

The Mystic's Stations (Maqamat):

The *'urafa'* maintain that in order to arrive at the stage of true gnosis, there are stages and stations that must be covered. Unless covered, the *'urafa'* hold, to arrive at the station of true gnosis is impossible.

'Irfan has a facet that it shares with theosophy (*hikmat ilahi*), while many of the facets of these two disciplines differ. The facet common to them both is that the aim of both is knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allah*). They differ in that theosophy does not aim solely at knowledge of God but rather aims at a knowledge of the order of being.

The knowledge that is sought by the theosophist (*hakim*) is of the system of existence, of which, naturally, knowledge of God is an important pillar. The goal of *'irfan*, on the other hand, is exclusively knowledge of God.

In the view of *'irfan*, knowledge of God is total knowledge. Everything must be known in the light of knowledge of God and from the point of view of *tawhid*; such knowledge is a derivative of knowledge of God.

Secondly, the knowledge sought by the *hakim* is intellectual knowledge and can be likened to the knowledge acquired by the mathematician after thought and reflection on a particular mathematical problem. However, the knowledge sought by the *'arif* is experienced and witnessed; it can be likened to the knowledge acquired by an experimental scientist in his laboratory. The *hakim* seeks certain knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqin*), while the *'arif* seeks the certainty of direct vision (*'ayn al-yaqin*).

Thirdly, the means employed by the *hakim* are his reason, deductions and proofs, whereas those employed by the *'arif* are the heart and the purification, disciplining and perfecting of the self. The *hakim* seeks, through the telescope of his mind, to study the order of existence, while the *'arif* seeks to prepare the whole of his being so as to arrive at the core of reality. He seeks to reach reality like a drop of water in the search of the sea. In the view of the *hakim*, the perfection expected of a human being lies in understanding reality, while in the *'arif's* view it lies in reaching reality. In the *hakim's* view an imperfect human being is one who is ignorant, while in the *'arif's* view the imperfect human is one who has remained distant and separated from his origin.

The *'arif* therefore sees perfection in reaching rather than in understanding. And in order to reach the principal goal and the stage of true gnosis, he views the traversing of several stages and stations as being necessary and essential. This he calls *sayr wa suluk*, the science of inward wayfaring.

These stages and stations have been discussed in great detail in the books of *'irfan*. Here it is not possible to explain, even briefly, each and every one of them. However, in order at least to give a general impression, I believe that we can do no better than to turn to the ninth section of Ibn Sina's *al-'Isharat*. Although Ibn Sina is mainly a philosopher, not a mystic, he is not a 'dry' philosopher, and especially towards the end of his life he developed mystic inclinations.

In his *al-'Isharat*, which appears to be his last work, he has devoted a whole section to the 'stations' of the gnostics. This section being extraordinarily sublime and beautiful, we consider it more suitable for our purposes to present a summary of this section, rather than citing or translating suitable passages from the books of the *'urafa'*.

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