. 66; Muhammad Rayshahri, *Mawsu’ah al-Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib* (2nd ed., Qum, 1425/2004), 9:408–15; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* (Cairo, 1959–), 4:106–8.

[13.](#) See Chapter 2, note 32.

[14.](#) See Chapter 3, note 105.

[15.](#) See al-Mizan (Beirut, 1970), 6:53; Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib-i Al- i Abi Talib (Najaf, 1956), 3:42.

[16.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib-i Al-i Abi Talib, 2:23; Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, al-Amali (Qum, 1414/1995): 708. 'Allamah Majlisi has reported from both sources in Bihar al-Anwar, 35: 18 and 35:35 respectively.

[17.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib-i Al-i Abi Talib, 3: 118; Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Amali (Qum, 1417/1996): 690; al-Qunduzi, Yanabi' al-Mawaddah (Tehran, 1416/1995), 2: 134.

[18.](#) Baha' al-Din Muhammad ibn Husayn al-'Amili (Shaykh al-Baha'i), Miftah al-Falah (Beirut, 1324/1906): 171; Muhammad ibn Talhah al-Shafi'i, Matalib al-Sa'ul fi Manaqib-i Al-i Rasul (Beirut, 1420/1999), 2: 141. [Translator's note. Note that the narration in Miftah al-Falah does not explicitly say that Imam Jawad was playing with the children, and based on Matalib al-Sa'ul the children were playing and the Imam was standing there.]

[19.](#) [Translator's note. There seems to be a confusion concerning the figures known as Bayazid Bastami, as there have been other Sufis with that name besides the famous Bayazid. And due to his legendary character, various unauthentic stories and anecdotes have been reported about him, which at many times contradict one another. The most famous year reported for Bayazid's death is 261/874, which actually complies with the possibility of his having met Imam Jawad (195–220/811–35). It might have been a different Bayazid who is reported to have served Imam Sadiq (80–148/699–765). See Sami'i's introduction on Lahiji, Mafatih al-I'jaz fi Sharh-i Gulshan-i Raz (Tehran, 1958): 48; and Baha' al-Din al-'Amili (Shaykh al-Baha'i), Kashkul (Qum, 1957–), 1:112–13.]

[20.](#) [Translator's note. After his migration to Medina, in one occasion the Prophet recalled and described for his companions where he used to play with the kids in his trip to Medina with his mother when he was six. See Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-Kubra (Beirut, 1376/1958), 1:116. No doubt the way and manner that a child plays differs across children based on their talents and mentalities, and one who watches them can realise these differences. The playings of the Prophet and the Imams were certainly not vain and childish acts for the sake of enjoying the game. These acts were rather manifestations of the realities and perfections within them at the minor and lower level of children. They were normal human beings whose attainment of the higher perfections did not prevent them from undertaking regular human affairs. Nevertheless their higher level of maturity and mindset were certainly evident to the other children and could be seen by anyone who observed them.]

[21.](#) [Translator's note. Rukn here is referring to the southeastern corner of the Ka'bah, where the Black Stone (al-hajar al-aswad) is situated. Maqam Ibrahim is a stone on the east side of the Ka'bah, on which Prophet Abraham stood as he was rebuilding the Ka'bah, and which bears his footprint.]

[22.](#) See Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mah (Qum, 1405/1984): 331, with minor differences.

[23.](#) [Translator's note. The reference was not found.]

## 6. Scientific Discourses

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

STUDENT. God has made the Noble Qur'an graspable by everyone:

***And truly We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there anyone that remembreth?  
(54: 17, 22, 32, 40)***

But then why is it that some verses of the Qur'an are utterly complex and intricate, such that it is so

difficult to reach their real meaning and message? For example, consider the noble verse,

***He directeth the command from the heaven to the earth, then it ascendeth toward Him in a day that is a thousand years of your measurement. (32:5)***

Reaching the real meaning of this verse and having a proper grasp of it is very hard. What is the process of descension of command from the Realm of Command (*'alam al-amr*) to the Realm of Creation (*'alam al-khalq*)? And what does it mean that it takes a thousand years of our common years for the command to ascend back? Without deep contemplation, only a simple interpretation and a straightforward literal meaning of the verse would be understandable to everyone.

Or for example, there are some terms in the Noble Qur'an whose definitions require exegesis and commentary.

One cannot know the meaning of these terms without referring to a commentary. For instance:

***By those that pluck out vehemently \* By those that gently draw out with comfort \* By those that float swiftly \* And those that hasten surpassingly \* And those that direct the command. (79: 1-5)***[1](#)

Do all people understand these verses? Or should they inquire into them and refer to books of exegesis in order to realise that they mean particular groups of angels?

Another example is the term *falaq* (disjunction) in the following verse:

***Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of falaq. (113: 1)***

According to some exegetes, *falaq* either means 'the daybreak and morning that opens up', or 'being (*wujud*) that emerges out of non-being'.[2](#) But how can one know these meanings without referring to the exegeses?

Or for example, concerning the term *wayl* (literally 'woe') in Chapter 83 (al-Mutaffifin), there is a narration that

*Wayl* is a well in hell.[3](#)

Is this a matter of naming – that different locations in the Hereafter have different names, like in this world? Or is it a symbolic interpretation?

## **The Qur'an is easy to understand; the difficulties and complexities relate to its hidden meanings**

'ALLAMA H. In terms of the meaning that initially comes to the reader's mind, it seems that all of the Noble Qur'an has been set forth very simply, such that it is understandable by everyone. Nevertheless,

there are other planes and layers of meaning beyond the initial meaning that gradually become harder and more difficult to understand. Those are the inward and hidden (*batini*) meanings of the Qur'an.

The apparent (*zahir*) meaning of every verse of the Qur'an is plain, simple, and intelligible. But the hidden meanings become more and more complex. As they become deeper, they become more difficult and more distant from the understanding of common people:

Truly the Qur'an has an inside, and its inside has an inside, up to seven insides [or up to seventy insides].<sup>4</sup>

The 'insides' refer to the different planes of the Qur'an's meaning. Each plane involves a particular reality that is not found in the other planes. Such are the various planes of the Qur'an. So it is not that the Qur'an can be looked at from a single plane, which would be either very easy and straightforward, or difficult and unintelligible.

As with Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at), once we attach those verses to the other verses of the Qur'an, it becomes evident that they refer to the angels. 'Those that direct the command' should imply the angels, because Allah, Exalted is He, would consign the direction and execution of the affairs of the universe only to one who is qualified. It is the angels who should deal with these matters and take the affairs under their own watch and protection. These verses are very similar to the verses at the beginning of Chapters 77 (al-Mursalat) and 37 (al-Saffat) and some other parts of the Noble Qur'an, whereby the angels are ordered to carry out their assignments in different ways.

And the initial meaning of the term *falaq* in the verse, '**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the falaq**' (113:1) is the splitting and opening of the morning. Then there is this general meaning that comes to mind, and that is the splitting and emergence of *any* being from non-being. So if its definition requires an interpretation even at the first plane, it would be an interpretation that clarifies the meaning of the verse by simpler terms. An initial interpretation is not one that that unravels a complexity or introduces a [deeper] reality.

And as with *wayl*, it has been defined as misfortune, woe, disaster and fatality. And its meaning as a well [in hell] is a symbolic meaning (*tamthil*), intended to represent the idea conveyed in the adjacent verses. Otherwise it is not a specific exegesis for the term [and does not represent a hidden meaning of the verse].

## **The creation of the angels and the Holy Spirit**

STUDENT. What does *ruh* ('Spirit') mean in the Noble Qur'an? For example it appears in the verse,

***The angels and the Spirit (ruh) descend on that Night [of Determination (qadr)] by the permission of their Lord for every command. (97:5)***

And what is meant by *Ruh al-Qudus* ('Holy Spirit') and *al-Ruh al-Amin* ('Trustworthy Spirit')? Is there any connection between the Spirit (*ruh*) as used in the Qur'an and the human spirit? And why are the angels mentioned alongside the *ruh*?

'ALLAMAH. *Ruh al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit) and *al-Ruh al-Amin* (the Trustworthy Spirit) refer to Gabriel (Jabra'il):

***Say: the Holy Spirit (Ruh al-Qudus) hath delivered it from thy Lord.... (16: 102)***

***The Trustworthy Spirit (al-Ruh al-Amin) hath come down with it [the Qur'an] \* Upon thy heart. (26: 193- 4)***

And the *ruh* is apparently creature that is superior to all angels, including Gabriel and Michael.

***On the day when the Spirit (ruh) and the angels stand in ranks; they speak not save whoever is permitted by the All-Merciful and speaketh aright. (78:38)***

The above verse mentions the *ruh* in addition to the angels. Thus the *ruh* cannot be Gabriel, for Gabriel is one of the angels.

The *ruh* is a transcendent being who stands at a superior existential plane compared to the angels. The angels are supported by the *ruh*, and get help from the *ruh* in the tasks that they carry out.

There are two verses in the Noble Qur'an that indicate that God sends the *ruh* to His prophets and messengers who call the people toward Him, and that the angels also descend with the *ruh*:

***He descendeth the angels with the Spirit (ruh) of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants, that they warn [people] that there is no deity save Me, so keep your duty unto me. (16:2)***

***...He casteth the Spirit (ruh) of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants, that he warneth [people] of the Day of Encounter. (40: 15)***

In his descents, his direction and planning of the world and in whatever he carries out, Gabriel gets help from the *ruh*. It is as if the *ruh* is with Gabriel and helps him through.

And the wording of the second verse is quite remarkable. It says that Allah 'casts' and 'throws' (*ilqa'*) the *ruh* on any of His servants that He sees qualified for warning and cautioning about the Day of Resurrection, which is the Day of Encounter.

In short, the *ruh* is a superior being and a sublime reality that comes down with the angels when they descend to execute the affairs of the world, and aids the angels in their missions. So Gabriel is different from the *ruh*, and its relation to the *ruh* is not that of a person to its species or a species to its genus. The *Ruh* does not consist of persons, but is a species that exclusively consists of one individual. Gabriel

is an angel, and the *ruh* is a reality that is different from the angels.

At any rate, the angels and the *ruh* are two distinct groups. Moreover, the angels are such that they get help from the *ruh*. They are accompanied by the *ruh* when they depart to carry out their tasks, and the *ruh* supports them: ***'He descendeth the angels with the Spirit (ruh) of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants.'* (16:2)**

Also, given that *ruh* (Spirit) is expressed in singular form in the Qur'an while the angels are mentioned in plural, one may infer that the status of the *ruh* is more comprehensive (*jami'*) than that of the angels. The *ruh* is closer to God, even closer than Gabriel, and there are narrations that confirm this.

## The spirit and the angels

STUDENT. What rapport is there between this Spirit (*ruh*) and the human spirit (*ruh*)? Why is the human spirit called '*ruh*'? Is it because it has some bond and connection with the Spirit? Can we think of the relation between the Spirit and the human spirits as that of a natural universal (*al-kulli al-tabi'i*) and its particulars?<sup>5</sup>

Also, in the noble verse,

***And they ask thee concerning the ruh. Say: the ruh is of the command of my Lord.. (17:85)***

which *ruh* is being questioned about? Is it the same Spirit as in the other verses, or is it the human spirit?

'ALLAMAH. As already mentioned, the *ruh* is a creature greater than the angels, and it is has nothing to do with man or the human spirit. It is a matter of terminology that they both share the same term '*ruh*', but their meanings are different. The connection between the two might be that by means of effort and worship, man's rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*, i.e. the human spirit) can reach a station where it becomes parallel to and on a par with that Spirit (*ruh*).

And in the noble verse mentioned above (17:85), the question is about *ruh* in its absolute and unrestricted sense, not the human rational soul in particular. And the response is, 'The *ruh* is of the command of my Lord,' which indicates that the *ruh* belongs to the Realm of Command (*'alam al-amr*), as opposed to mankind, which belongs to the Realm of Creation (*'alam al-khalq*). Those asking the question do not mention the human spirit at all. It seems that the question is about *ruh* as mentioned in the Qur'an. And what is quite remarkable is that the verse ends with,

***... And you have been given of knowledge but little. (17:85)***

It means that it is beyond human knowledge to know the creation and reality of the *ruh*; it is not easily graspable.

## The first thing that Allah created

STUDENT. Is this *ruh* the same as what is referred to in some narrations as ‘The first thing that Allah created’? That is, is it the ‘closest screen’ (*al-hijab al-aqrab*)? And in philosophy, is it the same as the First Intellect (*al-’aql al-awwal*)?

‘ALLAMAH. The narrations have mentioned several things as ‘The first thing that Allah created.’ For example:

The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.

The intellect, the water, the Tablet (*lawh*), and the Pen (*qalam*) have also been identified as the first thing that Allah created.<sup>6</sup> But among all these, I think the clearest and most robust narration is that ‘The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.’ There is a verse toward the end of Chapter 42 (al-Shura):

***And thus We have revealed to thee a Spirit of Our command. Thou knew not what the Book was nor the faith; but We made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed thou dost guide unto a straight path. (42:52)***

It is inferred from this verse that the Messenger of Allah came to know the faith and the Book through Allah’s revelation of the *ruh* upon him. And this happened through the connection that the Prophet’s spirit (*ruh*) had with that great creature, the Spirit (*ruh*). So the Prophet’s spirit had the same origin as the Spirit, and that is ‘the first thing that Allah created.’

In philosophy, the First Intellect may be identified as the *ruh*, on the condition that it does not lose its properties. That is, the First Intellect should maintain its immateriality and unconditionality; otherwise it would not be the First Intellect. As it comes lower and becomes more and more determined (*ta’ayyun*), it becomes other (lower) intellects, and the lower it goes, the more it loses its breadth and unconditionality (*itlaq*).

In its Arc of Ascent (*qaws al-su’ud*), the spirit of the Messenger of Allah has reached the same position where it came and descended from, which is the plane of the *ruh* (Spirit). That is because the first thing that God created was the light of His Messenger, which is the same as the *ruh*. Then after its creation, the spirit of the Messenger of Allah set on its Arc of Descent (*qaws al-nuzul*) and passed the realms one by one, until it reached the realm of nature and matter. Therefore through its Arc of Ascent, it reached the same initial position once again, whereby the beginning (*azal*) and the end (*abad*) are united together.

So the Spirit (*ruh*, which is not separate from the Prophet’s spirit) descended from its origin and kept descending until it reached the corporeal world. Then, by means of transubstantial motion (*al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*), it gradually advanced toward its perfection, until it ultimately reached the same status of

‘The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.’ So nothing new comes to existence. It is exactly what used to be – only that it has gone through a cycle of descent and ascent.

It is very strange how the affairs of the universe are managed, how the angels direct and coordinate everything, and how the Spirit plays a role in all that. Of course there is no contradiction between their roles. Their involvement in creating the affairs of the corporeal world is truly astonishing and incredible.

Imagine how many angels would be required for something very particular. For example, consider the creation of a single atom in a person’s body or elsewhere. If that involves one angel, then think of the number of atoms in the human body; there would be as many angels. What a crowd that would be!

And of course there are different angels out there, like those that bestow power, those that bestow knowledge, and so on. There are certain angels as guards and protectors, whose job is to ward off afflictions and tribulations, and to prevent people from suffering injuries.<sup>7</sup> Likewise there is a different group of angels for each affair. So imagine how many angels there are for each human being. And going beyond one person, how many angels there are for all human beings? Then think of the number of all animals, plants and objects. Glory be to Allah; such a universe we have!

STUDENT. Is any of the four archangels – Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and ‘Izra’il – superior (*jami’*) to the others?<sup>8</sup> That is, apart from the *ruh*, is there a superior angel, who directs and commands over the other angels?

‘ALLAMAH. Apparently there is no superior among the four archangels, although there seems to be some hints about Gabriel, as mentioned in Chapter 78 (al-Naba’).<sup>9</sup> But still it is not the case of a superior being. One cannot say that Gabriel’s supremacy over the angels under his command is that of a superior (*jami’*) over the individuals (*afrad*).

(May Allah guide us. We cannot do anything. With these conditions, all these ups and downs, the ascent and the descent, where should one turn to? What can our intellect grasp? How should we even approach these topics? By God I do not know.)

## **The impact of supplication and the role of the angels in its acceptance**

STUDENT. Sometimes a person makes a supplication (*du’a’*) that is accepted (i.e. realised). For example one may pray for a garden to blossom, a well to spring water, a patient to recover, and so on. As a result of that, thousands of angels will be assigned to plan, process and carry out the supplicant’s request. And they finally realise and objectify it by God’s permission (*idhn*). That is, there are all these different groups of angels who work in order to actualise and bring about that matter. So can we say that in a sense, these angels are ‘under the command’ of the supplicant?

‘ALLAMAH. Instead of saying that they are under the command of the supplicant, it is better to say that they are under God’s command to realise the supplicant’s request.

STUDENT. Previously you mentioned how there can be unity in plurality,[10](#) and you discussed these three verses:

***Allah captureth the souls at the time of their death... (39:42)***

***... The angel of death captureth you.... (32: 11)***

***... Our emissaries capture him.... (6:61)***

The act is an action of God, nonetheless the Angel of Death is also involved under God’s permission (*idhn*), and the other angels are involved with the permission of the Angel of Death. So in this sense of unity (*wahdah*) in plurality (*kathrah*), can one consider the angels that bring about a supplication as being under the command and order of the person who makes supplication and petition (*du’a’* and *tadarru’*) to Allah?

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, that is also one way of putting it and it is true if the full account is given. For, after all, ‘There is no occupant in the house except Him.’

The whole universe absolutely and fully belongs to God alone, and no being has any impact in the cosmos except by God’s will and permission. Therefore any impact that we observe from any being reduces to God and belongs to Him.

STUDENT. There have been times when one of the prophets or saints (*awliya’*) had a wish deep in his heart, with an inner inclination and desire for it to come true. Yet he would not make a supplication for his wish, but despite that, the wish would come to realisation by itself. That is, their mere will and inner inclination would influence and take control of the external function of the angels. But there have also been other times when their inner inclination, even when accompanied with explicit supplication, had no impact, and their wish would not be realised as they wanted.

Can one say that in the latter cases their supplications and requests were at odds with the supplication of another soul or souls? That is, can one say that in the supernatural realm, the request was prevented by the power of one or more other souls?

This of course happens a lot for other than the prophets and saints, when their wish is against the wish of a more powerful soul who wants the opposite. Therefore each person’s supplication provokes and arouses a different set of angels to carry out the task, by God’s permission of course. Thus, the purer and stronger soul would dominate, and the set of angels working for that request would take the lead from the other group of angels and objectify the request of the stronger soul.

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, all these are possible, and there is a verse in Chapter 13 (al-Ra’d) that implies this idea. [11](#)

STUDENT. Previously you had a great passion for philosophy, much more than now. Now you are more engaged in the Noble Qur’an. And you would not refrain from talking about your personal states like unveilings (*mukashafat*) and intuitions of the heart (*waridat*), but now you have strangely and mysteriously closed the doors tight! What is going on?

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, I guess ‘that crock broke, and that glass tipped over’ (i.e. those days are over). Currently my physical condition, particularly the forgetfulness that has overcome me, holds me back from my activities. I cannot work anymore, and it is by God’s grace that I am engaged in the Glorious Qur’an – may Allah accept it! But the peculiar amnesia of mine is really tough on me. In terms of studying and writing, I used to be busy almost day and night, with rarely any exception. I was always so busy writing, contemplating and studying. But all that has stopped for now.

STUDENT. Well this is a merit after all! Being immersed in the universal (*kulli*) prevents one from the particular. It is like absorbing the universal Spirit (*ruh*) in a state of trance (*khalsah*).

‘ALLAMAH. Is that so? Now you call that a merit? We would be thankful for the merit that Allah gives, no problem, but is this a merit? This is amnesia. Your point is correct, but what I feel is just amnesia. A state of sleepiness is usually noticeable in my eyes, as if they are filled with sleep or with dust. But then if I try to sleep I do not fall asleep. It is just this [odd] condition. Anyway, ‘The good is in that which happened’ (*al-khayr fima waqa’a*). My condition is not like a state of trance; it is a certain state of lethargy, especially with the drowsiness in my eyes. We have to pray to Allah for recovery, if He wills. Only may Allah aid us; otherwise we cannot do anything on our own.

## Barzakh is for everyone

A third person: Is the realm of *barzakh* (the intermediate life between one’s death and the Day of Resurrection) for everyone, or is it only for those who have reached perfection in either faith (*iman*) or infidelity (*kufr*)? One of the verses of the Qur’an about *barzakh* is:

***And count not those who were slain in Allah’s way as dead, but they are living, and receive provision there with their Lord. (3: 169)***

This verse establishes the receipt of provision in *barzakh* only for those who have been killed in God’s way. Therefore can we conclude that *barzakh* is not for everyone?

‘ALLAMAH. In some narrations there is this idea that only those who have achieved perfection go through *barzakh* after death. That is, *barzakh* is only for two parties: those who have perfect faith and those who have perfect infidelity. And a third party consists of those who have not achieved either perfect infidelity or perfect faith, and thus they will not experience *barzakh*. That would mean that

*barzakh* is exclusively for the perfect ones among the people of Islam and the people of infidelity (*kufr*).

But based on some other narrations *barzakh* is not just for the perfect ones. Instead, everyone goes through the realm of *barzakh* after death and before the Resurrection (*qiyamah*).

And the above verse (3:169) does not imply that no one apart from the martyrs in the path of Allah receives provision in *barzakh*. That is because first of all, the following verse says,

***[They are] jubilant because of that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty, and rejoice for those behind them who have not joined them, for they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. (3:170)***

This verse says that the martyrs are happy for those who have not joined them yet. And it is evident that those who have not joined them are all of the believers that are still alive and not necessarily those that will become martyrs.

## **The realm of barzakh starts right after one's death**

'ALLAMA. And second, there are two verses in the Noble Qur'an that entail that *barzakh* is for everyone, and that people enter the realm of *barzakh* right after death and with no delay.

The first one is in Chapter 36 (Ya-Sin), which narrates the story of two prophets who were sent by Prophet Jesus to the city of Antioch for preaching. The two prophets went there and started preaching, but the general population did not accept their call. [Neither did they accept their call when a third prophet was sent.] Thus a man from the outskirts of the city came to help the messengers:

***And there came a man from the furthest part of the city, running; he said, 'My people, follow the messengers.'* (36:20)**

He preached and advised his people, and he finally said,

***Lo! I believe in your Lord, so hear me, (36:25)***

whereby the mob killed that man of God. Then the Qur'an says:

***He was told, 'Enter Paradise!' He said, 'I wish my people would know \* That my Lord forgave me and made me of the honoured ones.'* (36:26-7)**

He was told to enter the Paradise right upon his death, and that is when he said, 'I wish my relatives and my tribe knew how God blessed me with His grace, forgiveness and honour.'

The second verse is in Chapter 71 (Nuh) and is similar to the first one, except that it is the other side of the story. That previous case was about a believer, and this one is about the infidels and transgressors:

### ***Because of their sins they were drowned and thereupon entered a fire.... (71:25)***

Noah's tribe were exterminated and drowned as a result of their sins, wrongdoings and misconduct. And after drowning, they immediately entered the fire. 'Thereupon they entered a fire' means that there was no pause or delay.

Most of the famous and multiple (*mustafidah*) narrations imply that *barzakh* is for all classes of infidels and Muslims, including those with perfect salvation or damnation and those in between. There are some narrations against that, but they are not reliable. Shaykh al-Mufid, be he blessed, held the view that 'No one is questioned in the grave except the one who perfected faith to the utmost or the one who perfected infidelity to the utmost; the rest are neglected.'<sup>12</sup>

## **Heaven and hell currently exist**

***And speed toward a forgiveness from your Lord and a paradise whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the self-restrained. (3:133)***

STUDENT. In the above verse, does the term 'has been prepared' (*u'iddat*) imply that paradise exists now?

'ALLAMAH. Yes, more or less.

STUDENT. If so, how would that comply with the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-a'mal*)?<sup>13</sup> For an action must first be carried out in order for it to build the heaven or hell!

'ALLAMAH. But there is also another point in the Noble Qur'an:

***Truly thou wast in heedlessness of this; thus We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight is piercing today. (50:22)***

This verse affirms that what is observed on the Day of Resurrection had existed and was observable in this world, except that people were heedless of it. Heaven and Hell had actually existed in this world and people had observed them, but they were heedless in their observation.

People are heedless of the fact of the matter and the reality of the world. Therefore Heaven and Hell are present in this world, though people are inattentive of them. And as we said before, the believer from the family of Yasin entered Heaven right after he was killed (36:26), and Noah's tribe entered the fire right after their drowning in water (71:25).

## **The speaking of ruwaybidah and the emergence of Ya'juj and**

## Ma'juj

STUDENT. There is a tradition that mentions the signs of the end of the universe (*akhir al-zaman*). It says:

And at that time the *ruwaybidah* will speak. [14](#)

What is meant by *ruwaybidah*? And [in the other narrations,] who is the Dajjal? And what about Ya'juj and Ma'juj (Gog and Magog)?

'ALLAMAH. Based on the narrations, one of the signs of the Resurrection (*ashrat al-sa'ah*) is that the *ruwaybidah* will speak, and apparently '*ruwaybidah*' refers to the ignoble and insignificant individuals in the society. Their 'speaking' means that they will become administrative and political authorities.

Then there are many narrations on the topic of the Dajjal (lit. 'liar' and 'deceiver'). He emerges before the appearance of Imam Mahdi (may our souls be sacrificed for him) and misguides the people. There are some narrations that describe him in detail, but those narrations are not reliable. For example, there is a narration that the Dajjal is a man who rides a donkey, and as he moves, the Paradise and Hell move with him on his right and his left [respectively].

The Dajjal is also mentioned in the narrations reported by the Sunni authorities. There are narrations about his birth, and there is even a narration that the Messenger of Allah was informed about him, whereby the Prophet went to him, or he came to the Prophet. Some of what has been said about him is certainly not reliable; for example it is said that his donkey is one *farsakh* (about 5.375 km) long. How could that be? [15](#)

And Ya'juj and Ma'juj are apparently two societies of mankind from the Caucasus (Qafqaz) Mountain. That is where Dhu al-Qarnayn built a dam to prevent them from attacking that region (see 18:92-8). And some have held that they were two Mongolian tribes. [16](#) There is a verse in the Glorious Qur'an about Ya'juj and Ma'juj, that they will rush down from all heights [before the Resurrection]:

***Until when Gog and Magog are freed, and they hasten out of every mound. (21:96)***

There are some narrations about the details of their creation, like that their ears are so huge that they turn one into a mat on which they sleep and use the other as a blanket. These narrations are reported by Sunni authorities, and it seems quite clear that they are unauthentic, and should not be accepted. [17](#)

## The Messenger of Allah was also the prophet of the jinn

STUDENT. How is it that the prophet of the jinn is from mankind? On one hand, based on the Noble Qur'an, the prophet of every group, class and kind of creatures should be of the same kind. That is why in the Qur'an Allah requires the polytheists to follow His Messenger, who is a human being. And when

they objected that ‘Why did God not send angels toward people to convey His message,’ the Noble Qur’an replies,

***And had We made him an angel, We surely would have made him a man, and confused for them what they confuse. (6:9)***

On the other hand, there are other verses in the Noble Qur’an that clearly speak of the belief of the jinn in the Prophet and the Qur’an:

***Say: it hath been revealed unto me that a company of the jinn listened [to the Qur’an] and then they said, ‘We have indeed heard a marvellous Qur’an \* It guideth to rectitude, so we believe in it, and we never associate with our Lord anyone.’ (72: 1-2)***

***And indeed when we heard the guidance we believed in it; and whoso believeth in his Lord shall fear neither any loss nor any oppression. (72: 13)***

***And when We turned toward thee a company of jinn listening to the Qur’an; and once they were in its presence they said, ‘Be silent!’ Then as it ended they returned to their people warning \* They said, ‘O Our people, indeed we have heard a book that was sent down after Moses, confirming what was before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight path \* O our people, respond to Allah’s summoner and believe in Him; He will forgive you part of your sins and shield you from a painful punishment \* And whoso respondeth not to Allah’s summoner cannot frustrate Him in the earth, and hath no supporter apart from Him. Those are in obvious misguidance.’ (46:29-32)***

***O tribe of jinn and men, if you are able to penetrate through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate [through them]. You shall not penetrate except with an authority [from Allah]. (55:33)***

This last verse is more evident than the other ones, as it addresses and challenges both the jinn and mankind. But if the Messenger of Allah were not a prophet and messenger for the group of jinn, it would have not been appropriate for the Glorious Qur’an – which flows from the Prophet’s tongue – to challenge them.

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, apparently the prophet of the jinn is a human being. And incidentally when the jinn were asked about this at time of summoning (*ihdar*) they replied, ‘We do not have any prophet from the jinn; but our prophet is Prophet Muhammad son of ‘Abdullah (peace and mercy be upon him and his family).’

STUDENT. In order to explain this, one may say that man and jinn are both corporeal beings, except that man is of earth and jinn is of fire and smoke. In fact, it is due to the jinn’s extent of delicacy that they cannot be seen by physical eyes. Man and jinn both fall under the same category, but jinn are of a lower degree [of existence] compared to man. That is why the same rules apply to both of them. Is that a

reasonable explanation?

‘ALLAMAH. That is the only thing one can say in order to explain this matter. The creation of jinn is subsidiary to mankind and their existence is for the sake of human beings. That is why they have the same prophet. And the duties and rites have been specified and tailored for each of the two groups according to their strengths and weaknesses. The following verse bears witness to this:

***O tribe of jinn and mankind, did messengers from yourselves not come to you, recounting to you My signs and warning you of the encounter of this day of yours?... (6: 130)***

This verse addresses both the jinn and men and tells them, ‘Did messengers of your own kind not come to you?’ But we know that the jinn do not have a prophet of themselves, and they share the prophet of men. But it is still true to say, ‘messengers from yourselves’ because jinn and man are both material and corporeal. They are of the same genus (*jins*) and so the same prophet has been sent for both groups. It is only that compared to the jinn, man is stronger and jinn is relatively weaker. So in the above verse, ‘from yourselves’ does not mean being specifically of earth or fire.

## The science of abjad Letters and its branches

STUDENT. Please speak, in brief or at length, about the *abjad* letters, their inferences, extrapolations, and significance, as discussed in the books. Also, please explain how the *abjad* calculation is divided into *kabir* (‘big’), *saghir* (‘small’) and *wasit* (‘intermediate’), and the significance of each.

‘ALLAMAH. Apparently *al-abjad al-kabir* (big) is a well-established and agreed-upon process. It involves the division of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet over the numbers ranging from one to one thousand. And all Muslims – both Shi’a and Sunni – unanimously concur on it. The scholars of both sects, such as Baha’ al-Din al-‘Amili (Shaykh al-Baha’i) and Muhyi al-Din [ibn] al-‘Arabi have expounded on the subject.

*Al-abjad al-kabir* is also known among non-Muslims. It was practiced by the Jews before Islam, and Muslims adopted it from Hebrew. Incidentally, the Hebrew alphabet has only twenty-two letters. They lack the last six letters in the *abjad* order: *th* [ﺙ], *kh* [ﺦ], *dh* [ﺪ], [ﺪﺩ], [ﺪﺪ], and *ghayn*. Therefore their letters only go up to *qarishat* (see below). Nonetheless they believe in *al-abjad al-kabir* and split the numbers ranging from one to a thousand over their letters.

One day I was attending a session with some experts in this field. They were discussing how the numbers one to one thousand can be divided over the Hebrew alphabet, which consists of twenty-two letters. I objected, ‘The Hebrew alphabet only goes up to *qarishat*, and letter *t* [ﺕ] is number four hundred [i.e. the highest number that their alphabet reaches]. So how can they practice *abjad*?’ They explained that ‘They incorporate the other six numbers in their alphabet by certain means, so that their numbers start from one and end with one thousand.’

There was also a Japanese philosopher in that meeting. [18](#) I asked him, ‘Do you [also] believe in the impact and power of the letters?’

‘Yes, we believe in the letters of *al-abjad al-kabir!*’ he replied. ‘And we have some truly remarkable ancient books on this subject’ – even though Japanese doctrines are rooted in those of the Chinese, who are not monotheists.

Apparently the Japanese and Chinese alphabets have three hundred letters (characters). But they somehow manage to divide the twenty-eight numbers (of *abjad*) that span from one to a thousand over their entire alphabet. That is amazing. Perhaps they end up counting many of their letters that have a similar pronunciation as one letter, like in Persian where *ch* is treated as *j* (*jim*), *zh* as *z* (*z*), *g* as *k* (*k*) and *p* as *b* (*b*). That is why calculating the *abjad* numbers in Chinese is very difficult. It is a skill in itself, and as it has been said, only their adept scholars can go about it.

One of the impacts of the *abjad* calculation is that dividing and placing the noble verse, *bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate) into a square based on the *abjad* letters is beneficial in repelling the jinn and those possessed by the jinn.

In *al-abjad al-kabir*, each letter of the twenty-eight Arabic letters has a number, and the numbers begin with one and end with one thousand. It goes like this: *abjad*, *hawwaz*, *uwwaj*, *kaliman*, *sa’fa*, *qarishat*, *thakhkhidh*, *aigh*, *l*.

ي ط ح ز و ه د ج ب أ  
12 3456 7 8 9 10  
' b j d h w Z y  
ر ق ص ف ع س ن م ل ك  
20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 200  
k l m n s ' f q r

ش  
ت  
ث  
خ  
ذ  
ض  
ظ  
غ  
ا  
300  
400  
500

600

700

800

900

1000

1

Sh

t

th

kh

dh

ق

gh

ق

*Hamzah* (‘) and *alif* (a, ق) are both number one. Letters with stress (*shaddah*, *tashdud*) are only counted once. For example, the term ‘*Aliyy*’ (i.e. ‘Alق) is numbered 110, because ‘ is 70, l is 30 and y is 10. So they add up to 110 ( y counts only once).

And the word *Quddis* is numbered 170; since q is 100, d is 4, w (ق) is 6 and s is 60. Here, d is not counted twice.

And the word *Fa’iq* is numbered 181; because f is 80, ‘ is 70, ق is 1 and l is 30.

One exception is the l (*līm*) in the Majestic Word ‘Allah’. It has a stress, but it is counted twice. Also, the middle ق (*alif*) in ‘Allah’ is not counted. Therefore ‘Allah’ is 66, because a is 1, l is 30 (and it counts twice), and h is 5. That is why in writing, ‘Allah’ is not written with a stress (*shaddah*), for the l (*līm*) is written twice and thus it should not be stressed again. It is for the same reason that the middle ق (*alif*) is not written, because it is not included in the *abjad* calculation. So the word is written with two consecutive ‘l’s and without an ‘ق’, like ‘*Allh*’ (الله)

If it were not for the exception, the word should have been written as ‘*Aqah*’ (with a stress on l i.e. الله). Since Arabic writing is based on *abjad* numbers, ‘*Aqah*’ should be written as ‘*Allh*’ [as it is conventionally written, except that it should not have a *shaddah*].

The fact that the stressed letters are written only once shows that they should count only once when retrieving the *abjad* number of a given word. And for the same reason, the word *ilāh* (deity, worshipped one) is written as ‘*ilh*’ (إله), without the middle ق (*alif*). That is because the middle ق in is not included in the count, and so the corresponding number to *ilāh* is 36. Similarly, the ق in *Raḥmān* is not counted either. That is why it is written as ‘*Raḥman*’ (رَحْمَن) without the ق (*alif*), which means that its number is 298.

This was about *al-abjad al-kabir* ('big' *abjad*).

But in *al-abjad al-saghir* ('small' *abjad*), the number of a letter is the remainder that is obtained when we divide the *abjad (al-kabir)* number of that letter by nine. For example, letter *y (ya)* is numbered one in *al-abjad al-saghir*, because it is number 10 in *al-abjad al-kabir*, and deducting nine from that gives us one. Letter *n (nun)* is five in *al-abjad al-saghir*, because when five times nine is deducted from fifty (the number of *n* in *al-abjad al-kabir*) the remainder is five. And therefore in *al-abjad al-saghir*, letters  $\text{ق}$  ( $\text{ق}$ ),  $\text{د}$  ( $\text{د}$ ) and  $\text{ي}$  ( $\text{ي}$ ) do not have a number at all (because they are whole multiples of nine). If multiples of nine are deducted from their *al-abjad al-kabir* number, nothing would remain.

And as with *al-abjad al-wasit* ('intermediate' *abjad*), it numbers the letters based on the remainder of their *al-abjad al-kabir* number when divided by 12, just like the procedure in *al-abjad al-saghir*.

There is also *al-abjad al-akbar* ('greater' *abjad*), where the number of each letter is multiplied by ten. For example, letter *y (y)* would be number 100 in *al-abjad al-akbar*, and the letter *gh (ghayn)* would be 10,000, and so on with the other letters.

Apart from the above division, one should also know that there are two methods of numbering any word: *mujmal* ('undifferentiated') and *mufassal* ('differentiated').

The *mujmal* method is to count the letters of a word as they appear in the word (as discussed above). For example, the word '*Quddus*' ('Sacrosanct') has four letters: *q, d, w, s*, with numbers 100, 4, 6 and 60, respectively. And the word '*Fa'ul*' ('Doer') has four letters: *f, ' , ا, l*, with numbers 80, 70, 1 and 30, respectively. And there are ten letters in '*y A'ad y' amad*' ('O One, O Independent'):

10 1 18 4 10 1 90 40 4  
*y ' ا d y ' m d*

Therefore in the *mujmal* method, '*Quddus*' is 170, '*Fa'ul*' is 181 and '*y' A'ad y' amad*' is 169.

But in the *mufassal* method, each letter is counted as it is pronounced. It includes the subsequent letters that appear in each letter's name. For example '*Quddus*' has four letters: *q, d, w, and s*:

*Q* is pronounced *qaf*, so it should count as three letters: *q* (100), *ا* (1), and *f* (80). Thus, *qaf* alone will be 181.

*D* is pronounced *dal*, therefore it should count as three letters: *d* (4), *ا* (1), and *l* (30). Thus, *dal* is numbered 35.

*W* is pronounced *waw*, thus it should count as three letters: *w* (6), *ا* (1), and *w* (6).

And *s* is pronounced *sin*, so it should count as three letters: *s* (60), *y* (10), and *n* (50).

Hence, the word '*Quddus*' will be 349 based on the *mufassal* numbering, while it was 170 under the

*mujmal* method.

Another example: ‘y A ad y amad’ is pronounced as:

10 1 18 4 10 1 90 40 4  
y ‘ d y m d

But once we expand it, it will be pronounced as: ‘y, alif, alif, d, y, alif, m, d’.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, each of these letters should be included in the count:

10 1 1 30 80 1 30 80 8 1 4 1 30  
y ‘ l f ‘ l f d l  
10 1 1 30 80 90 1 4 40 10 40 4 1 30  
y ‘ l f d m y m d l

Hence, the *mufassal* number for the phrase, ‘y A ad y amad’ is 619, while it was 169 under the *mujmal* method.

## Tayy al-ard and the beginning of Chapter Ta-Ha

STUDENT. What is the truth behind *tayy al-ard* (‘folding up of the earth’, instantaneous self-transportation)? And how can it be explained philosophically?

‘ALLAMAHAH. Its reality is the winding of the earth beneath the feet of a walker.

My brother, the late Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi had a student who used to summon spirits (not using a mirror or a triangular table, but he used to instantly summon the spirits by passing his hand over his eyes). One day, through that student, my brother asked the spirit of the late Qadi about *tayy al-ard*.

The late Qadi answered, ‘*Tayy al-ard* is six verses from the beginning of Chapter 20 [Ta-Ha].’

***Ta-Ha \* We have not revealed the Qur’an upon thee so that thou be distressed \* But as a reminder to him who feareth \* A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the high heavens \* The All-Merciful [Who] arose [and dominated] upon the Throne \* To Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth and whatsoever is between them and whatsoever is beneath the ground \* And if thou speakest aloud, then He truly knoweth the secret and that which is more hidden \* Allah is but Whom there is no deity; for Him are the Most Beautiful Names. (20: 1-8)***

STUDENT. What does that mean? Was the late Qadi indirectly and secretly implying that *tayy al-ard* is achieved when one realises and characterises the Divine Attributes in one’s self?

‘ALLAMAHAH. No. My brother was a sharp and discerning man. The way he quoted Mr Qadi’s reply was as if he had already arrived at the procedure for *tayy al-ard* from these verses.

These verses are very remarkable, especially the verse, '**Allah is but Whom there is no deity; for Him are the Most Beautiful Names**' (20:8). It makes note of all the excellent Names that are gathered in the Sacred Being of God. In this regard there is no verse as comprehensive as this verse in the Noble Qur'an.

The late Qadi always used to go from Najaf to Karbala' on days of *ziyarah* ('pilgrimage'; the days when *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn is specifically recommended). But no one had ever seen him get on a vehicle, and no one found about his secret, except for a tradesman in the Clock Market (also called the Great Market, *bazar-i buzurg*, in Najaf ). The tradesman had gone to the sanctified city of Mashhad and saw the late Qadi there. There was a problem with that person's passport, for which he sought help from the late Qadi, and the late Qadi solved his problem. When that man returned to Najaf he claimed to have seen Mr Qadi in Mashhad.

And that infuriated the late Qadi. 'Everyone knows' he said, 'that I have been in Najaf and have not taken any trips.'

## **The late Qadi's inquiry about Prophet Solomon's flying in the air**

'ALLAMAH. Then, through his student, my brother asked the Honourable Qadi, 'Was Prophet Solomon's carpet, on which he used to sit and fly to the East and West, made with ordinary instruments, and did it operate based on natural laws? Or was it an independent divine invention without any connection to with the laws of nature?'

The late Qadi replied, 'I cannot think of an answer for that at the moment, but a creature that lived the time of Prophet Solomon and was involved in that business is currently alive. I will go and ask him.' Thus the late Qadi set off and walked for a while, until a mountain came into view. As he reached the hillside, a ghost that resembled a human being was seen in the middle of the mountain. The late Qadi talked to the ghost for a while and asked some questions, of which my brother's student did not understand anything. Then the late Qadi returned and said, 'He says that it was a totally new and unique creation of God, and it did not operate based on natural causes.'

STUDENT. But the matter of *tayy al-ard* is still ambiguous. There are a few things here. One is that in *tayy al-ard*, the traveller does not walk over the earth as would be the case of speeding up and getting to the destination in no time or in a short time. Neither does the person exterminate his body at the origin and create it at the destination. But rather the earth winds beneath the traveller's feet, and he gets to the destination in a very short time as a result of this winding. But there is a clear problem with this.

First, we see that the condition of the earth does not change when one performs *tayy al-ard*. Everything stays in its own place, people are all in their own positions, and the winding and wrapping only occurs with respect to the traveller. But assuming that *tayy al-ard* is a real occurrence in the outside – and not an imaginary or illusive event – then it would not be reasonable for a material body (the earth) to move

*without* changing its relationship and position with respect to the beings with which it is related.

Moreover, it is possible to have two folding-ups of the earth at the same time in opposite directions. That would entail the movement of matter in two opposite directions, and the change of position and relation of every related object in two opposing ways, which is logically impossible.

Second, in your discussions about the miracles (*i'jaz*) of the prophets in *al-Mizan*, you have argued that 'A miracle is not opposed to the physical laws. It does not deny the natural systems of causes and effects, but it [only] causes the speeding-up of the process whereby the causes give rise to the effects. For example, it is naturally possible for a cane to become a living organism and a serpent, as it did for Prophet Moses (peace be upon our prophet and his family and upon him). However, it would take thousands of years for this transformation to take place through its chain of various natural causes. But in a miracle, these causes do their job instantly, and the effect and result appears right away, due to the will of God or His messenger.'<sup>20</sup> But *tayy al-ard* would violate the order of nature, because the existents cannot maintain their original positions with respect to the traveller.

'ALLAMAH. (Replying after a long period of thinking, with his head down) *Tayy al-ard* is a supernatural event (*khariq al-'adah*).

STUDENT. Fair enough, *tayy al-ard* is a supernatural event; but the problem is the logical impossibility.

It is like when one physically passes through a wall or ceiling without the splitting or tearing of the wall and without its being broken and fixed again. Yet prominent mystics claim that there is nothing wrong with that, and it does happen.

'ALLAMAH. That is right; there is no problem with that. And the evidence for it is that in one gathering, they wanted to show that the jinn can enter through closed doors and take whatever they want. So they locked the lid of a chest containing bundles of clothing, and had a stout man sit on the chest.

Even so, they immediately found the bundles of clothing outside the chest, and when they opened the chest they found it empty. So it became clear that the jinn had brought out the bundles at once, and that was not an illusion or magic.

STUDENT. But that does not solve the problem. And the question, with all its complexities, remains as it was.

'ALLAMAH. It is a supernatural matter (*khariq al-'adah*).

STUDENT. Did Ibn Sina do any study and analysis on the subject of *tayy al-ard*? After all, he was quite good at identifying and investigating the physical causes of various events.

'ALLAMAH. I have not seen any discussion of *tayy al-ard* anywhere in his works. But he believes in supernatural events and confirms the miracles of the prophets.

Incidentally, there is a verse about the throne of Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba):

***And one with whom was some knowledge of the Book said, 'I will bring it to thee before thy glance returneth to thee ( yartadda ilayka tarfuk). ' Then when he saw it settled before him he said, 'This is of my Lord's bounty... ' (27:40)***

Here, '*yartadda ilayka tarfuk*' does not mean blinking of the eye, because *tarf* does not mean eyelid. It is a thousand times faster than blinking. If it meant blinking of the eye, the verse should have continued with, 'Then when he saw it settled before him before having blinked.'

Rather, *tarf* means to look with the side of the eye, and thus '*yartadda ilayka tarfuk*' means, 'before your look returns.' It concerns the act of seeing. What happens when one sees an object is that the rays of light reflect from the object and enter the person's eye, based on the laws of reflection and refraction. So he is saying, 'I will bring Bilqis' throne for you before you see what you are about to see!'

That means faster than the speed of light, which is fifty thousand *farsakh* per second (almost three hundred thousand kilometres per second).

And the Qur'an does not mention that the person brought the throne, but it says, 'When Solomon saw the throne before him.' That is, after this conversation and discussion with the person who had some knowledge of the Book, he suddenly found the throne settled before him. This is a case of *tayy al-ard*.

## **The stages of tayy al-ard and its reality**

STUDENT. Does *tayy al-ard* ('folding up of the earth', instantaneous self-transportation) consist of exterminating one's body at the origin and generating and emerging it at the destination? Is this not the basic idea behind *tayy al-ard*, that the person who possesses this power generates and emerges himself at once at the desired location, through the divine and celestial will with which he is endowed?

'ALLAMAH. That seems to be it.

STUDENT. Seems to be, or is?

'ALLAMAH . It really is so.

STUDENT. Then there are some issues to be resolved. It must be that only the purified divine souls can possess this power. As long as one has not achieved gnosis of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) accompanied by gnosis of the Lord (*ma'rifat al-Rabb*), and as long as one cannot alter and take control (*tasarruf*) over the contingent beings, he should not be able to perform *tayy al-ard*. But then how can one explain the accounts of *tayy al-ard* performed by non-complete individuals?

'ALLAMAH. There are no such accounts about non-complete individuals. It is only performed by those who have achieved perfection.[21](#)

STUDENT. Based on narrations and historical accounts, perfect individuals have sometimes taken others with themselves on *tayy al-ard*. That would mean that in addition to creating his own body, the divine and creative soul of a perfect person is also capable of creating other bodies at the desired destination.

‘ALLAMAH. That is right.

STUDENT. How is it that for some people, *tayy al-ard* is not instantaneous, but takes some time, say five or ten minutes or more?

‘ALLAMAH. Their *tayy al-ard* is incomplete because they have not reached the state of perfection. So they need to spend some time and apply more power in order to create bodies at the desired destination. For example, the *tayy al-ard* of the jinn usually takes time. When talking about bringing Bilqis’ throne the Noble Qur’an says:

***A devil of the jinn said, ‘I bring it to thee before thou risest from thy place...’ (27:39)***

And rising from one’s place certainly takes some time, even if it is very quick.

STUDENT. If so, then why should one insist on reconciling *tayy al-ard* with physical causality, like the attempts that have been made to show that the miracles of the prophets are nothing beyond the laws of nature?

Instead, one can say that *tayy al-ard* occurs as a result of a divine will, ‘Be!’ (*kun*), which directly and instantly brings about the result (*yakun*). (In that case, one would not argue that one’s body rapidly passes through the series of required intermediate stages in a transubstantial motion, *al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*.) So the first body – with its characteristics of position, time, and other properties – becomes a second body with another set of properties of position, time, and so on. And so is the case with miracles and supernatural events (i.e. there is no need to explain them as accelerated processes of physical causality).

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, it can be put this way.

## **‘The name should delight you’; ‘And truly of his followers was Abraham’**

STUDENT. There is a narration from Imam Baqir that ‘The name should delight you!’

The reporter asked, ‘May I be sacrificed for you, what name?’ The Imam replied, ‘The two words [i.e. verses] of Him [Allah]:

***And truly [one] of his followers (shi’ah) was Abraham (37:83)***

**... Thus he who was of his followers (*shi'ah*) implored him for help against him who was of his enemies.... (28: 15)**

Therefore this name should delight you.' [22](#)

What does this narration mean? 'His follower' (*shi'atih*) in the first verse refers to Prophet Noah's follower, and in the second verse it refers to Prophet Moses' follower.

'ALLAMAH. It apparently means that since the term '*shi'ah*' has been used in the Noble Qur'an and the idea of *tashayyu*' ('followership') has been attributed to the followers of Noah and Moses, thus it is a pleasant name, and it is a sign of blessing that you Shi'as are also called '*shi'ah*' (literally, 'follower').

So there is a nominal similarity between you 'followers' of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the 'followers' of Prophets Noah and Moses. And this in itself is a source of hope for your salvation and felicity. The name carries some sense of honour with itself.

## **Hurr al-'Amili: 'The Prophet's knowledge is inherited from the previous prophets'**

STUDENT. In the preface of the book, *Ithbat al-Hudah* ('Proof of the Guides'), Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili says,

And then it has also been repeatedly reported (*mutawatir*) that the Prophet (peace and be upon him and his family) has inherited his knowledge – partly or mostly – from the previous prophets and their successors.[23](#)

Is this true? How could it be, given that the Messenger of Allah apparently had no contact with the previous prophets and their successors so that he may ask them questions and benefit from their knowledge?

'ALLAMAH. It seems that the above claim is not true since there was no encounter between the Messenger of Allah and the previous prophets. Of course, it might be true from an esoteric point of view, that the Prophet got some of his knowledge from his predecessors by talking to them and asking questions inwardly (*batini*). And a verse in the Noble Qur'an bears witness to this:

***And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before thee: did We ever set deities other than the All-Merciful to be worshipped? (43:45)***

It is inferred from this verse that the Messenger of Allah had the means to speak to and ask questions from the prophets in the Divine Realm (*malakut*).

## The universality of the resolute prophets (ulu al-'azm)

STUDENT. There are some verses in the Glorious Qur'an about the universality of the call (*da'wah*) of the Noble Messenger, Prophet Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (peace be upon him and his family) – that his call encompasses every human being until the Day of Resurrection. For example:

***And We have not sent thee except as a bringer of good tidings and a warner for all people, but most people know not. (34:28)***

***And We sent thee not save as a mercy for everyone. (21:107)***

***...O mankind, truly I am the messenger of Allah to you all; [of ] Him to Whom belongeth the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; there is no deity but Him; He gives life and death. So believe in Allah and His messenger, the unschooled prophet who believeth in Allah and His words, and follow him, haply you may be guided. (7:158)***

***Then how will it be when We bring a witness from every nation and We bring thee a witness against these? (4:41)***

This is also proven by the fact that the Messenger of Allah reached out to all mankind in order to call them to Islam. He wrote letters to the kings of Rome, Persia, Ethiopia and the nations and tribes elsewhere. Hence, there is no doubt in the universality of his call, and it is evident like the sun at midday. But then there are other verses that may suggest that his call was specific to his own people. For example:

***He is Who hath aroused amongst the unschooled a messenger of their own, to recite His revelations to them.... (62:2)***

***And for every nation there is a messenger; and when their messenger cometh, they will be justly judged between, and they will not be wronged. (10:47)***

***And We never sent a messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he may elucidate for them; thus Allah misguideth whomever He wills, and He guideth whomever He wills; and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (14:4)***

These three verses are ambiguous about whether the message of the Prophet was confined to his own people or not. However, since the first four verses explicitly speak of the universality of his call, they clarify the ambiguity of the other verses.

## Prophet Moses was sent to Pharaoh, a non-Israelite

STUDENT. But this might have been different concerning Prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon

our prophet and his family and upon them). There are some verses in the Glorious Qur'an that seem to indicate that their calls were specific to the Children of Israel (Bani Isra'il). For example:

***And truly We sent Moses with Our signs, that 'Bring forth thy people from the darkness to the light, and remind them of the days of Allah.' Lo! Surely therein are signs for every forbearing and grateful person. (14:5)***

***And [recall] when Moses said to his people, 'O my people, why do you persecute me, while you well know that I am truly the messenger of Allah to you?' Then when they deviated, Allah deviated their hearts; and Allah guideth not the people who are transgressors \* And [recall] when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of Allah to you...'. (61:5-6)***

And most evident of all is God's response to Prophet Jesus' mother, Hadrat Maryam (Honourable Mary):

***She said, 'My Lord, how can I have a son when no mortal has touched me?' He said: So [it will be]. Allah createth what He will. When He decreeth a thing, He only saith to it, 'Be' and it is \* And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel \* And a messenger to the Children of Israel.... (3:47-9)***

Furthermore, when the Qur'an quotes Prophet Moses, his speeches are addressed to the Children of Israel.

Also, the *hajj* (pilgrimage) was not decreed as a ritual in the religions of either Prophets Moses or Jesus. Had they been universal, they should have followed Prophet Abraham's universal religion, which had prescribed the *hajj* (peace be upon them all).

If one studies the religions of these two great prophets, he realises that despite calling to the unity of Allah, Glorified and Exalted He is, they include certain rules that are completely foreign to Islam and the religion of Prophet Abraham.

'ALLAMAH. Your points and remarks are all true in their own right. But despite all that, there are certain verses and narrations, as well as historical evidence from the life of the Noble Prophet, which indicate that the message and call (*da'wah*) of these two great prophets were universal. For instance, it says in the Noble Qur'an,

***Go both of you unto Pharaoh, [for] indeed he has transgressed. (20:43)***

Prophet Moses promoted his religion to Pharaoh and his tribe (the Qibtis), who were certainly not among the Children of Israel (referred to as the Sibtis). In fact, 'Qibtis' is used as the opposite of 'Sibtis'.

Also, the Noble Messenger recognised the religions of the Arab Jews and Christians who were in Mecca, Medina, Ethiopia, and elsewhere as official religions. If the religions of prophets Moses and

Jesus were specific to the Children of Israel, then adoption of these religions by the Arabs would have been wrong and should not have been endorsed by the Messenger of Allah.

One other piece of evidence is that the Noble Messenger was willing to do *mubalah* with the Christians of Najran.<sup>24</sup> He challenged them to a mystical battle, even though they were also Arabs.

And even though the *hajj* was a tradition (*sunnah*) of Prophet Abraham, he decreed it only for Arabs and not for all of his followers. He did not prescribe the *hajj* for the inhabitants of Palestine. Otherwise, prophets such as Isaac, Jacob and the other Israelite prophets would have definitely performed this divine ritual. Nonetheless, the ritual was passed down to Prophet Ishmael (Isma'il) and his descendants, who resided in Arabia. And there is no evidence that the *hajj* was decreed or should have been decreed universally at the time of Prophet Abraham.

And regarding the verses that you mentioned, just because a prophet was sent to the Children of Israel did not necessarily mean that his message was only for them. The verse, '***And We never sent a messenger save with the tongue of his people***' (14:4) only establishes that every prophet speaks the language of his people, and that is different from saying that his call is exclusive to his people.

## **Attributing actions to the Supreme Truth; 'So that Allah may know who supporteth Him and His messengers unseen'**

STUDENT. There are some verses in the Noble Qur'an that identify God, Sacred He is, as the Doer of the actions. Some of these verses are truly astonishing, such as:

***And whoever maketh a breach with the Messenger, after the guidance hath been elucidated for him, and followeth other than the way of the believers, We turn him over to what he hath turned to, and We enter [or burn] him in hell – a miserable return. (4:115)***

In this verse, God has identified Himself as the cause of diversion of those who oppose the Messenger of Allah and do not follow the way of the believers. What the verse means is that, 'About that person who diverted, It was We Who diverted him. That is why he diverted.' Another verse is:

***O you who believe, take not the disbelievers as masters [and friends] in place of the believers. Do you want to give Allah a clear authority [and proof] against you? (4:144)***

Truly whenever I, the lowest, think of the meaning of this noble verse, my amusement increases. Such a fine meaning, subtle content and comprehensive message! It is amazing how Allah, Glorified and Exalted He is, has forbidden the believers to befriend and affiliate with the infidels, and eventually take them as masters and superiors, while abandoning the believers. Then the verse regards the authority and dominance that the infidels acquire over this group of people – due to their wrong action (i.e. alliance with the infidels) – as Allah's authority and dominance. That is, the dominance and supremacy

of the infidels over the Muslims is God's supremacy over them. So it is saying, 'O you Muslims! Do not do this, so that God does not do that.'

'ALLAMAH. The language of the Qur'an when talking about God's Unity of Actions (*al-tawhid al-af'ali*) and relating every action to the Supreme Truth is truly outstanding. In one occasion it says,

***Then We raised them up, that We might know which of the two parties would better calculate the time they had tarried. (18:12)***

It is clear that here, knowledge refers to objectified knowledge (*al-'ilm al-fi'li*), which is the appearance and realisation of particular beings before the Supreme Lord. There are many instances in the Glorious Qur'an where what is meant by God's knowledge (*'ilm*) is the actions of beings. For example:

***... So that Allah may know who supporteth Him and His messengers unseen.... (57:25)***

***So that He may know they have conveyed the messages of their Lord.... (72:28)***

One of the exegetes has given a good interpretation of what is meant by *'ilm* (knowing) here: that it means, 'So that what We knew would be disclosed as We knew it.'<sup>25</sup>

***And never say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow' \* But only 'if Allah wills'.... (18:23-4)***

The above verse implies that God's decree and will includes the actions that a person does. And so does the verse,

***And had We made him an angel, We surely would have made him a man, and confused for them what they confuse. (6:9)***

## **All actions are subject to God's permission and decree**

'ALLAMAH. In general, what the Glorious Qur'an teaches us is that whatever there is in the universe (*'alam al-wujud*), be it an existence (*dhat*), an action (*fi'l*) or an effect (*athar*), they all belong to God. 'He is One and there is no partner for Him' (*wahdahu la sharika lah*), and it is His decision to do whatever He wills with His 'belongings'.

Anything other than God has no choice or power whatsoever, except for what God bestows upon it, and only to the extent that He gives it power. God is the Absolute Owner of every being. He is the Absolute Owner of man and his possessions, and there are abundant verses in the Qur'an that signify this reality.

No being in the universe is self-reliant in its actions and effects (even though we consider these beings as causes and means). In their causality, they are not independent of the actions and effects of God, Exalted is He. They cannot do any action and cannot cause any effect save for the action and effect that God wills. That is, God grants them the power to do an action or cause an effect, and if He wills

otherwise, the beings would lose the power to bring about that action and effect.

In other words, in itself, there is no system of causes and instruments (*asbab*) in the universe that can cause any effect. What a being does is done because God gives it the power for that action or effect, and because He does not will its opposite. That is to say, God facilitates and smoothes the path to that action or effect, and thereby permits it. God's permission (*idhn*) is His bestowal of power and removal of the impediments.

There are abundant verses and narrations that the action of any agent is conditional on God's permission, and that no doer does anything except by God's permission.<sup>26</sup> For example:

***No affliction befalleth save by Allah's permission.... (64: 11)***

***As for the good land, its vegetation cometh forth by the permission of its Lord.... (7:58)***

***And no soul may die except by Allah's permission.... (3: 145)***

***Any palm-trees you cut down or left standing on their roots was thus by Allah's permission.... (59:5)***

***And We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by the permission of Allah.... (4:64)***

Therefore it is incumbent on any person who has knowledge of his God to not regard himself self-reliant in his actions, and not consider himself independent of Allah. One should rather view himself as the doer of the action as a result of God's endowment, and capable of doing it by His power. Allah says,

***... Truly power belongeth entirely to Allah.... (2: 165)***

Any believer that wants to commence on any action must do so by trust and reliance on Allah, and should lean on His support:

***... So when thou art resolved then rely on Allah.... (3: 159)***

And when he wants to promise something or speak of the future, that 'I will do this and that,' he should condition it on God's permission and decree.

## **Allah attributes actions to people, but denies their independence**

'ALLAMAHA. Though the above is true, there is also no doubt that one's actions belong to himself. In many places in the Qur'an, Allah has attributed actions to the Prophet and the people, such as:

***... Then say: for me is my deed, and for you is your deed.... (10:41)***

***... We have our deeds and you have your deeds.... (42: 15)***

At the same time, He denies the singularity of this attribution to the person who does it, and refutes the independence of the person from Allah's permission and decree.

So based on what was said, the exception in the verse,

***And never say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow' \* But only 'if Allah wills'.... (18:23-4)***

only states the exception, but not what is excepted (*al-istithna' al-mufarragh*). It is implied that the exception includes all conditions or all times, and a conjunctive 'by' (*ba'*) should be assumed to connect the two verses. Hence, the meaning of the verse would be something like, 'And never say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow" at any time or any condition, unless you accompany it *by* saying, "If Allah wills".'

1. [Translator's note. In accordance with the author's argument, several meanings and interpretations have been put forward for many of the terms in these verses, and so the translations vary. Also, all these vows are to emphasise what follows in the following verses, about the hereafter.]
2. See Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani* (Beirut, 198?), 30:280
3. *Al-Mizan* (Beirut, 1970), 14:81; 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, *Tafsir al-Qummi* (Beirut 1387/1968), 2:410. [Translator's note. In addition to 83:1, the term *wayl* appears in several other occasions in the Qur'an.]
4. See Muhammad ibn Murtada (Mulla Muhsin) Fayd al-Kashani, *Tafsir al-Safi* (Tehran, 1416/1996), 1:31ff.
5. [Translator's note. The natural universal (*al-kulli al-tabi'i*) is a quiddity (*mahiyyah*) that 'possesses universality in the mind and is capable of corresponding to a multiplicity of things' (whether mental or external). See 'Allamah Tabataba'i, *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics* (London, 2003): 47; trans. A.Q. Qara'i.]
6. See Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* (Beirut, 1983), 54:306ff.; Muhammad Salih Mazandarani, *Sharh-i Usul al-Kafi* (Beirut, 1421/2000), 4:193.
7. [Translator's note. See note 202 below.]
8. [Translator's note. *Jami'* is a being that is existentially superior to the other beings of its kind, called the individuals (*afrad*), such that the individuals are the manifestations of that superior being.]
9. The verse is: 'On the day when the Spirit (*ruh*) and the angels stand in ranks; they speak not save whoever is permitted by the All-Merciful and speaketh aright' (78:38). Maybe what 'Allamah meant was that the verse hints at a sense of authority for the Spirit (*ruh*) over the angels.
10. See Chapter 5: *Mystical Discourses*.
11. 'Allamah might have been referring to this verse: 'There are guards [angels] for him [every person] before and behind him, protecting him from Allah's command. Allah changeth not what a people are at until they change what is in themselves. And when Allah willeth misfortune for a people there is no turning it back, nor have they a guardian other than Him' (13:11). In this verse, the 'guards' and their 'protection from Allah's command' confirm the points of the discussion above.
12. Kulayni, *al-Kafi (al-Furu')* (Tehran, 1388/1968), 3:235, which reports four narrations in this regard with similar meaning.
13. [Translator's note. The embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-a'mal*) is the belief that one's reward or retribution in the hereafter consists of the manifestation and appearing of his actual deeds being repaid to him; however, the reality of the deeds will only be realised at that time.]
14. Part of a long hadith about the signs of the resurrection; see 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, *Tafsir al-Qummi* (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:307; and *al-Mizan*, 5:396.
15. See Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (*Shaykh al-Saduq*), *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mah* (Qum, 1405/1984): 252 and 525ff.; *al-Muttaqi al-Hindi*, *Kanz al-'Ummal* (Beirut, 1409/1989), 14:282ff and 599ff.; See Ibn Majah *Sunan Ibn Majah* (Beirut, 1996), 4:396ff (*Kitab Ta'bir al- Ru'ya*); *Suyuti*, *al-Durr al-Manthur* (Beirut, 197?), 5:353ff.
16. See *al-Mizan*, 13:395.
17. See Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* (Beirut, 1995), 2:233; and Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut,

1995), 16:29.

[18.](#) [Translator's note. He was none other than Toshihiko Izutsu.]

[19.](#) [Translator's note. Note that letters like **ي** and **يٰ** have a hamzah at the end, but it is not included in abjad calculations since it has the same number as the preceding alif.]

[20.](#) See al-Mizan, 1:75.

[21.](#) As 'Allamah explains later, it might be that the traversing (tayy al-ard) of less-than-perfect individuals is done through the perfect individuals. That is, whenever they want to traverse the earth, they can do so under the permission of a perfect person, who would appear right away and take them on tayy al-ard. Or he may take them to the desired destination merely by his will and without his appearance.

[22.](#) Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983), 12:29; 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir al-Qummi (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:223; with its own line of transmission.

[23.](#) Hurr al-'Amili, Ithbat al-Hudah (Qum, 1959-60), 1:23.

[24.](#) [Translator's note. Mubalahah (mutual cursing) is when two parties pray to God to put the wrong party in curse and damnation. It is a gnostic combat whereby each party – which claims to be rightful – uses its spiritual connection with truth, which is the source of every power in the world, in order to put down the other side. Verse 3:61 is known as the Verse of Mubalahah, and Najran is a city in Yemen.]

[25.](#) Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan (Beirut, 1995), 6:315.

[26.](#) One must obey Allah's order because of Allah and because it is His order, not because of anything else. There are some short demonstrative arguments about this in al-Mizan, 8:26 that comprise a book of wisdom. It says, 'His word is the truth; and it is incumbent that His order is obeyed because it is His order, not because of any maslahah (expediency, welfare) or for any good or benefit that it involves. Otherwise that would dismiss God of His Lordship (rububiyah) and Mastership (mawlawiyah), and would make considerations of expediencies and benefits central to everything. And since those considerations and benefits pertain to His creatures, that would set God on a par with the other things.'

## 7. Historical Discourses

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

### [Abrogation in the Noble Qur'an and its possibility based on the religion and the intellect](#)

STUDENT. Some people believe that there is no *naskh* (abrogation, substitution of one verse for another) in the Noble Qur'an. Therefore they deny the existence of abrogating (*nasikh*) and abrogated (*mansukh*) verses (i.e. verses after and before the substitution of a law). However, we can see that some verses clearly abrogate some other verses, such as the Noble Verse of the Relatives (*ulu al-arham*; 8:75, see below). But why are some people so obsessed with and insistent on denying abrogation? Have they rejected the concept of abrogation because of any problem in it?

'ALLAMAH. It is true that some deny abrogation (*naskh*) in the Qur'an, and apparently what they mean is that there are no abrogating and abrogated verses. But it seems undeniable that some verses are abrogating and abrogated with respect to one another. The case of giving charity for whispering with the

Prophet is a very obvious one. It is about an order to the Noble Prophet that ‘Henceforth, any companion who wants to whisper something to you should have given something in charity first.’ That law was only carried out by Imam ‘Ali. The other Companions did not come anywhere close to performing it: [1](#)

***O you who believe, when you whisper to the Messenger, offer something in alms before your whispering. That is better for you and purer. But if you cannot find [the wherewithal], Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (58: 12)***

Another example is the case of inheritance and revelation of the Verse of the Relatives’ (*ulu al-arham*). Early in Islam, the believers used to inherit from one another according to the Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) that the Messenger of Allah had established between his Companions. But when the Verse of the Relatives was revealed, it substituted the previous law. So it was decreed that the individuals should inherit from one another based on family ties and not religious brotherhood. [2](#)

***And those who have believed afterwards and emigrated and struggled with you, they are of you; and those related by blood are prior to one another in the book of Allah; truly Allah is All-Knowing of everything. (8:75)***

The verse indicates that the inheritors should be family relatives, and thus it replaced the former law. There is another verse that,

***Any verse that We abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, We bring a better one or the like of it. Knowest thou not that Allah is truly All-Powerful over everything? (2: 106)***

This verse clearly confirms abrogation, and leaves no room for doubt about it. And perhaps an even more evident verse is,

***And when We substitute a verse in place of another verse – and Allah knoweth best what He sendeth down – they say, ‘Thou art but a forger.’ Nay, but most of them know not \* Say: the Holy Spirit hath delivered it from thy Lord in truth, that it may confirm those who believe, and as guidance and good tidings for the submitters [to Allah]. (16: 101-2)***

These noble verses clearly maintain that the verses of the Qur’an may abrogate and substitute one another, and are subject to transformation and change. In the first verse, *ayah* (literally ‘sign’) obviously refers to the verses of the Noble Qur’an (which are also called *ayah*). It says that the enemies claim that this change is from Muhammad, and not from God, and that he has alleged it [to God]. So the next verse responds to them, saying to tell them that these verses, both the abrogated and the abrogating, are descended by Gabriel – the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Qudus*) – so as to bring about confidence for the hearts of the believers, and serve as guidance and good tiding for the Muslims [those who submit].

Abrogation means that the period and duration of the abrogated law was limited. That is, the former law was not decreed permanently, but only until the advent of the abrogating (new) law. Not only there is no

problem with that, but in fact there must be abrogation in God's laws and canons. It may very well be that certain laws are not enacted permanently; nevertheless they involve temporary merits and benefits. But at the same time it may not be desirable to disclose their impermanence from the beginning. In that case, the law is first prescribed unconditionally, and then it is abrogated after the achievement of the desired benefits and results.

So the idea of abrogation is that the abrogating (*nasikh*) verse indicates that the abrogated (*mansukh*) verse was only applicable for a certain period of time, but not any more. It is not that the second law contradicts the first law, but that it provides more information about it (i.e. its duration). And one cannot expect all the laws to be the same (in terms of permanence). Two laws may apparently seem to contradict one another, but that cannot be a real (*haqiqi*) contradiction. What has happened is that the first law was decreed due to some consideration and expediency (*maslahah*), but was then replaced by another law. As the settings and conditions have changed, thus have the laws.

And the reason why some insist on denying abrogation in the Noble Qur'an is that they think that it involves a contradiction, while there should be no contradiction in the laws. Once one recognises that abrogation means that one verse discloses the period and duration of the other verse – i.e. for how long the first verse was applicable – then there would be no contradiction, and abrogation would totally make sense.

## Islam as the abrogator of the other religions

STUDENT. What is the evidence that the Noble Qur'an abrogated the Torah and the Gospel?

'ALLAMAH. There are certain verses in the Noble Qur'an that indicate that the Islam is a new religion, independent of the previous religions:

***He hath laid down for you a religion which He enjoined Noah, and that which We have revealed to thee, and what We enjoined Abraham and Moses and Jesus: To establish the religion and divide not therein. Hard for the polytheists is that thou callest them to. Allah attracteth to it [or Himself] whom He wills, and guideth to it [or Himself] who returneth. (42: 13)***

In other words, this verse clearly says that 'what We enjoined Noah, and what We revealed to thee, and what We enjoined Abraham, Moses, and Jesus' – i.e. the religions of Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus and what We [meaning Allah] revealed to the Prophet – 'We laid down and ordained all of these as a religion for thee.' This laying down of a religion, even if it is the same as the former religions, is an abrogation. It dismisses the previous law, and composes and imposes a new law and religion. So one could say that any religion abrogates the previous religions, because it is a new decree.

STUDENT. Why do the Jews deny abrogation?<sup>3</sup>

'ALLAMAH. It is apparently because they are not willing to recognise any divine book or celestial law

sent after the Torah, which is a divine book. They claim that the Torah ended everything, and so there is no divine law after the Torah.

In fact the Verse of Abrogation (*naskh*) actually disproves this very idea. No power can constrain and restrict Allah as to not change His law. Abrogation is a custom of His, and He causes forgetfulness, and He is Powerful over everything:

***Any verse that We abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, We bring a better or the like of it. Knowest thou not that Allah is truly All-Powerful over everything? \* Knowest thou not that truly to Allah alone belongeth the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and you have not any guardian or supporter apart from Allah? (2:106-7)***

But the Jews maintain that Allah cannot abrogate a decree after its descension. That is, abrogation is not a constituent of God's power or an element of His knowledge, and so God's hands are tied up with regard to such matters:

***And the Jews said, 'Allah's hand is enchained.' Their hands be enchained, accursed they are for what they said. Nay, but His two hands are outspread; He bestoweth as He will.... (5:64)***

They believe that God decreed the laws during the six days when He first created the heavens and the earth, and that was it and over with, and there is no further change or transformation. And the idea behind this way of thinking is the same as God's hand being enchained and tied down – and Allah is the refuge [from such blasphemy]. Rather, His hands are open.<sup>4</sup> His two hands are open, and He makes any change that He wills in the world of creation. He issues new laws based on new expediencies and circumstances.

## **The scribes of revelation**

STUDENT. How did the scribes of the divine revelation, the Glorious Qur'an, use to record the revealed verses? Was it that whenever the Messenger of Allah received a revelation, he would then send for the scribes (*kuttab*, sing. *katib*) to come and write it down? For example, one of the scribes of revelation was Imam 'Ali. But certainly he was not with the Messenger of Allah at all times. He might have been sent for a battle or on some other mission at the time of revelation.

And what about 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Zayd ibn Thabit? And what is the source of their different recitations (*qira'ah*)?

'ALLAMAH. I have not seen any narration that the Messenger of Allah ever sent for one of the Companions or scribes of revelation to come and write down the revealed verses! It is [only] reported that they used to write the revelations that the Messenger of Allah received.

The scribes were Imam 'Ali, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thabit and some others.

Later on, Zayd ibn Thabit was put in charge of the first compilation of the Qur'an, which was done under Abu Bakr's caliphate. He was also involved in the second compilation of the Qur'an that was done by 'Uthman and at his time. It was Zayd ibn Thabit who compiled the Qur'an and put it together.

And the different recitations have been attributed to different narrations (*riwayah*). That is, these recitations are how the reciters have narrated the Qur'an from the Messenger of Allah. And so is the case with the subsequent recitations, like that of 'Asim, which is the prevalent recitation of the Qur'an. 'Asim has reported his recitation through one intermediary from Imam 'Ali. Each of these reciters has recited the Qur'an in a particular manner, and thus they differ from one another in their recitations. For example, the recitation of Ubayy ibn Ka'b is different from that of 'Asim.

## The different recitations of the Qur'an are narrated from the Messenger of Allah

'ALLAMAH. In the history of Qur'an, the subject of different recitations is quite an issue and story in itself. Overall, even though the reciters have got their recitations from the Messenger of Allah, these recitations should not be considered as direct narrations from him. It does not seem to have been so.

What may be inferred is that at the time of the Noble Messenger, there were many individuals – about seventy or eighty or more – who were carriers of the Qur'an. They used to recite the Qur'an, learn it and then spread it among the people. And if they had any questions or problems, they would ask the Noble Messenger and he would clarify it for them. That is the overall picture.

Therefore their recitations are not the selfsame recitations of the Messenger of Allah. Neither did they invent these recitations on their own. It was that the Muslims saw the carriers of the Qur'an recite the Qur'an the way they did, and that they have received it from the Noble Messenger. Hence it was deduced that the recitation of this reciter or that companion went back to the Noble Messenger.

According to the historians, the Noble Messenger used to recite the Qur'an in two ways or more. Therefore the discrepancy in recitations is because of the recitations of the Messenger of Allah himself.

Gabriel used to come to the Messenger of Allah once every year, and would recite to him all of the Qur'an that had been revealed thus far. Thereby Gabriel would renew the revelation. Then the Prophet would recite it to the scribes based on Gabriel's most recent recitation, and they would spread it among the people as such. That is how the revelation each year came to be different from the ones before it. Thus, the different recitations are rooted in Gabriel's recitations through the years.

STUDENT. For each year that Gabriel descended and recited the whole Qur'an for the Messenger of Allah, would he then recite the whole Qur'an *only* for Imam 'Ali for one year, *only* for Ubayy the next year, *only* for Zayd ibn Thabit in another year, and so on? That is, was it recited only for one scribe each year? Because otherwise, if the Honourable Messenger of Allah used to recite Gabriel's recitation each

year for everyone, then the recitations of the scribes should not have differed from one another. In that case, all of the scribes should have recited the same way each year, and only one's own recitations would differ from year to year. But we see that the recitations of the scribes are different from one another.

'ALLAMAH. No doubt that the recitations that they have narrated are very different and diverse. In the last year of his life, it is reported that the Noble Messenger said, 'My life is over [this year]. And the evidence for it is that Gabriel came to me and recited the Qur'an twice this year, from beginning to the end. This is a sign of my departure.'<sup>5</sup> And clearly reciting it twice means in two ways.

For these discussions, Suyuti's *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (in 2 volumes) is quite a good book. It clarifies these matters to some extent. Suyuti was truly an adroit scholar. He demonstrates some mastery in quoting and analyzing the narrations and reports, and is very well-versed and quite an authority in these matters. He is a master of narration (*naql*).

STUDENT. But still this problem should be solved, which is: was it that Ubayy ibn Ka'b had his own way of recitation of the whole Qur'an, Zayd ibn Thabit had his own way, and Imam 'Ali had his own way? If so, then that means that the Messenger of Allah recited the Qur'an for [only] one person each year. But if he recited the Qur'an for everyone, then there should also be discrepancy within the recitations of each reciter.

'ALLAMAH. No, it may have been that Ubayy recited the Qur'an one way in some year and another way in the next year and so on – a different recitation every year. Some claim this to have been the cause of the different recitations.

Ubayy's recitations not only differ from those of the other reciters, but his recitations also differ from one another. And so is the case with the others. For example, 'Asim has two disciples, who both report the Qur'an from beginning to the end from him; yet their recitations differ from one another. Both are reporting 'Asim's recitation, but in two different ways. The same is true about Ubayy, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and the others.

## **'The King of the Day of Judgment' is more inclusive and pertinent than 'The Owner of the Day of Judgment'**

STUDENT. Can we liken the different recitations to the different views of the experts of *nahw* (syntax, grammar)? Experts of *nahw* such as Sibawayh, Kisa'i and others use different sets of rules, such that one reads an Arabic poem in one way and the other reads it in another way. Thus they differ in inflectional morphology (*i'rab*). So maybe the differences between the recitations of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thabit and the others are similar to that. They were all Arabs, proficient in the language, and adept in the fields of syntax (*nahw*) and literature. So they recited the way they did based on their mother tongue and the rules that they knew. Therefore the different recitations would be due to their

personal judgments and interpretations.

‘ALLAMAH. No, that is not the case. It seems that their difference is due to narration; that is, they ascribe their recitations to the Messenger of Allah. For example, verse 1:4 has been recited in two ways: ‘The *Malik* (King) of the Day of Judgment,’ and ‘The *M<sup>l</sup>lik* (Owner, Master) of the Day of Judgment,’ and both are narrated from the Messenger of Allah. If both narrations are *mutawatir* (substantially repeated, and hence credible), it means that the Messenger of Allah used to recite the verse both ways.[6](#)

The reciters of *Malik* are more than the reciters of *M<sup>l</sup>lik*. Four out of the seven reciters (*al-qurra’ al-sab’ah*) have recited *Malik*, and the rest have recited *M<sup>l</sup>lik*. And intuitively *Malik* makes more sense, because a ‘day’ (*yawm*) is not usually attributed to an ‘owner’ (*m<sup>l</sup>lik*). Instead, it is more appropriate for a day to have a ‘king’ (*malik*), as one would say, ‘the king of the day,’ not ‘the owner of the day.’

The late Qadi, may Allah’s mercy be upon him, used to recite the verse with *Malik*. And the commentary (*tafsir*) *al-Kashshaf* mentions why *Malik* is more inclusive and pertinent than *M<sup>l</sup>lik*.[7](#)

STUDENT. Who are ‘the seven reciters’ (*al-qurra’ al-sab’ah*)? And what are the ‘repeated’ (*mutawatir*) and ‘uncommon’ (*shadhdhah*) recitations?

‘ALLAMAH. There are seven reciters, known as *al-qurra’ al-sab’ah*, whose recitations are repeatedly narrated (*mutawatir*) from the Messenger of Allah. These recitations are considered credible. One of them is the recitation of ‘Asim, who narrates from the Messenger of God through one intermediary: Imam ‘Ali. And the other six recitations are similarly reported from, say, Ubayy, Ibn Mas’ud, and others. Since there are few intermediaries, the line reaches the Messenger of Allah quite fast.

And the *shadhdhah* (single, uncommon) recitations are those that the masters of recitation formed for themselves using the *mutawatir* ones. There are many *shadhdhah* recitations, three of which are quite famous, and together with the seven *mutawatir* ones, they make up ten well-known (*ma’ruf*) recitations. Other than those three, there are other uncommon recitations, which are mixtures of various recitations, and are called non-famous uncommon recitations (*shadhdhah ghayra ma’rufah*). Some people consider some or all of the three *shadhdhah* recitations to be *mutawatir*. So for them, the number of *mutawatir* recitations is more than seven.[8](#)

## **Compilation of the Qur’an by ‘Uthman, and the death of Ibn**

### **Mas’ud**

‘ALLAMAH. Over four hundred (or seventy) reciters of the Qur’an were killed in the battle of Yamamah, which occurred at the time (caliphate) of Abu Bakr (11–13/632–4). Thus there was this threat that the whole Qur’an may be lost if the other reciters also got killed in future battles (because the Qur’an was not compiled and sorted out yet). So Zayd ibn Thabit was appointed to collect and compose the Qur’an at that time, and thus the Qur’an was first compiled at the time of Abu Bakr.[9](#)

But by the time of ‘Uthman’s caliphate (23–35/644–56) there had arisen many discrepancies in the recitation of the Book. So Ibn Mas’ud wrote to ‘Uthman, ‘Hurry up and save the Qur’an, for it is about to be lost due to the extent of discrepancies. Its recitation has become confused.’<sup>10</sup> ‘Uthman took the word of Ibn Mas’ud and acted upon it. He ordered that all the Qur’ans – with the various recitations – to be brought to Medina, and gathered in some place. So there was this huge pile of these Qur’ans, which were written on wooden tablets, deer parchments, cattle shoulder bones and paper. They were all gathered together and set on fire.

But Ibn Mas’ud refused to hand over his own Qur’an, even though he was the first one to write to ‘Uthman that ‘The condition of the Qur’an is adverse. Do something for the Qur’an! Do something to protect this Divine Book from loss!’ It was following his message that ‘Uthman ordered for all the Qur’ans to be brought from the different cities. So the real call and motivation had started from Ibn Mas’ud.

He was in one of the counties outside Medina at the time of the burning. When he came to Medina and was informed of the matter, he said, ‘All my concern was to preserve the Qur’an! But this – the burning of the Qur’an – is even worse and more grievous. I will not hand in my Qur’an and will not let them burn it!’ So he did not submit his Qur’an at that time, and neither did he until his death. In fact, it was because of this very matter that he eventually lost his life.

When he came to Medina, he had two or three meetings with ‘Uthman, whom he criticised, condemned and rebuked; and that made ‘Uthman upset with him. One day ‘Uthman was speaking on the pulpit (*minbar*), when Ibn Mas’ud started criticising his actions in front of the public. ‘Uthman was enraged, and ordered his guards and minions to drag Ibn Mas’ud out of the mosque on his face. So they dragged him out of the mosque on his face, whereby one of his ribs broke. Thus he became ill as a result of that and finally passed away.

When Ibn Mas’ud was sick, ‘Uthman sent him a gift, which he rejected. ‘Uthman also sent him money, but he also rejected that. He rejected them all, saying, ‘I have no need for it. You abstained from giving when I had a need, and you give now that I have no need?’ He also said, ‘I will not consent to and will not let you take away and burn my Qur’an.’

Based on the narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt (the Household of the Prophet, peace be upon them), Ibn Mas’ud’s Qur’an did not include Chapters 113 and 114 (*mu’awwidhatayn*).<sup>11</sup> That is, Ibn Mas’ud believed that these two chapters were not part of the Qur’an. They were two ‘*udhahs* (protective charms against evil and calamities) that Gabriel brought down from the heavens in order to protect Hasan and Husayn when they were sick. The two ‘*udhahs* were meant to be hung on their necks and recited to them so that they may recover. And that is what they did and thus they recovered.

Anyway, ‘Uthman maintained that the Qur’ans should be burnt for the good of the Muslims. But Ibn Mas’ud claimed that there was no such good to be sought through such an insult to the Qur’an and by burning the Book of Allah.

And when one thinks about it, it should have been quite easy to deal with this issue. They could have had the Qur'ans buried in some pure land, or kept in a holy place, or thrown in water.

The above are based on the Shi'a narrations. But according to the Sunni narrations, they did not burn the Qur'ans, but they boiled them in a cauldron of water, so that the letters written on the bones, tablets, and papers faded away. [12](#)

## The Qur'an of Imam 'Ali

'ALLAMAH. According to one of the history books, Imam 'Ali did not come out of his house after the Noble Messenger passed away. Thus some of the prominent Companions went to him and inquired, 'Why do you not come out? Why do you not come to the mosque? Why do you not join the congregation of the Muslims?' [13](#)

'I have vowed to not wear [my] cloak ('*aba*') he replied, 'unless I have finished the ordering of the Qur'an and prepared its commentary and exegesis! So I am locked in here because of my vow!' His preparation of the Qur'an took six months, whereby he ordered and arranged the chapters based on their chronological descension. That is, he placed Chapter 96 (al-'Alaq; the first chapter that was revealed to the Messenger of Allah) at the beginning, and the last chapter – perhaps Chapter 5 (al-Ma'idah) – at the end. Therefore Chapter 2 (al-Baqarah), which was revealed in Medina for instance, would have been positioned toward the end. [14](#)

Apart from arranging the chapters and verses in the order they were revealed, a further feature and merit of Imam 'Ali's Qur'an was that it included the circumstances in which the verses and chapters were revealed (*sha'n al-nuzul*). Therefore the chapters and verses that had a specific occasion in which they had descended were distinguished from the chapters that were revealed before them and after them, and were positioned between the two. [15](#)

That is how Imam 'Ali organised the Qur'an, and he even included some exegetic and hermeneutic points. He prepared and finished the Qur'an in six months, then loaded it on a camel and brought it to the entrance of the mosque. 'This is your Qur'an, which I have compiled and brought!' he told the Companions who were in the mosque.

But they did not say anything! Thus he took the camel back home, and that Qur'an was never seen again.

That is according to the Sunni narrations ('*ammah*'). But according to the Shi'a narrations (*khassah*), when Imam 'Ali loaded the Qur'an on the camel and brought it to the mosque and said, 'This is your Qur'an!' they replied, 'We have no need for your Qur'an.' They did not even inquire about it, and the Imam did not insist on it either. He simply redirected the camel and went home saying, 'You will not see this Qur'an ever again, until the Resurrection!' [16](#)

## Why is the name of Imam 'Ali not mentioned in the Qur'an

STUDENT. Why is the name of Imam 'Ali not mentioned in the Qur'an?

'ALLAMAH. Had his name been in the Qur'an, they (the enemies and usurpers of the caliphate) would have changed and erased it. That is his own answer. [17](#)

## The Qur'an has not been distorted

'ALLAMAH. The Qur'an that we have, which was compiled by Zayd ibn Thabit at the time of Abu Bakr, is certainly the complete Qur'an. It does not have a single letter more or less than the original Qur'an. And the claim that the Qur'an has been distorted is invalid.

And the reason for it is that the authenticity of the *ahad* (singly narrated) traditions that talk about the Qur'an's distortion (*tahrif*) hinges on the authenticity of the word of the Imam who has said that narration. And the authenticity of the Imam's word hinges on the authenticity of the word of the Prophet, who has appointed the Imam as his infallible successor. And the authenticity of the Prophet's word hinges on the authenticity of the Qur'an, which has introduced him as an infallible leader, prophet, and guardian (*wali*). Meanwhile, even if a single letter were extra or missing in the Glorious Qur'an, then the whole Qur'an would be discredited. And that would in turn discredit all the narrations.

All Muslims concur on the authenticity of the Glorious Qur'an. On many occasions our Imams drew on the verses of the Qur'an as evidence for their contentions. They have affirmed the Qur'an's authenticity, and there is no doubt or uncertainty on this subject.

When seventy or four hundred reciters of the Qur'an were killed in the battle of Yamamah at the time of Abu Bakr, 'Umar went to Abu Bakr and insisted that the Qur'an should be compiled. 'Currently,' 'Umar maintained, 'the Qur'an is in the chests of its reciters. Should another battle come up and more reciters get killed, the Qur'an would vanish from the earth altogether. So we must gather the reciters and make a *mushaf*' – that is, put the Qur'an in a volume as a book with covers.

Thus Zayd ibn Thabit was appointed to compile the Qur'an. Twenty-five reciters from the Muhajirin ('Immigrants', the Meccans) and twenty-five reciters from the Ansar ('Supporters', the Madinites) were chosen to accept any verse that was brought in as a verse of the Qur'an and was testified to by two just witnesses. [18](#) That is how the Qur'an that we see today was compiled and made into a volume, at the time of Abu Bakr. And our Imams have unanimously ordered us to recite the Qur'an as it is and with the arrangement that it has. They recited it as it is and so did their companions.

In compiling the Qur'an, they recorded any verse that was brought in. And if a verse came in two or three times, it was recorded in two or three spots, save for Chapter 1. Chapter 1 (al-Fatihah) was revealed to the Honourable Prophet twice, but was written only once, and all Muslims concur on this.

Apparently Chapter 112 (al-Tawhid) was also like that; that it was revealed twice but recorded only once.

At any rate, as already mentioned, the claim that the Qur'an has been distorted is not credible. Such a claim would rely on the authority of the narrations and reports, and that relies on the authority of the word of the Imams and the Prophet, and in turn on the authority of the Qur'an. Therefore the narrations that affirm the distortion of the Qur'an would be nullify the authority of the Qur'an, and thereby they would invalidate themselves. They are self-refuting, and thus they are unacceptable.

## **The displacement of the verse 'Today I perfected your religion for you'**

'ALLAMAH. Of course the position of some of the verses might have been changed, but that is different from the distortion of the Qur'an (which means dropping a part of it, or adding something extraneous to it).

As it appears – while Allah knows its truth better – I believe that in the whole Qur'an, from beginning to the end, there are two verses that have surely been displaced. For the other verses, it is possible to say that their positions have not been changed, and that could be justified. But it is not justifiable whatsoever for these two cases. The first one is in Chapter 5 (al-Ma'idah), and the second one is in Chapter 33 (al-Ahzab). The first one is:

***... Today those who disbelieve have despaired of [harming] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me! Today I perfected your religion for you, and completed My bounty upon you, and approved Islam as your religion.... (5:3)***

There is much evidence, including the verse itself and the verses before and after it, that leave no doubt that the position of this verse has apparently been altered.

They (the compilers, under the supervision of the usurpers of caliphate) positioned this verse after the description of the unlawful edibles, right between the excepted clause and the exception. They did this, so that the subjects may be mixed up; so that the reader would presume that this day – the day when the infidels lost hope of eradicating and spoiling the religion of the Muslims, the day when the Muslims should fear Allah, the day when the religion of the Muslims became complete and God's bounty was perfected for them, and the day when Allah approved Islam for the Muslims – was the day when things like carrion, blood, pork and their likes were prohibited.

But note that the subject of unlawful edibles has appeared in four places in the Noble Qur'an. And in all of them, the subject is discussed in the same way, style, and tone. And each of these four cases is followed by the exceptions, that those who are desperate and under exigency may use these unlawful items.

It is only in this case (5:3) that there is a separation between the excepted clause (which states the unlawful edibles) and the exception, and there is no clear connection between the middle part of the verse and the rest of the verse. The misplacement that has occurred here becomes very clear when one compares this verse against the other three verses. The four exceptions that have been stated after the unlawful edibles are:

(1) ...***But whoever is desperate, while neither desiring nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (2:173)***

(2 & 3) ... ***But whoever is desperate, while neither desiring nor transgressing, then truly Thy Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (6:145 & 16:115)***

(4) ...***But whoever is desperate in starvation, while not inclining to sin, then truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (5:3)***

These are the four exceptions, which as we see have the same tone and style. And the complete verses about the unlawful edibles are:

***He hath only prohibited for you all carrion, blood, and pork, and that which hath been slaughtered with saying other than Allah's name unto it. But whoever is desperate, while neither desiring nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (2:173)***

***Say: I find not in that which is revealed to me, prohibited to eat for an eater except it be carrion, or running blood, or pork, for it is [or they are] verily impure, or an ungodly thing slaughtered with saying other than Allah's name unto it. But whoever is desperate, while neither desiring nor transgressing, then truly Thy Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (6:145)***

***He hath only prohibited for you all carrion, blood, and pork, and that which hath been slaughtered with saying other than Allah's name unto it. But whoever is desperate, while neither desiring nor transgressing, then truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (16:115)***

***Prohibited for you are all carrion, blood, and pork, and that which hath been slaughtered with saying other than Allah's name unto it, and the strangled, and the beaten, and the fallen from a height, and the gored, and that eaten by beasts of prey, except for what you decapitate [before dying], and that which hath been slaughtered on the altars, and to partition by the divining arrows. Those are ungodly. Today those who disbelieve have despaired of [harming] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me! Today I perfected your religion for you, and completed My bounty upon you, and approved Islam as your religion. But whoever is desperate in starvation, while not inclining to sin, then truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (5:3)***

When we consider these verses side by side, we see that in the first three cases, the exception comes

immediately after the unlawful edibles. However, in this last verse (5:3), even though the exception is the same as in the other verses – and so it should supposedly come right after the excepted clause – the sentence, ‘Today those who disbelieve have despaired of [harming] your religion...’ has separated between the excepted clause and the exception.

This sentence is about guardianship (*wilayah*) and has such a grand meaning and a supreme content. It is very evident that they (the enemies and the usurpers of the caliphate) have placed it here so that the subjects get mixed up, and that the people would not notice its meaning and not follow its message. This verse (sentence) of Guardianship speaks about the completion of the religion and the perfection of God’s bounty, with which there is no deficiency in Islam anymore, and with which Allah is pleased with this religion. It has been placed here so that the reader may think that these are about customary matters such as interaction with the infidels, their food being lawful for the Muslim and the food of the Muslims being lawful for them, and so on (see 5:5).

And the second occasion where the position of the verse has obviously been changed is the Verse of Purification (*tathir*) in Chapter 33 (al-Ahzab).

## The displacement of the Verse of Purification

***...People of the House, Allah only willeth to remove all impurity from you, and purify you such [thorough] purification. (33:33)***

‘ALLAMAH. This verse is also placed where it has no connection with what is before and after it. The verses before and after it are all about the wives of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family). But this verse is about the Prophet’s Household (Ahl al-Bayt; which is a different group of individuals), and it has been placed in the middle of the other verses so that it may be mistaken and disguised. The verses as a whole are:

***O wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women if you observe self-restraint; so be not soft in speech, lest it lure he in whose heart is a sickness, but speak commendable words \* And stay in your houses, and appear not in the public like the previous era of ignorance, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and obey Allah and His Messenger. People of the House, Allah only willeth to remove all impurity from you, and purify you such [thorough] purification \* And evoke the verses of Allah and the Wisdom that is recited in your houses. Truly Allah is All-Subtle, All-Aware. (33:32-4)***

In the part about the Prophet’s wives, there is no mention of Ahl al-Bayt, and nothing is said about them. There is no connection between that part and the Verse of Purification, where Allah addresses Ahl al-Bayt, telling them that He has removed all impurity and ignobility from them, and has purified them.

In fact, the above verses (apart from the Verse of Purification) only consist of two verses that are about

the 'Wives of the Prophet' (*nisa' al-nabi*). The first verse is, **'O wives of the prophet, you are not like any other woman if you observe self-restraint; so be not soft in speech, lest it lure he in whose heart is a sickness, but speak commendable words.'** (33:32)

And the second verse is (should be),

**And stay in your houses, and appear not in the public like the previous era of ignorance, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and obey Allah and His Messenger, and evoke the verses of Allah and the Wisdom that is recited in your houses. Truly Allah is All-Subtle, All-Aware.**

These verses (verses 32, 34, and the first half of 33) concern the wives of the Prophet, whom are given certain instructions. And all of the pronouns and verb conjugates correspond to them. They are all in second person plural feminine form, like 'you are not' (*lastunna*), 'you self-restrain' (*ittaqaaytunna*), 'you be soft' (*takhda'na*), 'you speak' (*qulna*), 'you stay' (*qarna*), 'your houses' (*buyutikunna*), 'you appear in the public' (*tabarrujna*), 'you establish' (*aqimna*), 'you pay' (*atina*), 'you obey' (*ati'na*), and 'you evoke' (*udhkurna*).<sup>19</sup> But the address changes in the middle of the second verse by the introduction of an incongruent sentence about the Household of the Prophet. In that part, the pronouns and the verb conjugates correspond to the second person plural masculine form, like 'from you' (*'ankum*) and 'purify you' (*yutahhirakum*). It is just like an incompatible patch; it clearly shows that it has no connection with the verses before and after it. It is evident that this sentence does not belong here.

But it has been brought here so that it may be disguised, and that the minds of the general public may be directed to the wives of the Prophet and associate the honour of purification and removal of impurities with them. As a result of inserting this extra part in the middle, they had to turn the second verse into two verses: one verse ending with **'purify you such [thorough] purification'** (33:33), and the other ending with **'All-Subtle, All-Aware'** (33:34). Thus the verses addressing the 'Wives of the Prophet' have turned into three verses.<sup>20</sup>

## **The change of qiblah, and the Prophet's qiblah in Mecca**

STUDENT. Was Bayt al-Muqaddas ('the Sanctified House', Jerusalem) specifically decreed as *qiblah* (direction of prayer) in the beginning when the Muslims used to pray toward it, or was it chosen as *qiblah* following the other religions?

'ALLAMAH. In Noble Mecca, we know that the Messenger of Allah used to pray in Masjid al-Haram in such a way that he would face both the Ka'bah and Jerusalem. That is, he used to stand in front of the Ka'bah in such an angle that Jerusalem would also be in the same direction. But it was not like that when he migrated to Medina (it was not possible to face Mecca and Jerusalem at the same time). There, the Messenger of Allah and the Muslims used to pray toward Jerusalem, and so the Jews started censuring and taunting them for not having a *qiblah* of their own. The Jews kept rebuking the Muslims for that, until finally the verses of *qiblah* were revealed (2: 142-50). And indeed, to pray while facing the

Ka'bah is a splendid pillar of Islam.

STUDENT. In terms of established historical evidence, do we have any certain proof for the distortion (*tahrif*) of 'the two Testaments' (*ahdayn*)?

'ALLAMAH. The Noble Qur'an explicitly states that the Jews and the Christians distorted the two Testaments (the Torah and the Gospel).<sup>21</sup> However, the Qur'an solidly maintains that not all of the two Testaments are distorted, but they still include parts that are true. In many cases the Qur'an challenges and argues against the Jews and the Christians based on the very Torah and Gospel that they had at the time.<sup>22</sup> And there is also historical evidence for their distortion, and there are also some accounts mentioned within the Torah and the Gospel that confirm their distortion.

## Revelation of the Torah to Prophet Moses

STUDENT. Was the Torah (*Tawrah*) revealed to Prophet Moses (peace be upon our prophet and his family and upon him) during the selfsame forty nights that he had gone to talk to God at His rendezvous? What were the tablets on which the Torah was written made of? And where is Mount Tur?

And how was the Gospel (*Injil*) revealed? Did the Apostles (*hawariyyun*) of Jesus Christ write the Gospels during his time or later on? And were they all pious and righteous or not?

'ALLAMAH. It is true that the Torah consisted of some tablets (*alwah*) that were sent down upon Moses in Mount Tur over a period of forty days; but it is not quite certain whether those were the same forty nights of supplication or not. So Prophet Moses took the tablets and headed back for his people, but he dropped them as he was angry (about his people worshipping the Calf). Therefore some of the tablets were broken. And the tablets were all made of emerald (*zumurrud*), which God had created and originated from sheer non-being (*ex nihilo*). In the (current) Torah there are certain historical accounts, stories, exempla, and episodes that cannot be attributed to a divine book; there are lots of strange and bizarre things. There have been fewer alterations in the Gospel compared to the many in the Torah.

There is no doubt that the Torah was revealed to Prophet Moses in Mount Tur (Mount Sinai), which is in the Sinai Desert in Egypt.<sup>23</sup> If one sails in the Red Sea from Egypt toward Mecca, the Sinai Desert would be on the right. The Torah was revealed entirely in those forty days, and Prophet Moses collected the tablets and took them to his people. But since a lot of them did not obey, God raised Mount Tur and suspended it above their heads:

***And [recall] when We made a covenant with you, and raised over you the Mount, [that] 'Firmly adhere to that which We have given you, and give ear.' They said, 'We heard and we disobey,' and [the adoration of] the calf was sunk in their hearts because of their disbelief. Say [unto them]: Evil is that which your belief orders you, if you are believers. (2:93)***

This suspension of Mount Tur was both a threat and a punishment for them, so that they may prostrate

and submit to the truth. Some of them prostrated and accepted the truth that they were told, while others said other things (like asking for an idol, or wanting to see God).

Initially, Prophet Moses' successor was chosen to be his brother, Prophet Aaron. But Aaron passed away in Tayh (in the Sinai Peninsula), and so Elisha (al-Yasa', Yusha' ibn Nun) became Prophet Moses' successor:

***And make mention of Ishmael and Elisha (al-Yasa') and Dhu al-Kifl. All are among the righteous. (38:48)***

## **Revelation of the Gospel to Prophet Jesus**

'ALLAMAH. The story of how the Gospel was revealed is more ambiguous than that of the Torah. Was the Gospel revealed as a divine Scripture upon Prophet Jesus? Or is it his teachings? Or was it compiled in another way? It is not quite clear. At any rate, all of the Gospels were written after the ascent of Prophet Jesus (to the heavens). Some one hundred and twenty Gospels were written, four of which were accredited and officially recognised by the Church. They were the Gospels of Luke, John, Mark, and Matthew. The other one hundred and sixteen were rejected, and they are still rejected, meaning that they are not being used.

At some point in history, there appeared the Gospel of Barnabas, which made quite a turmoil. But it was finally rejected and discredited, as it matched the teachings of Islam and Qur'an for the most part, and included tidings about the Prophet Muhammad.[24](#)

## **The Apostles of Prophet Jesus, and monasticism**

'ALLAMAH. The Apostles were the specific disciples and the chosen companions of Prophet Jesus. God, Exalted is He, instructed them to embrace faith, and thus they became His supporters (*ansar*):

***O you who believe, be supporters of Allah, as Jesus son of Mary said to the Apostles, 'Who are my supporters unto Allah?' The Apostles said, 'We are supporters of Allah.'... (61:14)***

The Apostles have been mentioned more than once in the Qur'an. In addition to the above verse, they are also mentioned in these verses:

***And when Jesus sensed disbelief in them, he said, 'Who are my supporters unto Allah?' The Apostles said, 'We are supporters of Allah. We believe in Allah, and thou [bear] witness that we are submitters \* Our Lord, we believe in what Thou hast sent down, and we follow the Messenger; inscribe us therefore with those who bear witness.' (3:52-3)***

***And [recall] when I inspired the Apostles that 'Believe in Me and in My Messenger,' they said, 'We believe, and [bear] witness that we are submitters' \* [And recall] When the Apostles said, 'O***

***Jesus son of Mary, is thy Lord able to send down upon us a table of meal from heaven?' He said, 'Observe your duty to Allah, if you are believers.'* (5: 111-12)**

It is said that all of the Apostles were righteous and virtuous people, except for one of them, who revealed the location of Prophet Jesus when the enemies were searching for him. But just as the enemies were about to capture Prophet Jesus, he ascended to the sky and left the people for good.

There were twelve Apostles, and except the one that turned out corrupt, they all maintained the custom of Prophet Jesus. Following his approach, they all decided to not get married, not establish any housing or dwelling for themselves, and not settle in any city.<sup>25</sup> Instead, they constantly travelled from city to city and from town to town in order to propagate the religion of Prophet Jesus. Thus they adopted monasticism (*ruhbaniiyyah*) and solitude, and even though the Exalted Allah had not initially decreed monasticism (for them), He was pleased with it:

***Then We kept sending Our messengers after them [Noah and Abraham], and We sent following [them] Jesus son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. And a monasticism they initiated – We did not prescribe it for them – only seeking Allah's pleasure, but they observe it not as it deserved to be observed. So We gave those of them who believed their rewards, and a lot of them are evil-doers. (57:27)***

The Christians did not observe the conditions and requirements of monasticism as they should have been observed, and failed to do justice to it. But at any rate, the Apostles succeeded in spreading the word and establishing a complete proclamation all around the world.

STUDENT. Is it true that the celibacy of Prophet Jesus is a sign of imperfection?

'ALLAMAH. It is not a sign of imperfection, but it is a sign of his spirituality and transcendence, for he did not become involved in this world whatsoever. He did not get married and did not take up any lodging or abode in this world. He had a peculiar state of being.

But the Noble and Honourable Messenger (of Islam) had a comprehensive (*jami'*) character, as he fully took up and digested the various features and aspects of this life. And marriage in particular is a distinct custom of the Messenger of Allah.

***And of His signs is that He created for you spouses of yourselves, that you may find repose with them, and He set between you care and mercy. Surely in that are signs for a people who contemplate. (30:21)***

## **Prophet Joseph was a mukhlas**

STUDENT. Based on some reported narrations, God took away the line of the prophets from Prophet Joseph's progeny as a result of his abandoning a preferred action (*tark al-awla*). (After Joseph had

become the king (of Egypt), his father along with his family left Canaan (Kan'an) for Egypt to see him. They entered the palace while he was sitting on the throne, and he did not stand up in respect for his father. Or (according to other narrations) he preceded his father when they wanted to mount a horse.)[26](#)

But then why did God place the line of prophethood in the descendants of his other brothers, even though they had committed a great crime, which was throwing their brother Joseph into the well and inflicting the pain of his separation upon their old father?

'ALLAMAH. 'The good deeds of the pious are evil deeds for the intimates.'[27](#) Given his spiritual rank and divine intimate standing, Joseph's abandonment of a preferred action (*tark al-awla*) might have been more crucial than the others' throwing him down the well.

Not to mention that the Qur'an explicitly says that Prophet Joseph was a *mukhlas* (chosen, one who is made sincere by Allah),[28](#) and the chosen never sin. Hence, based on that verse, one could reject all those narrations and count them apocryphal.

## Platonism

STUDENT. Some people claim that Plato did not accept the religion of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon our prophet and his family and upon him) saying, 'This religion is for people with weak intellects. I cannot adopt it for I have already reached the reality.' Is this true or made-up?

'ALLAMAH. That is not true, because Plato lived (about) five hundred years before Prophet Jesus. Plato was Aristotle's teacher, who was the teacher and a chief minister of Alexander of Macedonia, whose era is documented in history (d. 323 BCE).

Plato was the founder of an illuminative school of theosophy (*hikmat al-ishraq*) and was the master of the stoics.[29](#) Divine realities and gnosis were unveiled to him by means of austerity, spiritual combat, and inner purification. And Aristotle founded the Peripatetic school, which does not rely on esoteric (*batini*) means of knowledge whatsoever. He built his philosophy purely on rational demonstration (*burhan*).

Note that the book *Theology of Aristotle (Uthulujiya)*, which is attributed by some to Aristotle, is in fact by Plotinus, who was a Neoplatonist. This book is concise and to the point, and is based on illuminative theosophy. But its attribution to Aristotle is a mistake.[30](#)

And hereby the conversations of this lowest with my teacher and master, Honourable 'Allamah Tabataba'i, come to an end. Of course these were only my formal conversations that I had recorded in writing. Otherwise I have immensely benefited from meeting with the Honourable 'Allamah here and there, whether the meetings were recorded or not, and have used his teachings in many of my writings. May Allah reward his superb efforts and resurrect him with Muhammad and his family, the best of people.

1. See Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur (Beirut, 197?), 6:185.
2. See *ibid.*, 3:207.
3. [Translator's note. This is widely agreed upon by Jewish scholars, and is the ninth principle among the thirteen principles attributed to Maimonides (1204). See M. Shapiro (1993) 'Maimonides' Thirteen Principles: The Last Word in Jewish Theology?' *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, vol. 4, pp. 187-242.]
4. [Translator's note. As 'Allamah has mentioned in al-Mizan (under the above verse), in Arabic, yad (hand) alludes to power, and 'two hands' is used to indicate maximum power. In many places in the Qur'an we see Allah speaks of His 'two hands', meaning utmost power.]
5. See Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), al-Amali (Qum, 1417/1996): 692; Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari (Istanbul, 1981), 6:101.
6. See Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Beirut, 1983), 4:257.
7. Zamakhshari, al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil (Beirut, 199?), 1:9. [Translator's note. Note that 'Allamah also recited the verse with Malik (King) and so did the author in the later part of his life. See S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, Nur-i Malakut-i Qur'an (2nd ed., Mashhad, 1421/2000), 4:474.]
8. [Translator's note. For a comprehensive discussion on the different recitations and their credibility see S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, Nur-i Malakut-i Qur'an, 4:415-65.]
9. See Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari, 5:210; Suyuti, al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an (Beirut, 2001), 1:208 and 245-6.
10. [Translator's note. This and the following quotations from Ibn Mas'ud should be taken as paraphrases rather than literal, word-for-word quotations.]
11. [Translator's note. 'The correct inflectional form of the term is mu'awwidhatayn – as a subject [i.e. that which gives refuge] – and the common form of mu'awwadhatayn – as an object – is a mistake.' Baha' al-Din Muhammad ibn Husayn al-'Amili (Shaykh al-Baha'i), Miftah al-Falah (Beirut, 1324/1906): 252.]
12. [Translator's note. All of the above, even the ones mentioned as Shi'a narrations, have been narrated by prominent Sunni authorities: Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh (Beirut, 1965), 3:112; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah (Cairo, 1959-), 3:40-5; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad (Beirut, 1978), 5:130; Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (3rd ed., Beirut, 198?), 9:18; Suyuti, al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, 1:208ff. For Shi'a sources see Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj (Najaf, 1386/1966), 1:222-3; Ya'qubi, Tarikh (Leiden, 1969), 2:196-7.]
13. [Translator's note. The quotations in this story should be taken as paraphrases rather than literal, word-for-word quotations.]
14. See Suyuti, al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, 1:209 and 248; Ibn al-Nadim, al-Fihrist (Beirut, 1988): 30; Hakim al-Haskani, Shawahid al-Tanzil (Tehran, 1990), 1:36ff.
15. For the order in which the chapters of Qur'an were revealed see Shaykh al-Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan (Beirut, 1995), 10:211; exegesis of Chapter 76 (al-Dahr); Suyuti, al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, 1:57ff.; Ibn al-Nadim, al-Fihrist: 28-30.
16. See Ya'qubi, Tarikh, 2:152ff.; Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, 1:105, 107 and 281; Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul) (Tehran, 1388/1968), 2:633; Kitab of Sulaym ibn Qays, no. 4, part 2.
17. See Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, 1:379
18. See note 226 above.
19. [Translator's note. In Arabic, unlike English, the second person plural feminine verb conjugates and possessive pronouns are distinct from the other persons. All of the mentioned terms are distinct from the pronouns and conjugate forms of second person plural masculine form, which appear in the Verse of Purification.]
20. According to Ayatollah Sayyid Sharaf al-Din 'Amili, the Verse of Purification is a separate sentence (istitradiyyah) that has appeared between the two verses before and after it (al-Kalimah al-Gharra' fi Tafdil al-Zahra', published in one volume with al-Fusul al-Muhimmah fi Ta'lif al-Ummah (5th ed., Najaf, 1964): 213-14). He writes: Independent or separate (istitradiyyah) sentences that appear within one's speech are common in the words of eloquent speakers. This usage involves the interruption of a series of connected orderly sentences that follow one another. Some examples from the Noble Qur'an are:

'...Indeed this is a guile of you women; surely your guile is great. \* Joseph, turn away from this; and thou [woman] ask forgiveness for thy sin....' (12:28-9)

‘...Truly when the kings enter a city they disorder it and make its honourable inhabitants disgraced; and that is what they do. \* Indeed I will send them a present, and see what the emissaries bring back.’ (27:34– 5)

‘No! I swear by the positions of the stars. \* And that verily is a tremendous oath, [only] if you knew. \* It is surely a noble Qur’an.’ (56:75–7)

Likewise, the Verse of Purification has appeared as a separate independent statement in the middle of the verses addressing the Prophet’s wives. The separate addition here shows that Allah’s address to the Prophet’s wives – including His commands, prohibitions, and guidelines – is only mentioned in service of His high regard and attention for the Ahl al-Bayt. That is, when addressing the wives of the Prophet, the separate addition indicates that the Ahl al-Bayt are clear from any blame, censure, and ignominy, and in this they are different from everyone, including the Prophet’s wives. Or it may be to prevent the hypocrites from making use of the [shortcomings of] the Prophet’s wives to object and argue against the Ahl al-Bayt. This precious point demonstrates the eloquence, perfection, and miracle of the Noble Qur’an, and it hinges on having this separate addition in these verses.

[21.](#) See 2:75–6, 159, 174; 3:70–1, 78, 98–9, 187; 4:44, 46, 5:13–15, 41; 19:30–7; 62:5.

[22.](#) See 3:65–6, 84, 93, 113–14, 199; 4:66, 68, 77, 82–5; 5:43–7, 60, 66, 68, 72; 6:91; 7:157; 9:111; 48:29; 57:27; 61:6.

[23.](#) See 19:52; 28:29, 44–6.

[24.](#) [Translator’s note. For a detailed discussion on the compilation and history of the Torah and the Gospels, as well as the Gospel of Barnabas see S.M.H. Husayni Tihrani, *Nur-i Malakut-i Qur’an*, 4:254– 93.]

[25.](#) [Translator’s note. According to the Gospels, Peter had a mother-in-law whom Jesus met; See Matthew 8:14, Luke 4:38, and Mark 1:30.]

[26.](#) [Translator’s note. See Fayd al-Kashani, *Tafsir al-Safi* (Tehran, 1416/1996), 3:47–8. Also note that according to most scholars and exegetes, what is meant by Joseph’s mother in the above account (and in 12:100) is his aunt. See Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 12:319.]

[27.](#) [Translator’s note. Apparently this is not an established hadith, though it has also been reported as a prophetic hadith (al-Turayhi, *Majma’ al-Bahrayn* [Qum, 1988], 1:235). Nevertheless it is an accepted doctrine among most Muslim scholars.]

[28.](#) ‘She verily desired him, and he would have desired her had he not seen the proof of his Lord. Thus it was, that We may turn away from him evil and indecency. Truly he was of Our chosen servants.’ (12:24)

[29.](#) [Translator’s note. Plato was not himself a stoic, as the school of stoicism was founded later on by Zeno (d. 262 BCE). ‘Allamah seems to be aware of that, and his point here is apparently about the major influence of Plato’s thoughts on this school.]

[30.](#) [Translator’s note. The book is identified as Porphyry’s paraphrase and abridgement of books 4–6 of Plotinus’ *Enneads*; but it became known as the *Theology of Aristotle*. See F. Klein-Franke, ‘Al-Kindi’ in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S.H. Nasr & O. Leaman (London, 2001): 171.]

## 8. Epilogue

And hereby this memorial to ‘Allamah Tabataba’i and his discourses is concluded on 13 Rabi’ al-Thani 1402 (8 February 1982). To Allah is all praise and to Him is all gratitude. It is by Allah’s grace that I passed the best days of my life, the past two months and three days, in constant thought and remembrance of my superb teacher and master. And I have been supplicating and asking mercy for the luminous spirit of that honourable deceased in the Sanctified Threshold of Allah’s Eighth Proof. I want to

put down this pen, but it is begging me, 'Just a little more! Just a few more words!'

## 'Allamah's endurance of allegations and difficulties in the way of Allah

Let me finish this work by quoting what 'Allamah told me one day when he had come to my house for lunch. After lunch he said,

One day in the noble city of Najaf, I was sitting in a state of attention and trance (*khalsah*) after the morning prayer, when I saw Hadrat 'Ali ibn Ja'far, peace be upon him and his father. He approached me and came so close that it was as if I could feel his breath on my face. Thereupon he said, 'The concept of unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) is amongst the certain principles of us Ahl al-Bayt.'<sup>1</sup>

Then 'Allamah continued, 'So nice are these words of Sa'di:

The path of reason is but turns and twists;  
In the world of gnosis, it's only God that exists.  
Well-understood by the people of the truth;  
But deductive minds always resist:

'So what is the sky, and the earth that's so wide?  
And men and animals, and all in the midst?'  
Whatever they are, if He is a Being,  
It's wrong to say that they too subsist.

The wave of the ocean is huge in thy eye,  
The luminous sun penetrates the mist;  
People of appearance do not understand,  
The world of the gnostics, what does it consist:

The seven oceans are only a drop.  
The sun is naught, but a mote in His fist.  
Should the King of all raise His flag,  
The world will fade, and nothing will persist.'

And added, 'So nice are these words of 'Abd al-Karim Jili in *al-Insan al-Kamil (The Perfect Man)*:<sup>2</sup>

Every being, you shall know, without confusion,  
Is an illusion, in illusion, in illusion.

And no one is alert but the people of truth,  
Who are with God, in old age and in youth.

At different levels, they are indeed;  
The higher the perfection, the more is the heed.

Their exalted positions are known to all;  
For them, and not others, greatness shall befall.

Indulged in His Essence, and Attributes of God;  
Honoured by their Lord, as a noble squad.

At times they enjoy the beauty of their Lord;  
At times they immerse, in His majesty and His sword.

The Divine Essence flows in their veins;  
The joy of Essence is the final goal to attain.'

## 'Allamah's brilliant ode on loving Allah

As a memorable closing it is appropriate to mention an ode by our honourable teacher and master, and hope for the prayers of his spirit. 'Allamah composed this ode about taking the heart away from all other than God, and loving and showing affection for the Beauty and Majesty of Allah. In terms of similes, metaphors, and poetic devices, it is at the utmost degree of elegance and eloquence. It is unbelievable that this ode – with all its poetic subtleties – is by someone whose mother tongue was (Azeri) Turkish, such that his accent was noticeable when he used to speak, and for whom Arabic and Persian were second languages. At the same time he was a man of asceticism, worship, and night vigils; and a perfect example of piety and world-renunciation.

I say as I've said again and again:  
A religion of love, is that which I retain;

One's insobriety defines his prayer;  
Those who're mindful are out of this affair.

The masters of the heart care not for food,  
Or rest, or sleep, or a joyous mood.

The entrapped lover has only a share  
Of a heart full of pain, and eyes full of tear.

The town of passion has a wall in between  
One's desires, and the love of unseen.

So many Farhads, in mountains they died;  
So many Hallajs, on gallows were tied.<sup>3</sup>

Except the heart, the love, and their fusion,  
What's in the world, other than illusion?

But the free spirits of the divine choir,  
In this carrion, showed no desire.

The liberated souls of lovers of God,  
Removed the chains of whim and facade.

They freed themselves of this body of mud;  
They coloured the roses, red with their blood.

The spring is a time of prizes and gain,  
The flowers obtain showers of rain;

A green garment, on meadow and plain;  
The blossoms fill up the garden's domain.

The flowers reflect on the nearby stream,  
Their forms and patterns, are all like a dream.

The flowers blend in, with the lily,  
The blossoms are dancing graciously.

The buds are opened with the morning breeze;  
The nightingale sings its chants with ease.

The cypress plays and the jasmine leads;  
The tunes of the harp, and the song of the reeds.

The beautiful face, its brow, and its line,  
As you remember, have a drink of wine.

Thus you will find the problems have shrunk,  
The mysteries are revealed, when one goes drunk.

The world is nothing but illusion in a night  
That shut the eyes of the kings to the light.

Do not give in to the future's concern,  
It's a dream like the past, and that you should learn.

Be not deceived by the world! Beware!  
A field of flowers, with thorns everywhere.

Goblets of wine, is all that you need,  
If they want to catch you, pay them no heed.

O Allah, effuse Thy continued peace and blessing upon the first determination of Lordly diffusions and the last one who descended from Thee toward humankind; about whom Thou hast said, '**And We have not sent thee save as a mercy for everyone' (21:107)**'; as long as the heavens and the earths stand, by the rank of Muhammad and his pure and noble progeny, Thy peace and mercy be upon them all.

Written in the sanctified city of Imam Rida, Mashhad, and by his grace, peace be upon him, 13 Rabi' al-Thani 1402 (8 February 1982).

By the transient hands of the powerless, humble, poor, nondescript Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani.

1. In his conversations, 'Allamah often invoked the verse, 'And that the final end is truly unto thy Lord' (53:42). And at times of difficulty and hardship he used to say, 'And Allah it is Whose help is to be sought' (12:18).

If he ever came to know that someone had maligned him, made false allegations about him, or said exaggerated and extreme accusations against him in order to thrash his mystical approach and philosophical style, he would never retaliate whatsoever. He would not seek to respond or counteract in any way. And obviously such allegations were made quite often in the dogmatic seminaries (hawzahs) that were devoid of the Qur'an, exegesis (tafsir), narrations, ethics, mysticism, philosophy, and the intellectual sciences. They were rather a bunch of people sitting around a table of darkness, busy with fighting over the petty commodities of this world and rivalling over worldly fame and recognition.

But 'Allamah migrated from Tabriz and settled in the precinct of Hadrat Ma'sumah (Imam Rida's sister, may God's mercy be upon them) in order to put an end to such views and attitudes, and in order to enlighten the young students about the divine mysteries, realities, and spiritualities of Islam. Of course some people did not approve of his way and approach, so they tried to put out his light by deceitful and demagogic ascriptions. They employed the special cunning and tricks with which they had lived all their lives in order to render the sacred hawzah clear of philosophy and mysticism. Whenever the news of these actions and ruses reached him, 'Allamah used to say, 'But the evil plot befalleth only on its people [who make it]' (35:43). Their actions were exactly demonstrative of this verse of the Qur'an: 'They want to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah perfects His light, though the disbelievers are averse' (61:8).

'Allamah used to receive a lot of unsigned letters full of swearing, nonsense, false allegations, cursing, and vain, made-up and pointless words. They were so many that I came to think – and also heard from others – that he did not read the unsigned letters anymore. So one day I told him, 'It has been said that the matter has gone so far that when you open the envelopes, you first look at the place of signature, and put the unsigned letters aside right away without reading them!' He smiled gracefully, 'I read all of the letters. Regrettably I also read the unsigned ones!'

2. Abd al-Karim Jili, al-Insan al-Kamil (Misr, 1981), 2:42.

3. [Translator's note. Farhad is a legendary lover in Nizami's Khusraw wa Shirin; a stonecutter who rolled himself down the mountain in suicide when he heard the false news of the death of his beloved, Shirin. Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) is a famous Sufi who was hanged because of claiming, 'I am the Truth' (ana al-Haqq).]

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